

In Parallel to the Euphrates

By

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## **THE BEGINNING OF THE END**

"Tell me please. Why are you beating me?" Pleads the old man politely while he has his head wrapped within his two wrinkled hands to make a shield from repeated heavy blows he receives. He's being hit in every corner of his body. Particularly on his head. The defenseless old man is blindfolded and cannot see which direction the next punch or kick comes from and which part of his head or face it is going to strike.

A dozen men have circled around him and keep on punching, kicking and shoving him towards one another without the slightest mercy. The innocent slim old man is pushed by one torturer to the other like a ball being passed between kids in a ball game.

"Please. I think you have mistaken me for someone else." Continues the old man begging politely with a trembling voice.

"My name is Sheikh Gulzar and have done nothing wrong. Tell me. Why you are doing this to me? I'm seventy-three years old. As old as your fathers. Please. Tell me. Why?"

What Sheikh Gulzar says, however, does not stop the men from punching, slapping, kicking and shoving him around.

The middle-aged rough-looking captain Al Allawi witnesses the whole thing as he stands a few feet away smoking.

Sheikh Gulzar is about to fall on the ground and pass out. He can sense his most severe wounds are on his forehead, left eyebrow, lower lip and right ear. He can feel the blood running down his skin. His blood has almost covered the upper section of the overall white cloak he has on, which has made him look like a priest of some kind. Sheikh Gulzar knows the next blow is on its way after receiving one. The next blast targets his temple. He can no longer hold on. He cannot stand anymore. The weak old man collapses. His knees hit the ground at last.

"Help me God! Why?" Mumbles the old man.

"It's enough." Orders the captain at last. "Stop". He continues. Bring two chairs and sit him across from me." Says the captain as he points at a number of chairs a few yards away.

Al Allawi's servant, fifteen-year-old Muradov, handsome white boy, runs towards the chairs, grabs two and arranges them across from each other. The same masculine guy grabs Sheikh Gulzar from his long grey beard, drags him on the gravel on the ground quite violently and pushes him down to sits him on the chair. He stands next to Sheikh Gulzar waiting for Al Allawi to come and take a seat opposite the wounded man. Sheikh Gulzar has no idea what is happening around him though. He is blindfolded, dizzy and his wounds hurt so badly. No one speaks to him or explains that he is going to see the captain the moment his folds are taken off.

"What's going to happen?" Asks Sheikh Gulzar while he turns his head to left and right in fear trying to figure what's going to happen. "What are you going to do?" Asks the disheveled and confused old man as he waves his hands to grab whoever is around him. Sheikh Gulzar moves his hands to every direction trying to get a hold of something or someone. His sore fingers finally touch and grabs the masculine man's sleeve as he is still standing next to him.

"Sir, sir. Please tell me if you are going to shoot or stab me now" Pleads defenseless Sheikh Gulzar. "Tell me please. I need to say my prayers before I die."

"Open his blindfolds." Orders Al Allawi.

Confused and scared, Sheikh Gulzar looks behind him the moment his blindfolds are taken off. He's quite eager to see the people who have such hatred for a man his age. Sheikh Gulzar vaguely sees a number of men. His vision becomes clearer and clearer. The men are mostly in their early thirties and have broken the cycle. Some are in dark, grey or black thobes and some in fatigues. Every one of them are dirty and dusty, unshaved and sunburnt. Some men have cigarettes between their fingers smoking. The men have packs of Marlboro cigarettes on their army vest's pockets.

Sheikh Gulzar lowers his head and is worried about what is going to happen next. He senses someone approaching. He can hear footstep on the dry, hot and damned desert floor. Sheikh Gulzar turns his head towards the sound immediately and sees a man in his late fifties. Sheikh Gulzar suspects this is the man he has heard everyone address as the captain. A man who is in a different outfit than the others, walks towards him. He even walks differently than the others. Captain Al Allawi has a khaki army uniform. The uniform's shirt is not tucked

in. Without a doubt the captain looks like an authority figure. Sheikh Gulzar realizes captain Al Allawi is the one who ordered his men to open his blindfolds. The captain's Arabic accent sound familiar.

Al Allawi walks towards Sheikh Gulzar slowly. He has locked his fingers and held his hands behind his back. He stares at Sheikh Gulzar while getting closer. The captain pretends to be thinking of what to do with the old man next. The captain sits on his chair across from Sheikh Gulzar. He takes out a toothpick from his shirt's pocket and begins picking his teeth. One of the strangest things that catches Sheikh Gulzar's eyes are Al Allawi's hands, which have different lengths. One of his hands is unusually shorter than the other.

Al Allawi is picking his tooth with his longer hand and holds a stick of cigarette between fingers of his shorter hand. The masculine man lights his lighter for the captain. But the captain throws his cigarette away immediately after a quick puff or two. As if the cigarette tastes different to him all of a sudden. Captain Al Allawi moves both his eyebrows often. Sheikh Gulzar thinks it is because of the big V-shaped scar he has between his eyebrows. The scar makes the captain genuinely look like a monster. But no. He does not act like a monster. He enjoys being scary and terrifying. The captain bends towards Sheikh Gulzar so to gets his big hairless head closer to him.

"I've been told you are a very good fortuneteller." Claims the captain sarcastically. "Huh? Is that true?" Asks Al Allawi smiling.

Sheikh Gulzar is still disoriented. His eyes switch between the captain and the ground thinking of what might happen next. Sheikh Gulzar is surprised by Al Allawi's curiosity about his predictions abilities, which is definitely not the reason he is being tortured. Sheikh Gulzar realizes he has absolutely no idea where he is being held. He takes a quick look around and perceives that he is at the corner of a spacious walled backyard of some sort, with a small entrance door to a building. There are dark sienna break walls all around. Sheikh Gulzar also sees the men who have been beating him clearly, while the captain waits for him to respond.

"Hey. The captain is talking to you." Shouts one of the guys as he takes a long step and kicks Sheikh Gulzar in his back. "Answer the question. You old fart."

"He will. He will." Responds Al Allawi instead in a soft tone. "Give him a few seconds". "Let him get familiar to his new surroundings. Get him some water."

Muradov, Al Allawi's young male servant, runs inside the building and comes back quickly holding a plastic bottle of water. Muradov hands the bottle over to him. Sheikh Gulzar is still confused and scared. He isn't sure what is happening. Sheikh Gulzar looks around distrustfully. He certainly seems suspicious of why did those men stop torturing him suddenly. He looks at the captain, looks away and ponders for a moment. Why did the captain become so kind all of a sudden?

"Yeah?" Asks the captain, again. "Is it true? You can see the future?"

Sheikh Gulzar quaffs the entire bottle. Water drips off his long white beard. He nods while still having the bottle on his mouth.

"I see things." Replies Sheikh Gulzar. "I can see people's future. Things I don't like to see. But I do."

"So, how do you do that." Asks the captain. "Like you read palms. You see it in a crystal ball or what."

"No. No, No. Nothing like that." Responds Sheikh Gulzar. "Images just come to my mind. Events, voices, pictures, statements people are going to make, decisions they're going to make later and things of these nature."

"So, can you see my future."

"Can you please tell me why I'm here first?" Responds Sheikh Gulzar by asking. "I should be on the estate of relaxation, I mean I should be calm, feel comfortable and establish a connection with whose future I want to forecast. I cannot see someone's future while bleeding like hell from the wounds I have all over my body, or when a dozen men stand behind me threatening to attack and beat me to death."

Sheikh Gulzar sighs. He looks into Al Allawi's eyes and sees no emotion or reaction. He pauses for a moment. "I'm just a temple keeper sir." He says "The temple is ten minutes away from the town. I don't see people coming to the temple often. Unless there's some kind of a ceremony or something. I was

mopping the holy temple's floor when I heard a car stop, its doors opened and people got out. I thought they were visitors. So, I walked out to greet them. But someone hit me on the back of my head with something. The next thing I know I'm at the back of a pick-up truck blindfolded and handcuffed. Then I was brought here and the beating started, and now I'm here at your presence. I said all these because I have no doubt you've mistaken me for someone else. I don't know. Why were these men beating me sir? I'm as old as their fathers you know. They have no respect for the elderly. Hitting a seventy-three-years old blindfolded defenseless man does not make them heroes or great warriors."

Sheikh Gulzar hears giggling and sees the captain looking behind him. He turns his head and sees the men burst into laughter, repeating his sentence and mocking him: "Respect for the elderly".

"Well. You are arrested and brought here because you are one of the priests." Says the captain trying to stop himself from laughing. "You are one of the devil worshipping priests, and a witch I was told."

"Excuse me?" Responds Sheikh Gulzar in disbelief. "Devil worshipper? I'm not a devil worshipper sir! I have a God I pray to and I assure you that I'm not a witch. Some people see things that are going to happen in the future without even wanting to or performing any magical rituals, using any supernatural sources and things like that. I'm one of them. I see the future, but I assure you I do not practice witchcraft. And I will explain what my religion is if you allow me. I'm sure you'll be convinced that you have captured the wrong man."

"Hmmm." Nods captain Al Allawi, sarcastically. "Ok. We are all ears. Explain away."

The captain looks around. He has a ridiculous smile on his face. Some of his men laugh, some nod sarcastically, and some stare at the old man in skepticism waiting for him to convince them all that he is not a devil worshipping priest or a witch.

"I am sorry sir, we are Yazidis. One of the oldest religions in Iraq. In fact, in the world. We have never had any problems with any other religions. We are peaceful people. We keep to ourselves, accept and appreciate every single human on earth. You are not the first group or faction that has accused us of

worshipping devil by the way. But I need to explain what you should know about us Yazidis. We are a misunderstood religious group. We have a God and we do not worship the devil."

The old man sighs and pauses for a moment. He takes a last sip and finishes a few drops of water left in the bottle.

"Yeah." Continues the old man. "We believe the world is created by God. God assigned the responsibility of running the world to seven angels, led by one angel we know as peacock angel or "Malek Taos" in our language. Peacock angel is the primary figure in our belief system. Peacock angel filled the earth with all plants and animals you see. That's precisely the reason you and people before you look upon us as devil worshippers. That's also the reason we have been hated and attacked throughout history by people or religious groups and factions such as yourselves. You all want to get rid of us."

"Shut up." Yells the same man who kicked him a while back. The man takes too long and quick steps towards the old man again to punch him. But the captain interferes. He raises his right hand for him to stay where he is.

"Who are the other priests or so-called religious leaders of your so-called religion?" Asks the captain softly?

"Why sir?" Asks the old man. "So, your men would beat and torture them too? Like they did me?"

"No. I promise no harm will be done to them. I just have a proposition for them. That's all. Look, old man. I will find out who they are and what their names are one way or another. We can do this the hard way or the easy way. I can easily issue an order to my soldiers to kill a hundred men, women, and children. I can even ask for the heads of your own children if I want to get the names out of you. But I don't usually go for the hard way. I don't want to choose that method just yet. I promise you that they will not be harmed. A gentleman's promise."

The old man knows well that he has no choice. The captain and his men are capable of killing thousands of people for no reason at all if they wish the old Sheikh thinks. Let alone killing a hundred innocent people. They are going to do all it takes to get those few names and Sheikh Gulzar knows it. He can give up a few names, but save a hundred innocent men, women, and children's lives. What the captain says about

killing the old man's children is enough for him to consider giving up his fellow believer's and religious leaders names.

"You have thirty seconds to decide old man." Emphasizes the captain. "I don't have all day. Actually, you know what? Let me convince you I'm not joking when I say I am going to kill a hundred of your beloved fellow-citizens. let's begin with your own children. Ha?"

The captain yells ordering two of his soldiers to go fetch the old man's children.

"Wait wait wait. Please." Pleads the old man. "You promise? You swear there will be no harm to anyone if I give those names to you?"

"I already did promise. Didn't I? you stupid old man." Replies the captain who now looks dangerously upset and annoyed".

The old man looks up and whispers something. As though he is already asking God for forgiveness before he even reveals his fellow-priest's names. He knows he has no other choice. So, he finally leaks the names his captors want. Muradov writes the names on a piece of paper and hands it over to his master. But captain's cell-phone starts ringing at the same time. The captain who has moved his face closer to Sheikh Gulzar lays back on his chair now and looks at his cell phone's screen. He looks at the piece of paper in his hand, smiles and answers his phone and says "Hello". The captain asks the caller to hold on for a second. He looks back at the old man while holding his phone away from his mouth.

"You see?" Comments the captain while he getting up his chair. "That wasn't so difficult. Was it? you unwise old fart."

Sheikh Gulzar doesn't know what to respond. He has a bad feeling now that he has revealed his fellow believers and religious leaders' names to the captain. He only lowers his head regretfully. The captain walks away and continues speaking into his phone. Remorseful and nervous, the old man cannot wait for the captain to finish talking on the phone. He is counting seconds for the captain to come back and reveal what he has decided he is going to do with him.

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Six dirty-looking men, all in their early twenties to early forties are finally called into the ballroom. Every one of them knows they are summoned to be officially promoted and be given their new responsibilities as they have fought and performed well for their cause and the objectives set by their caliph. They have discussed what they are probably going to be told in advance and decide not to look overexcited when they are called in. They exit the hall and enter the ballroom, happy and proud, while commotion can be heard outside the ballroom in the streets. Women and children's bloodcurdling screams shake the town. Their voices mix with men's voices that shout and yell trying to stay with their wives, daughters, sons, sisters, mothers and their other family members.

Middle-aged Hadji Mazen is standing alone by the side of his desk and chair on the ballroom's stage. He has an evil smile on his face, scratching his ginger long beard, looking around at the bright shiny granite walls that are designed and built quite beautifully. He takes a long look at a few red velvet chairs which are arranged below the stage, takes a dirty piece of cloth he used as a handkerchief out of his baggy trousers pocket and rubs his sweaty bald head with it. The men enter the ballroom and walk towards the stage. Their voices echo in the empty ballroom when they say hello to the man, greet him and show him respect since he is older than them all.

"Hi. Hello. Welcome brothers." Replies Hadji Mazen. "We did it huh?" Continues the bold fat guy while he places his both hands on the sides of his bulging stomach. "Please my dear brothers have a seat."

The commotion outside is getting louder by the second. The men are taking their seats when everybody at the ballroom suddenly hears a gunshot followed by a furious man's voice shouting something inaudible.

"Shut the damn door Asad." Shouts Hadji Mazen irritably ordering his male east European teenage servant. "Can't you see I have guests and we are going to have a goddamn meeting?"

Gay is written all over 17-year-old Asad.

"Yes sir. Sorry sir." Replies Asad trembling. The young man runs towards the ballroom's nicely carved wooden door and shuts it quickly. The commotion, however, can still be heard.

"Bring me a cup of tea and some refreshments Asad." Orders Hadji, again. "Or actually, wait. Get everyone some cold juice. I still want you to bring me my tea though. But bring it to me after thirty minutes or so."

"Yes sir." Replies Asad.

Asad runs outside a door that is situated a few feet behind the desk on the stage.

Hadji takes out a small notepad.

"I will always carry this with me from now on. That's where I register my to-do list, mission-related tasks and of course, my priorities."

The men are looking at each other with a frown and look at their host. Hadji glances at the curious faces of his guests and shows them his index finger and the notepad next. Meaning they should wait while he takes a note of something.

"I'm going to tell you why you are called here. In just a minute." Says Hadji.

He closes his notebook and sits at the desk moments later. Hadji takes his dirty feet off his sandals. The men sitting below the stage opposite Hadji can now see his bare filthy feet.

"I was actually told by the captain Al Allawi to convey some important messages to you my dear brothers." Says Hadji. "I explained to the captain the prejudice, zeal and enthusiasm I saw in you. I told him all about the sacrifices you have made during the past eleven months. That's of course since you my dearest brothers and teammates joined our holy army. We have lost many of our well-dedicated brothers. We've lost some good soldiers who proved they were worthy to give their lives for Islam and what they truly believed. But they are in heaven now enjoying beautiful virgin angels by the side of a river in which honey runs, a beautiful garden full of different kinds of wines and aromatic flowers. We are happy for them of course. You all and myself included are going to be rewarded here on earth, almost in similar ways, for the sacrifices we make. Remember the virgin 10-year-old and above rewards? Says Hadji referring to their near future captive girls and young women. 'How young yet ripe our rewards have so far been and are going to be?'"

Everyone begins cheering with an evil horny look on their faces after they realize what the man is referring to and what kind of reward he is talking about.

Raping innocent virgin young girls and boys, stealing people's cash, gold, jewelry, and valuable belongings, using their innocent captives as moving targets to practice shooting are some of what Hadji Mazen and other faction members consider reward and reimbursement offered to them by God for their sacrifices. Hadji's yellow and grey teeth are hidden behind his mustache and beard the moment he closes his mouth and stops laughing.

"You know you are the men I trust the most." Claims Hadji. "You are the only worthy men I know." He continues as he nods and tries to look sincere. "That's why we have been and still are very close friends."

Asad rushes inside the ballroom hurriedly, breathless, nervous, and he interrupts Hadji's speech.

"Sir, I just saw the captain's servant outside sir." Mutters Asad. "He said the captain will be coming this way any second now."

"It's fine." Replies Hadji. "No problems. I knew he would come." Continues Hadji with confidence.

Hadji pauses for a moment pondering. He looks at the six guests he has.

"Everybody must now go back outside and wait for the captain to call you back in." Instructs Hadji, looking a bit nervous all of a sudden.

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The captain finishes speaking on his cell-phone and goes back near Sheikh Gulzar, where he was standing when his phone rang. He stands opposite the old priest and stares at him through narrowed eyes, trying to remember where he has left off. The captain ruminates for a second and suddenly realizes he is holding a piece of paper in his hand. Names that the old man has revealed. The captain nods and smiles. He walks towards the exit, glances at Muradov and winks at him. Knowing the meaning of captain's wink, Muradov follows the captain. Two

bodyguards, too, follow the captain. They walk a few yards behind him. The captain slows down, stops for a moment and looks behind him at his men.

"Find them." Orders the captain as he throws the piece of paper towards his men and glances at the petrified old man in a strange weird way. "Ask them to swear allegiance if they want to live". Says the captain. "Kill them all if they refuse."

The captain turns his head and walks away. But he pauses and looks at the old man again.

"Actually, you know what?" Says the captain. "Never mind. I'll have my newly assigned lieutenant and his sergeants to take care of this task." Continues the captain. He seems he has made up his mind. Muradov picks up the piece of paper, hands it back over to the captain and they walk away.

The old man looks up with his lips pressed together. He shakes his head and realizes how stupid he was believing the captain and giving up names of his fellow-priests to the wicked man. The old man realizes he has been deceived and lied to. He hits his forehead a few times as he become enormously remorseful. Poor Sheikh Gulzar is about to burst into tears. But decides not to give the captain and his crew the satisfaction.

"Mr. Captain." Yells Sheikh Gulzar while he has a mysterious smile on his face.

The captain turns his head, again, and looks at the old man. The captain has a victorious smile on his face.

"You forgot to ask what I saw in your future." Says the old man and clears his throat. "You wanted me to tell your fortune. Didn't you?" Continues Sheikh Gulzar breathing heavily.

The captain is quiet. He raises his eyebrows and gazes into Sheikh Gulzar's eyes. As if he is reminded of something of high significance.

"Luckily you will die. A sudden death." Reveals the old man before the captain has a chance to respond. "A good-looking young man of a different fate will put an end to your dirty miserable life." The old man lowers his head while still

looking into the captain's eyes. "The good news is that your death would be an end to your legacy, your name and whatever else that you thought would matter after you are gone. Your bloodline would die after your death. Because you will never have a child." Shouts the old man revealing his predictions, trying to stand up, but being slapped on the mouth, punched on the stomach and pushed back on the chair.

The captain shouts as he issues his orders. "Kill this fucking witch." He spits on the ground and walks away.

The old man knows he is going to be blindfolded, gagged and severely beaten again. But he continues. The captain's men cannot stop him. To him saying what he wants to say is the closest thing to fighting back that satisfies him and eases his soul before they end his life. So, he continues talking and shouting.

"About your new platoon, those you will announce as your new platoon today. They will all die, one by one, exactly the way they have and will be killing our innocent people over here in Sinjar and the surrounding areas." Continues Sheikh Gulzar. "They all die humiliating deaths as they will all be killed by a young man. A young man who will burry your new platoon members one after another. He'll do it to protect his love, too. The God we Yazidis pray to, the one you say is the devil, will make you and your people suffer and pay back in the most horrible way. A terrifying death."

Knowing he'll be killed any moment now; the old man laughs so loud that his laughter echoes in the town.

"I said Kill him." Yells the captain looking at the guy next to the old priest.

The old man laughs even louder and a gunshot is heard. The old man's thin body hits the ground. He has gotten shot on the head by one of the men who executed captain's order. There is a moment of silence. A weird, eerie and deafening silence no one can deny.

"There's only one God and one religion." Yells the captain furiously. "My God, Allah, the most compassionate, the most merciful and my religion, excellent Islam." Continues the captain. "The last and the most comprehensive religion in the world." The captain spits on the ground over and over again while staring at the old man's motionless body yards away. He

turns his head and walks away shaken by what the old priest confidently predicted. What if the priest was as good in foreseeing his future as everyone believed and what if everything, he said was really going to happen to him and his platoon the captain thinks?

"Is he there already?" Asks the captain, looking at his assistant.

"Yes sir." Replies Muradov amused. "He has been there, happy and excited, waiting for you sir. One of my guys heard him practicing a line how to thank you."

"Also waiting in the hall at the ballroom's entrance, sitting there and waiting, two of them were praying when I last checked."

"So, for sure they don't know why they've been summoned?"

"No sir. They have no idea what so ever."

"Good. You guys stay outside. I need to talk to him alone first."

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On August the 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014, Isis attacked Sinjar, a town in Shingal District, Nineveh Province situated on north of Iraq, near Mount Sinjar/Shingal, where Yazidis lived. Seven thousand Iraqi Kurdish fighters who had defended and protected Yazidis withdrew and left defenseless Yazidi civilians of Sinjar behind without giving them any prior warning. Isis easily broke into the city and literally killed everyone seen outdoors. Fortunate Yazidis who had a chance, escaped to the mountains as quickly as they could. Around fifty thousand of them fled to Mount Sinjar/Shingal but they had no idea they were soon going to become trapped on the mountains. They were going to face starvation and dehydration. Isis took over Sinjar and its surrounding areas and immediately began their forced conversion campaign. Using the influence Yazidi elders and priests had on their people, Isis captain, Sayyed Al Allawi, assigned his new lieutenant, Hadji Mazen, to form a platoon and promote Abu Mahdi, Omar, Emad, Samad, Damdam and Ayad, his wildest, most aggressive, savage, barbaric and brutal comrades to sergeants to enforce conversion campaign on the Yazidis, to force them to convert to Islam, swear allegiance or be killed otherwise. It wasn't

long before these evil Isis sergeants initiated sexual abuse on Yazidi young women and girls as instructed to them by their superiors. They captured, enslaved and forced Yazidi girls, boys and young women into sexual slavery. Those animals were only selected and promoted because they had proven they were capable of vandalism against men, women, young and old without feeling any guilt, shame or regret. They committed crimes that were going to be written in history books later on. Crimes against humanity, race and sex this story is about.

lieutenant Hadji Mazen and his sergeants killed Yazidi men using the nastiest execution methods. Isis perpetrated genocide on Sinjar. As per captain Al Allawi, evil Lieutenant Hadji Mazen and his closest friends who got promoted to sergeants were amongst the first terrorist members who initiated a massacre in Sinjar that killed thousands of Yazidi civilians, abducted Yazidi innocent girls and defenseless young women. Isis Continued its brutalities in Sinjar, while they lead their forces to cross Iraqi border, unit after unit, and enter Syrian soil as they knew very well that American forces were going to intervene, attack them by air strikes and distribute arms and ammunition within Kurds soon. Isis knew America, UK, and Australia were going to make air drops to Yazidis who had fled to mountains and would provide arms to Kurdish "peshmerga" who defended Yazidis from the beginning. What they did not know was when this was going to happen. That's why they wanted to achieve their goals in Sinjar with killing Yazidis as quick as possible, cross Iraqi border and advance towards the west.

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The captain opens the back door and enters the stage. Hadji runs to him to welcome him and shake his hand. The man has been waiting for the captain to enter for a while now.

The ballroom has several doors. The back door is used for artists to come up the stage when there is a concert, theatre or any kind of performance. That is the door the captain uses when entering the ballroom.

"Hello sir. God be with you." Says Hadji in a gracious tone. He kisses the captain's right hand and shoulder after almost kneeling before him.

"Ok Hadji. Get up, stand." Orders the captain. "We have some important matters we need to discuss."

"Yes, sir. I'm at your service." Replies Hadji, with his head down and his hands on his chest.

"Good. I don't need to remind you that Yazidis are devil worshipers and all devil worshipers should be executed as per Islam and our holly caliph". Says the captain looking around at the ballroom's walls and decoration. "There are also other matters you need to have in consideration." Continues the man now looking directly at Hadji. "Remember, I want you to get your men mentally and ideologically prepared for the objectives we are here to achieve. Do it how you like. I don't care. Don't tell them things that you don't think they should know if you think you don't have to. But make us achieve our objectives."

"Ok, sir. I assure you..."

"Do not interrupt me again." Commands the captain, interrupting Hadji Mazen. "One important thing I want you to do is to rid this area of Kurds and armed civilian fighters. Kurds in particular are the community who support these devil worshipping bastards. I've heard Americans will soon arm and train more Kurdish soldiers to fight us. That's bad for us. But we still have time before they do. We have run them out of Sinjar and the whole area for now. But I have no doubt they will regroup and get back to us with the help of Americans, English and other countries. We also need to get Yazidis to convert to Islam. Use force and any kind of brutality you think of. You need to force them to convert. We need to replace Kurds with Muslims. Muslims are at least more obedient. You should kill as much Yazidis as you can in case they refuse to convert. This area is of high strategic importance to us and we need to hold on to it tight. I have written some guidelines for you anyways. Remember, I assigned you as a lieutenant because I had no doubt you could handle bigger tasks. Contact me whenever necessary or any time you have a question."

The captain congratulates Hadji Mazen, his newly assigned lieutenant, hands two pieces of paper over to him and orders him to call his men inside so he would go ahead and announce him as their new commander.



Hadji Mazen orders his servant, Muradov, to get the six men back inside. The men enter and see the captain inside the ballroom with Hadji this time. They rush towards the Captain, kneel before him and try kissing his dirty army boots until he pulls himself back and stops them from doing that.

"Go down there and take a seat." Orders the captain as he points at the first row of seats below the stage.

Like a bunch of cubs, the men walk downstage and take their seats next to one another.

"I'm sure you are all surprised to see your comrade, Hadji Mazen, standing up here next to me instead of sitting amongst you guys like before." Says the captain loudly to the six guys. "Hadji Mazen has been with us fighting hard for our caliph's caliphate, for our cause, long before you joined us from different parts of the world. We have lost our best team leaders or second in commands during our battles with our enemies since we fought to capture Mosul and this goddamn city, Sinjar. I'm assigning Hadji Mazen as your new commander today, and I'm sure you respect, obey and co-operate with him as your new lieutenant. I am now officially assigning him to be in charge and ask him to form a special platoon. You, my brothers, are being promoted as well. I would at this moment promote your ranks to sergeant and wish you all the best with your missions. I'm sure your new superior expects more from you starting this very moment. Congratulations to you all and your lieutenant. You all should understand that your superior represents me and I represent my superior, and we all represent the holy caliphate. So, your superior's decisions are at the end, our dear caliph's decisions. We all know our war is for the caliphate. I now want you to step up one by one, shake your new lieutenant's hand and swear you would obey him all the time without questioning his decisions and judgement, execute all his orders and fight with him side by side until the last drop of your blood and assist him to achieve our goals at all times."

The Newly assigned sergeants who are all younger than both captain and the lieutenant do as the captain orders. They step up one after another, shake their new lieutenant's hand, congratulate him and assure him they are going to execute his orders until their last breaths. They mean whatever they say to Hadji Mazen at that moment and praise him sincerely. They all seem happy he has been chosen as their new commander because they know him and his habits well. He has been one of

them for quite a long time, and they know they are going to have even more authority and power under his command. They are happy knowing they can satisfy their own evil desires under their newly assigned superior's command. They are okay with the fact that the captain chose Hadji Mazen to create his own team and execute what senior officers order by accomplishing what Isis is going to achieve their cause's objectives and goals.

Each of the new Six sergeants are convinced that their previous teammate is indeed chosen as their new lieutenant, mainly because of his seniority both in age and battle experience. They have no idea the natural cruelty and inherent violence they all have in them are the actual reason they are selected and promoted. None-of-the men wonders why they have even become candidates and are being promoted to a higher rank. Why did it have to happen precisely after Sinjar city is captured and why not earlier despite having lost many people with essential status and roles? They have no idea their new lieutenant has been briefed much earlier and ordered to choose members who never question injustice, who are merely bad-tempered, vile and heartless to join him form an especially vicious platoon. The captain and his superiors have discussed this matter way earlier in a secret meeting and have come to the conclusion that they need to form a platoon and assign a strict relentless team, with every single sergeant studied, evaluated and carefully selected based on their criminal background and evil level in them.

New sergeants are back on their seats. The captain reveals to them that each one of them is carefully selected by Hadji Mazen, their ex-teammate and new lieutenant, based on their performances, sacrifices they have made and their reliability. The captain makes it clear that he has had no say in their selection process personally.

The captain tells Hadji Mazen that he can already begin briefing his newly assigned sergeants about tasks they are expected to undertake. He reminds Hadji that what he needs him to do is written in the mission summary he gave Hadji moments earlier. The captain pulls a chair and takes a seat facing Hadji.

"You will see names of six people in the smaller piece of paper I gave you" Says the captain while stretching his longer hand. "These Yazidi people have seven religious leaders originally, one of which I ordered my men to kill just before

I came here to see you guys. I don't know if you heard the gunshot. That was one of the devil worshipping priests getting killed. So, you now have the remaining six to find and execute. I am giving you this order as your personal task. This is not the kind of mission you can have others accomplish for you. You must be personally and directly involved with executing this in a particular order. Are we clear?"

"Oh yes, sir." Replies Hadji. "It is crystal clear sir. God willing, I will take care of it personally."

"I want you to find those people. The religious leaders whose names I've given you. Find them and tell them there's only one way for them to live," emphasizes the captain. "and that is to swear allegiance, convert to Islam and join our caliph's cause and holy prophet's army. But I want you to do it in the presence of the other Yazidis. I want all Yazidis witness how easily those devil worshippers give up their beliefs and convert just to stay alive. Let the Yazidi people see and hear their elders clearly when they swear allegiance. People will follow these religious leaders after seeing them convert to Islam, our holy religion. This has a psychological impact on the people. Remember that. Bring me those who agree to swear allegiance and agree to convert. Kill those who refuse without hesitation. As simple as that. I want you to make a point by killing those priests. I want each and every single person in the crowd to see what their fate would become if they decide to remain devil worshippers."

The captain clears his throat. A funny noise can be heard that makes sergeants laugh. But they keep their mouths shut. They don't want to offend the captain. The captain looks at Hadji Mazen while he still tries to clear his throat and asks for a cup of tea, coffee, juice or any other drink they may have.

"What kind of a host are you?" Asks the captain smiling. "I'm your guest and I'm dying here. Ask your servant to get me a drink before I choke. Is that how you entertain a guest?"

Hadji calls Asad. Asad runs inside the ballroom and stands in front of Hadji and the captain.

"Yes Daddy" Says Asad giggling. He talks with a soft tone while playing with the hair on the back of his head.

"Get everyone tea." Orders Hadji laughing. "Or coffee, juice or any refreshments we have available."

Asad places both his hands on his chest and bends his back in a funny way. He runs back out the door.

"So many things wrong with that servant." Continues the captain as he laughs. "So, as I said, make sure everyone in the crowd witnesses what we are capable of. The next thing I want you to do is to catch the civilians who fought us last night defending the city and punish them on the spot. You and your sergeants will be the judge, the jury and the executioners. Make Yazidis of Sinjar understand what their fighters are being punished for. Announce the fact that they are the people who possessed a firearm and fought us before we captured Sinjar. Execute them all and tell everyone they are being executed as per our Islamic laws and orders. Actually, you know what? Execute them along with their family members. Keep young girls alive for us though."

The captain pauses as he gets tired of talking. His voice has become cracked and low.

"Ok. Now you can talk to your men and issue your orders to them. I'll just sit here, wait for my tea or coffee or something to arrive. Don't mind me. Just do and say what you want to them. Tell them to do their tasks. Get a bit more serious with them." Continues the captain now whispering. "They must realize you are not only their friends now. You are their boss, too."

Hadji stands up. He walks towards the captain, bows before him, holds the captain's hand and kisses it.

"Like my Six men, my Six brothers seated down there, like them who promised and swore faithfulness to me, I swear my faithfulness to you and assure you that I will obey your orders and execute them the way you want me to, sir. I will be serving you, sir, until I have breath and the last drop of my blood. These men are not less than brothers to me. They have not been less than a brother, and they'll never be. I will unleash hell on Sinjar and the Yazidis starting tomorrow."

The lieutenant orders his so-called brothers upstage, again, so they would hear him reading the contents of the two pieces of paper given to him by the captain.

"Here I have objectives, orders, and deadlines set by my superior, the captain." Says Hadji to his platoon's sergeants, looking at the captain. "I will decide who takes care of what task. I decide when, how, where and who would do what."

"Decide quickly though." Spits the captain interrupting the lieutenant. "Remember brothers, we don't want to waste much time."

"Yes, sir." Replies Hadji looking embarrassed. He doesn't like to be interrupted, but he swallows it.

Hadji's sergeants stare at him and nod.

"I meant today itself". Continues Hadji addressing the captain. "Because I should discuss it with them and want them to feel free to choose their own tasks." Continues Hadji.

"Okay." Replies the captain. "Carry on."

"People of this city and its neighboring villages and towns, are all devil worshippers. We knew it before we attacked them of course. In that regards though, the followings are what to be done:" Says Hadji with a quite serious look on his face now.

"We give everyone a chance to convert to Islam, pray the God we pray and swear allegiance. They should whether convert to our religion or die. Kill, torture, rape, enslave and do whatever you feel like if they refuse. And believe me they'll refuse. History shows us these people will never convert"

What Hadji Mazen says places a wicked smile on the captain's face. That is how he wants Hadji Mazen and his platoon to act against Yazidis, and that is the main reason why he has chosen perverted Hadji as a platoon leader in the first place.

"So, the conversion campaign is our number one priority." Continues the captain. "We should get rid of those who fled to the mountain before foreign help gets to them. Especially before Americans begin to intervene. We should cut their land supply routes, so they'll suffer starvation and dehydration."

The Six sergeants are listening quite carefully. They seem excited about the challenges ahead. They look at one another while whispering into each other's ears.

"Now remember, collect as much gold, jewelry, and money as you can." Instructs Hadji. "Arms and ammunition are as important as gold and jewelry. Kill any single person you see or suspect possessing or carrying any kind of weapon. All the mentioned tasks are equally important. Doing what I say will get us closer and closer to our objectives. I will explain how we achieve our objectives in details later. We will sit down and break these tasks down into smaller ones. You are allowed to implement any method to earn income, the financial means for the caliphate."

An evil smile begins forming on the men's faces, again. Especially when they hear the term rape. It is quite apparent from their appearances, level of education, the way they talk, they are dressed and the path they have chosen, they were never involved in a relationship with a female and never had consensual sex throughout their lives. It is evident that being part of Isis is the one and only way for those Isis members to experience scent and softness of a woman. Isis gives them power and authority over men and women. Maybe that is the actual reason they have joined the terrorist group in the first place.

"My dear brothers, what we have so far done and we are still going to do is to get closer to our objectives step by step which is well thought of, calculated and set by our beloved caliph himself. The cause is what matters here, not who's the boss. It doesn't matter who gives the orders and who executes them. The most important thing is for missions to be completed well and to get a satisfactory result."

Asad enters the ballroom carrying a big tray with a pot of hot water, some instant coffee, a few teabags, a bowl of sugar and several glasses of watermelon juice. He places the tray on the table and invites everyone to help themselves.

Everybody starts drinking when the captain begins laughing suddenly. He surprises everyone and makes them curious about why he has started laughing like crazy all of a sudden. The captain notices everyone's startled looks and begins explaining. He says that remembering what the Yazidi religious leader, the one he called the male witch, makes him

laugh. The captain explains what the Yazidi priest told him he predicted was going to happen to them all, in the future.

"The witch bastard told me I am going to die with no flesh and blood left in me. He said I will have no remains and I am going to be killed by a young man of a different faith. Oh, I almost forgot." Continues the captain laughing louder. "He actually told me how you and your sergeants are going to die, too."

"What did the captain say about us?" Asks Hadji looking concerned. But he's hiding his fear behind an artificial smile.

"He said you and your sergeants will all die by the exact methods you kill people." Continues the captain. "Yazidis are what he meant of course. I wanted to ask him if he saw his damned death coming before we concurred his city and captured him mopping his shitty temple's floor!"

The captain tries hard to make the old priest's predictions sound ridiculous. But the fact that he has brought it up with his subordinates for no good reason in itself is a proof that he is worried about what the old man said he foresaw might in fact occur. Sheikh Gulzar's predictions is now bothering the captain in an odd way. What the old Yazidi priest said begins giving the captain an eerie feeling. He's a superstitious person. Everyone in the ballroom bursts into laughter, of course, and make fun of what has the old man told the captain. Every one of them laughs of course and satirizes what they have heard so the captain would see non-of-them take the old man's words and predictions seriously. That not a single person is worried about those predictions coming true.

The captain stands up after he finishes drinking his Nescafe.

"Ok". Continues the captain Al Allawi addressing Hadji Mazen. "I'll just leave and let you get to it. Call me or message me if you have any question or want to report anything. I'll still be here for a while. But I should move to a temporary station they are setting up for me somewhere nearby. I will be staying with other officers and decision makers until we finish our mission here in Sinjar. Does anyone have a question or something? Is everything clear for everyone?"

"I guess we are well-briefed, sir." Responds Hadji Mazen after glancing at his sergeants. "I assure you; you'll not regret selecting me, sir. I'll not fail you. I promise you, sir."

"Good. Allah be with you all. Let me repeat this once again, though. Remember, our primary mission is to rid Sinjar and its suburbs off all devil worshipping infidel Yazidis. Those who fight us just to protect dirty Yazidis. Yes, I meant Kurdish fighters specifically. So, the more you force Yazidis to convert to Islam the bigger and better will your reward be in heaven after Allah decides it is time for you to go. The most beautiful virgin girls are watching you closely brothers. Believe me, the crueller and more brutal you become with infidel Yazidis and the harder you force them to convert, the more gratified Holly profit and Allah become of you. So much so that there will be a huge villa reserved for you in heaven with so many beautiful virgin angels who beg you to sleep with them all day and all-night long. Ok? I should leave already. See you soon."

Everyone stands up as captain Al Allawi leaves the ballroom. Hadji Mazen escorts the captain while he steps out of the room. He makes sure the captain, Sayyed Al Alawi, is far enough before he walks back and joins his friends. His previous comrades and new sergeants, putting a friendlier face on, pretending that nothing much has been changed in their friendship and closeness.

All promoted sergeant congratulates their lieutenants again, now in a more casual way. Hadji Mazen sits with the guys and tells them what he was briefed about before being officially announced as their new lieutenant. He explains again that forcing Yazidis to convert to Islam, no matter what it takes, is highly crucial to Isis and caliph himself.

Hadji Mazen explains that it does not matter if Yazidis are tortured to death or executed. Not only because they are considered devil worshippers, but also Isis needs to force Kurdish fighters out of Sinjar and its suburbs because caliph's primary goal is to replace Kurds with Arabs. Because Isis knows Arabs are more obedient than Kurds.

Hadji Mazen proceeds by telling his new sergeants that he needs their help and support to prove their captain has made the right choice by promoting him and giving him the authority to execute his orders.



"Abu Mahdi, Samad, Omar, Ayad, Emad and Damdam." Reads Hadji Mazen loudly and firmly, looking at any of them whose name he calls. "We have been together for a long time my dear brothers. We have gone through a lot together, helped one another, supported each other in many ways, sacrificed at times but also had fun and enjoyed fucking our captive girls. Only God knows how many children we've produced so far we don't know about."

Hadji Mazen can no longer keep a serious face after he finishes his last sentence. Everyone bursts into laughter. Hadji Mazen's sergeants have become more relaxed and comfortable around him hearing what their new commander says. His new rank and position do not seem to have changed his manners and mentality.

"There are hundreds or thousands of beautiful girls and young women out there right now that must do whatever we tell them. That's the reality. We have them all under our command. We now have the power and authority. Imagine, we can easily kill and get rid of girl's parents and younger women's husbands, fathers, brothers, fiancés and get away with it. That's if we happen to like any of them and no one is going to question us why? We can say we did it because they refused to convert to Islam or swear allegiance even if we are ever asked to explain. You see? We can do all we fancy with these girls. As simple as that. But the first step is to rid Sinjar and surrounding towns and villages from Yazidis, as well as any armed civilians. Because we don't want our captain's male servant, for example, to be assassinated by them on our watch. Do we?"

Everyone shakes their heads laughing. "No."

"But what's the first order of business?" Asks Ayad.

"yeah." Continues Samad. "What do we do now?"

"I guess what they mean to ask is what is the next thing that we need to do?" Asks Abu Mahdi. Right after this meeting that is?"

"Good question." Replies Hadji Mazen. "But you should know the answer already yourselves. We should take care of what the captain wants us to take care of. That is to find those religious leaders whose names were given to us by our captain. Get every Yazidi in Sinjar out of their houses and gather

them here, outside at the empty parking lot. We should get everyone out of their houses and their hiding places if anyone has had the balls to hide and usher them to the parking lot. We will find those religious leaders and deal with them accordingly. This is what we need to do immediately. I will now tell you what your next mission is.”

Hadji Mazen takes Iraq’s map out of his bag and lays it open on the desk. He points at different Sinjar suburbs and assigns each of the sergeants with purging a specific area from armed forces, armed civilians or any other fighters. Each one of the six guys have to get to a particular suburb to purge it from unwanted people. So, Hadji Mazen reminds them all that they need to be armed to their teeth, take enough ammunition with them, in case they’re ambushed.

Those six sergeants could not even imagine, not in their wildest dreams, that they would achieve such power and authority. At least not that effortlessly and rapidly. Hadji Mazen did neither. He was even shocked himself when he was first told about his promotion to a lieutenant. Each and every single one of those Isis members had got so excited and satisfied when they heard their lieutenant authorized them to do all they wanted. Especially with defenseless innocent girls, boys and young Yazidi women. Of course, it was a dream come through for everyone.

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Using their megaphones and as per Hadji Mazen’s orders, Isis sergeants and their squads roam around Sinjar and order all Yazidis they must get out of their homes and head towards town hall’s parking lot. Innocent Yazidis exit their homes and walk towards the place they are told, terrified as they think they are going to be mass executed. They know they are going to be killed even before reaching the empty lot if they disobey Isis members. Abu Mahdi, Damdam, Omar, Emad, Samad, and Ayad lead the Yazidis towards the vacant lot while Isis motor cross riders maneuver around creating psychological warfare for the civilians. Yazidis can see Isis black flags raised almost on the top of every government building, on the tanks they have utilized to block Sinjar’s main streets and on their army vehicle antennas.

It doesn’t take long before a big number of civilians, mainly women, children and elderly march towards the ballroom’s parking lot. Isis soldiers of infantry division lash elderly

Yazidis because they cannot keep up with the rest. Because they just cannot walk fast enough.

Yazidis are forbidden to the town hall. People try to communicate with one another while proceeding towards the lot. Fear and trepidation can be clearly seen in their sad and terrified eyes. Sinjar's air is polluted with agony, hatred and pain. Women and children cry and scream out of fear and dread. Yazidi men look more desperate than frightened, though. It is apparent they want to take action against Isis but they don't know how. They are caught by the element of surprise and have no hope for immediate rescue.

People of Sinjar feel abandoned by their Kurdish guardians who left them without a prior warning. They do not have enough arms, ammunition, and trained fighters to defend their city and its defenseless people.

The Yazidis are gathered around at the lot in front of the town hall. They are all told to sit on the ground until the lieutenant decides it is time to reveal what he has planned for them. Hadji Mazen stares at Yazidi girls and younger women with lechery. He gazes at them, licks his lips, touches himself and then glances at his oldest sergeant, Abu Mahdi, and smiles. Even a kid would understand that Hadji is getting Horney by looking at the women.

"I really hope their men refuse to convert to Islam," says the lieutenant as he looks at a few females around in a sharp predatory manner. "So, we get all these young beauties for ourselves. I want to have all their wives, daughters, and sisters. I want to sleep with all of them"

Like a psychopathic sex offender, Hadji Mazen Continues staring at young women and girls lustfully. "Can you believe your eyes? I never knew Yazidis had so many sexy, good-looking girls until today. I am very impressed and excited."

"I swear to Allah I knew what you were thinking the moment you began staring at the people." Replies Abu Mahdi while laughing enthusiastically. "Brother, I'm delighted we are still in the same team, and I'm happier now that you are my commander. I swear to the prophet I knew becoming a lieutenant would not change you a bit."

"Change me? No, no, no. Of course not. Becoming a lieutenant never changes me. It apparently makes me much hornier than before though."

Both Hadji Mazen and Abu Mahdi burst into a loud laughter. Teardrops rolled down their ugly faces. Especially Hadji's. Tears usually pour down his eyes whenever he laughs genuinely. Hadji Mazen raises his binocular, holds it against his eyes and looks around.

"Ok then. Contact our other comrades ask them why they are not here yet? Ask if they are already bringing those Yazidi bastards here. Tell them to hurry up. We should get this over with quickly."

Abu Mahdi holds his walkie talkie against his right ear and pages every sergeant. He presses the transmission button down and begins talking: "All sergeants and their squads must report to the base. I repeat, all sergeants, squads and their captive Yazidis must get to the town hall's front parking lot immediately. We should start already. Over."

Abu Mahdi keeps on rubbing the walkie-talkie against his greasy beard to scratch the long itchy hair that has grown on his face. He continues doing it while waiting for the response from other sergeants. Omar, Ayad, Samad, and Emad begin replying one after another. Samad says he is on his way along with Emad escorting some Yazidis towards the town hall. Omar and Ayad express they are almost done and they are going to join the lieutenant soon. But no one hears from Damdam. No reply. There is no sign of him and that worries his comrades a bit. Hadji Mazen pages Damdam personally after he is informed by others that Damdam is not responding. But Damdam does not respond to Hadji neither.

"Sir. Damdam is not responding." Says Abu Mahdi looking at Hadji Mazen a bit concerned about Damdam's whereabouts.

"Call him back."

"I did. No response."

"What is this now? Keep on trying."

"Ok, sir."

"Base to squad 4. Come in squad 4. Base to squad 4, come in. Over."

"Quiet. Silence." Yells Hadji into the megaphone. There's still a hubbub that can be heard. "Shut the fuck up, bastards. My people will now read some names Those men whose names are read, must step forward. I expect others to introduce them in case they decide to hide their identity from us by any chance. I don't have all day, people. I will start shooting you randomly if I feel you are wasting my damn time. So shut the hell up and keep your ears and eyes open."

Hadji Mazen returns the megaphone back to Abu Mahdi and he begins reading some names on the list. It isn't long before two out of six religious leaders step forward. They walk out of the crowd and stand on the first row just like Hadji Mazen instructed.

"Repeat those fucking names." orders Hadji Mazen angrier now, glaring at the crowd.

Abu Mahdi reads the names once again, but no one else steps forward. So, he fumes and goes towards the two elderly religious leaders who stepped forward.

"Where are the others?" Asks Hadji Mazen in a threatening tone. "Where are they? I know there should be six of you. Where are the others???"

The two old men glance at each other and lower their heads. One of them shakes his head to imply they have no idea. So, disappointed and furious, Hadji Mazen grabs the megaphone from Abu Mahdi and holds it against his mouth.

"I give you two more minutes to disclose where the rest of your priests are hiding. Only two minutes. Tell me where the hell they are and where can we find them? or I'll start shooting your kids. I'll prove to you that I will do it. I'll kill ten little boys for each of the men remaining hidden. Your two minutes starts now."

Hadji Mazen starts the chronometer on his wristwatch. A loud hum can be immediately heard. People begin chattering and whispering words into each other's ears in fear. Petrified mothers whimpering and crying gets louder and louder by

second. Two minutes deadline is fast coming to an end, but still no one seemed to be willing to say a word.

"Ok. If that's what you want." Yells Hadji into the megaphone glaring at people. Hadji's eyes scans the crowd looking for kids at the rows closest to him for a moment. He points his finger at a terrified little boy.

"Get me that kid." Shouts Hadji Mazen while looking outraged. "I wasn't kidding when I said I would shoot your kids."

Omar, Emad and Ayad suddenly jump towards the boy. The crowd shields the terrified little boy and his mother who screams her lungs out now, knowing her sweet baby is going to be taken away and killed right in front of her eyes.

Sergeants push people away, attack and hit them to get to the little boy. Other boy's and girl's parents hide their children under their Abaya, the black Arabic overall ladies wear, so the heartless sergeants of Isis would not see and select them. There is a massive uproar.

A sad turmoil going on at the town hall's front parking lot.

Omar, Emad and Ayad are pulling the little boy away from the people and his mother when one of the two old religious leaders raise his hand and asks Hadji Mazen to stop tormenting his people. He finally says he wants to talk.

"Stop." Yells Hadji Mazen into the megaphone victoriously. "The courageous man wants to finally talk. Hmmm. Okay."

One of the two old priests tell Hadji that he knows two other priests were rushed to Mount Sinjar. According to the old priest, two other religious leaders were taken to the villages around that he did not know which one exactly. The old man begs Hadji Mazen and his callous sergeants to leave his people alone. But Hadji Mazen assures him his people, especially the kids are not safe until he explains everything adequately. So, the old man continues that he knows two other priests were taken to the nearby mountain to be kept safe. Because they are supposed to teach Yazidi religion to future generations.

The old man reveals that the two remaining religious leaders Hadji Mazen is looking for were escorted to a village nearby. But the elderly man denied knowing which village or having

anything to do with their escape. He claims he has absolutely no idea which village they are taken to and by whom they are hidden now. The old man tells the Isis lieutenant to leave his innocent people, kids and hard-working men of Sinjar alone. He says Isis can take his anger on Syrian government instead of terrorizing his defenseless people, women, children and Yazidi families in general.

That's when Hadji Mazen throws a heavy punch towards the old man's face. The evil man's punching impact on the weak old man's face sounds as if his nose gets fractured.

"Your people? Your kids? Your women? You've not created them to claim they're yours you old devil worshipping shit. You must address them as Allah's creations. These people must be praying Allah as prophet Muhammad guided. Not listening to you infidel priests. Pieces of fuck"

The old man wiped the blood off his nose and lips. That's when Hadji Mazen noticed the man is smiling.

"What is that smile on your ugly face for, you bastard?" Asks Hadji Mazen heatedly.

"It makes me laugh realizing how uneducated and illiterate you Isis people really are." Replies the old man without worrying for the consequences or being even slightly frightened of what he says is possibly going to cost him his life. Despite being old and weak, the religious priest is quite outspoken and loud. He clearly says what he believed is true. The crowd begins to appreciate the old man's courage.

Hadji Mazen and his sergeants notice people have begun to react more daring. They determine the old priest aims to give people courage. The old priest Continues talking:

"You call us devil worshippers? Do you even understand what we worship and why? What do you really, honestly know of our history? Huh? You guys are actually devil's dedicated soldiers all of you. Look around you. Now we know what your God tells you to do to your fellow men. Its good these nice people see a sample of the religion you are promoting and representing. They can easily differentiate good from evil. I assure you they have already realized which one of us is the real devil worshipper. You guys? Or me and my fellow believers?"

Abu Mahdi is the one who punches the old man now. He anticipates the lieutenant is going to do that. So, he does it before Hadji Mazen makes a move this time. Hadji Mazen hands the megaphone back to Abu Mahdi. He stands behind the two old priests and places each of his hands on each priest's shoulder and bends. The evil lieutenant now has his big head between the back of both priest's heads. He does it so they would hear him well despite the loud humming sound produced by captive crowd.

"You have a chance to live, you know." Whispers Hadji Mazen into their ears. "Convert to Islam now. Swear allegiance and advice your people to do the same. That's the only way for you and your people to stay alive. You don't want all your people, as you address them, to die. Do you? Announce on the megaphone that Allah is the only God and prophet Muhammad the only prophet. People will listen to you, old man, because you are their priest and they respect you. They do what you say is right. Save everyone's lives. Tell them the right words after my little introduction."

The sound of people's commotion and hubbub has not stopped since they arrived at the town hall's vast parking lot. They don't seem as if they are going to stop making noise despite Hadji Mazen's men constant warnings. People are scared to death. They have no idea what their fate is going to become. Women and children's screaming and crying sound has made it absolutely impossible for Hadji Mazen or his sergeants to talk and announce what they intend to without the use of a megaphone. So, Hadji Mazen takes the megaphone back from his sergeant, takes a few steps forward and ordered everyone to shut their mouth and listen. But nobody seems to care what the lieutenant orders until Abu Mahdi fires a few warning shots. He points his gun back at the civilians while looking at them with his red scary crazy eyes. He now has the crowd's attention.

"The lieutenant is going to speak to you idiots." Yells Abu Mahdi. "One word and I will shoot you. Shut the fuck up. You hear? hush"

"Thank you." Says Hadji Mazen smiling bitterly and nodding.

Everyone is almost quiet now, paying full attention to what the lieutenant has to say.



"You have worshiped evil for centuries. You should be all executed as per Islamic laws, and we are here to do that."

The ruction gets even louder as everyone is terrified knowing Isis members are not joking. Almost everybody has heard how cruel and brutal they can become. But they are quieted down by Abu Mahdi's warning shots once again. Especially after he points his gun at the crowd, still pissed-off, looking devilishly mad.

"But we are not devil worshippers." Continues Hadji Mazen. "We are Muslims and fair soldiers of Allah. We want to give you a chance to survive. We want you to stay alive. We gain nothing by killing you all. Waste of ammunition to be honest." Continues Hadji Mazen now, smiling.

"I have explained to your priests, to your religious leaders, and they seem to agree with me. You will worship the God we introduce to you to from now on. You convert to Islam and swear allegiance. Like your religious leaders would. You'll stay alive if you do. I guarantee that. Otherwise, we'll have no choice as I said earlier, but to kill you. Because we know you are all devil worshippers. I'm going to hand this megaphone to your religious leaders now. I'm sure they will ask you to do the right thing. Let me remind you also that there's no one to help you anymore. No one to protect you or fight us to save you."

Hadji Mazen takes a step towards the two priests who are whispering something into each other's ears. They are frowning. They look as if they are trying to make a critical decision. They both get quiet as soon as they notice the ISIS monster getting closer to them. They begin mumbling something and make gestures that seems as though they are saying their prayers.

"Which one of you will be talking?" Asks Hadji Mazen. "Which one of you will do me the honor?"

The priest who appears to be calmer and more cooperative raises his hand, receives the megaphone from Hadji Mazen and pauses for a moment. His hands are shaking. So is the megaphone. He is old and afraid. But no one can guess how terrified he is of the consequences of what he is about to do.

"The man is right." Says the old priest into the megaphone while the crowd listens quietly. "There's no one, no armed faction, army or group to protect us here. Our peshmerga brothers who had been protecting us, abandoned us and left without warning us of what was coming. There's no P.K.K, no Y.P.G to defend us and of course, we are not fighters. We have remained, we are and will remain peaceful people. That's if we stay alive. These gentlemen," the old man pointing at Hadji Mazen, Abu Mahdi, and other sergeants. "They want us to give up our faith and pray as Muslims. They want us to convert to Islam, even if we have a religion already and our belief is an ancient one."

"Hurry up and get to the fucking point." Yells Hadji at the old man after he senses there is something wrong with the words and sentences of the priest. Hadji Mazen doesn't like where this is going.

"Yes. Of course. Yes." Replies the old man. I will get to the point. Believe me I will. "So, we are basically told who our God is from now on, how we should pray, where to pray and when to pray. I say we have a God we believe in. We have our own divine angels. Our God has allocated to run the world, we already know how, when and where to pray. They will kill us anyway. Whether we convert to their religion or not. But I want to tell you that we do not trade our faith to stay alive. They are the true evil. They are the devil's representatives on earth. All of them."

Hadji Mazen and his sergeants, Abu Mahdi, Omar, Ayad and Emad, all run towards the old man and to keep him quiet and get the megaphone back from him. But the old man resists. He holds on to the megaphone tight and Continues talking even though he is receiving quite heavy blows from all angles.

"They'll kill us all anyways. Do not trade your religion and belief. These terrorists want to replace us with Muslims. Because they are more obedient than us. That's the real reason they'll kill us all."

Those are the last words that comes out of the priest's blood-spattering mouth. Abu Mahdi sees a shovel nearby, grabs it quickly and strike the priest on his face and knocks him down after others takes the megaphone away from him finally. Every Isis member is now hitting the old man. Abu Mahdi's shovel blow to the old man's face is so heavy that the weak man's lower jaw gets ripped off and separates from his face

completely. The shovel's sharp edge tears the old man's lower jaw apart and tosses it away a few yards farther. Shocked and in disbelief, the man keeps on touching his lower jaw to make sure it is part of his head that has been separated from his face. Others who are punching and kicking the poor old man step away so that they would not get hit by the shovel's sharp metal head accidentally. While everyone in the crowd watches and screamed, Abu Mahdi's second shovel blow hits the old man right on his throat. That's the final nail in the coffin. The fatal blow to guarantee the old priest's death.

The other priest's tears roll down as he watches what happens to his spiritual brother. His lips move as he prays for his soul. He suddenly stands, throws his fists up and begins addressing the crowd while shouting, telling them to witness what the Isis does to their respected religious leader. That those Isis members are the real devil. But the old man is suddenly silenced by Damdam's unexpected appearance. Damdam spills petrol all over the priest's body and sets him on fire. The poor old man screams on the top of his lungs and runs towards the people. He falls and tries rolling himself on the ground to extinguish the fire. But those burning flames do not go off that easily. The old man gets quiet after a minute or two, but the crowd's scream and cursing at Isis members continue for a few more seconds.

Damdams sets the second priest on fire for his boss, Hadji Mazen, and his other comrades to see he is present and participating in all events that are taking place. The poor old man's body is burning in fire. He moans and twitches. To torture the man Damdam waits for his body to burn so he would suffer the pain for a while before he put the man out of his misery. Damdam takes out his gun finally and shoots the old priest in the head.

Men shout and curse at Hadji Mazen, Damdam, Omar, Ayad, Emad, Samad, and their ugly soldiers. They swear at them for what they did to their religious leaders. Women scream and younger children are all the more horrified when they see how their mothers, fathers and other adults yell at the lieutenant and his sergeants.

Almost all Yazidis are firm believers in their ancient religion. They believe their religion is the best, most complete and an outstanding one in the whole world, just like disciples of other faiths and beliefs.

Isis's top leader has declared caliphate weeks earlier. He wants to conquer the world, expand his boundaries and force people to convert just like what we read in religious history books today. Just like he believed prophet Muhammad did in ancient times. People scream and yell calling Isis devil's hand, Satanism promoters, hell people and animals. They have all heard what their religious leaders ordered them to do loud and clear. They are no longer going to convert, even to save their own and their family's lives now that they know what kind of Islam Isis wants to promote.

Hadji Mazen orders his sergeants to keep the crowd quiet. He wants to speak again. A few warning shots are fired once again. But it seems as though even firing warning shots isn't going to work this time. Gunshots have lost their effect it had on getting the fuming and furious crowd quiet. So, Isis soldiers shoot three men. To stay alive and for no one else to get hurt, people have no choice but to keep their mouths shut and listen to what the stupid Isis lieutenant wants to say this time.

"I gave your Goddamn priests a chance." Yells Hadji Mazen, trying hard to sound fair and look innocent. "I'm happy you witnessed the whole damn thing yourselves. What kind of a religious leader puts his disciples, his followers and fellow-citizens in such jeopardy? Huh? Are those the priests you respected? Really? are those the men you listened to preaching and obeyed their religious guidelines? So disappointing."

The lieutenant pauses, ponders for a moment and murmurs something to himself before he continues.

"I'm going to give you some time to make up your minds. Those who are willing to convert should show up right here tomorrow at noon. That means an hour before Islamic midday prayer time. We would make a holy ceremony and convert them to the only true religion, Islam. Tomorrow's noon time prayer will be adducted along with our newly converted Muslim brothers and sisters of Sinjar. We will deal with those who do not show up at a later time. Go home and make up your minds. Discuss converting to the holy prophet's religion with your family members. Also, I want everyone to bring any arms, ammunition or any kind of weapons you possess. Ok. You can all go back home now. Remember to tell everyone who is absent what you saw and heard today. If we find any arms and ammunition on someone later, we'll kill him, and their entire families

without hesitation. Get the hell out of here now. I hope to see some new Muslims here tomorrow.”

Hadji walks back inside the town hall's building and orders his sergeants to hang the two priest's corpses right at the middle of the city somewhere and set them on fire. So, people would see what's going to happen to them in case they decide to disobey. People's chatter begins getting louder and louder. A constant hum can be heard while everyone walks away back to their homes. None of the people speak to each other on the way home. They are still shocked digesting what they have witnessed and heard. What about their own religion and what they truly believed in they ask themselves. They are all in shock and are horrified. Did they really have to go through all of that if they were born a Muslim?

Hadji Mazen is walking inside the town hall followed by his sergeants.

“What's next guys?” Asks Damdam.

Hadji Mazen stops for a moment, stares at Damdam angrily without saying a word. He continues walking.

“Where have you been?” Asks Hadji Mazen after everyone walks in complete silence for a few seconds.

“I actually thought that captain Al Allawi was also here.” Replies Damdam laughing in hopes Hadji would shrug off his absence. Hadji Mazen and others look dead serious. “So, I immediately thought of a strategy as soon as I reached the parking lot.” Continues Damdam trying to present an alibi for his absence. “I figured I should find a four-liter gallon, fill it with petrol and pretend my truck had run out of petrol somewhere further down the road. I thought of doing that so the captain would think I was struggling to find fuel and get back to where I left my truck. I didn't want him to suspect I was missing because I was busy doing what I love to do most. I was relieved when I saw no sign of the captain. Thanks God.”

“Where have you been and why were you not answering your damned walkie-talkie and fucking cell-phone?” Asks Hadji furiously.

“Wait my dear brother, let me finish. I saw a gorgeous young girl hiding in an alley. I had no doubt she was a virgin. She was so pretty I couldn't resist. The thought of fucking her

alone made me totally forget I had to be present at the parking lot. I even forgot to take my cell-phone and walkie-talkie from the damn truck. She was so beautiful that I had to stop the truck and attack her before she even thought of running away. I tore down all her clothes in a matter of seconds. I was just like a hungry lion. She kept on crying and begging me to stop. But I wasn't still finished. You know? Oh, thank you dear Allah for such an unexpected gift. She was a very beautiful girl. Oh, I can still see her pretty face and young boobs."

"You think you can ignore your superiors and it's okay to do selfish, stupid things like this?" Demands Hadji Mazen meaning to interrupt Damdam crossly. "Go after your own pleasure while we are all working hard to finish what the captain specifically emphasized on earlier? I'm so disappointed with you, Damdam. I cannot even look at you. Don't take advantage of my kindness, our relation and history. Its good captain is not here to listen to your bullshit. You can't do things like that."

"But." Pleads Damdam.

"There's no but. Listen very carefully because I'm only going to tell you this one last time. The most beautiful young boys and girls will be selected and taken to the captain first. He will select two or three of each for himself every day. I am the next person who selects girls and boys. Only then, you get to choose yours. Just like we did before. Who allowed you to start fucking without saying anything to me first?"

"I'm very sorry. It will never happen again."

"It's too late to say sorry now. Isn't it? Because you already did what you were not allowed to do. Sorry? Who do you think you are? Show some respect or I will just fire you from my platoon and transfer you elsewhere."

Hadji Mazen places his index finger on his nose and makes a silence gesture before Damdam is able to say anything else. He looks at Damdam irritably, ordering him to shut up. He mumbles a short Quran verse and takes a deep breath.

Hadji Mazen and his sergeants Abu Mahdi, Omar, Damdam, Emad, Samad, and Ayad enter the ballroom again. The lieutenant orders everyone to sit down. He picks one of the papers the

captain has given him, takes a quick look at it and makes a strange facial gesture.

"We will begin by demolishing their temples. You'll do it tomorrow first thing in the morning. I want these Yazidis to see they will have no temple to go to and pray after we demolish them all tomorrow. They must realize how serious we are about them converting to Islam. Search those temples before demolishing them though. Take out and bring me any item you think it might be of value. We can get good money for some antiquities and artifacts they keep in their temples. We have done it before. So, I'm sure you know what to take. What we get by selling them can help us finance part of our activities. Tomorrow you will act as a "settlement battalion." You will select buildings as targets for demolition but take valuable items from some of your assigned temples first. Do not think of this as looting. Because these people are not Muslims. Stealing is when you take what does not belong to you only from another Muslim. Not these devil worshippers. They're animals. They are not Muslims. Get out of here now and go prepare yourselves for your next mission."

It's night time and no one in Sinjar can go to sleep. Families sit around thinking about what they must do. They know well they are not allowed to give up their faiths and beliefs to stay alive. At the same time, they want to stay alive and to do so, they merely have to give up their ancient religion. Their lives depend upon accepting or refusing to converting to Islam now.

Yazidis of Sinjar are stuck at the biggest and the trickiest crossroad of their lives. What a dilemma. They are extremely scared, unaware of what fate has in store for them. Are their lives really going to be spared if they converted to Islam? Or they are going to be executed regardless? Is Isis looking for an excuse to perpetrate a mass murder? These are the concerns of most Yazidis of Sinjar on this unfortunate evening.

Family members discuss their options while Isis members drink, use drugs and celebrate their victory of capturing Sinjar. Some young Yazidi girls are snatched from their homes on the same night and brought to the party forcedly so Isis high ranking officers would satisfy their sexual needs with them.

\* \* \*

As per Hadji Mazen's orders, each squad heads towards a dedicated Yazidi temple the following morning. All six sergeants are told to complete their missions and get back to the city hall before midday prayers time so they will be there when Yazidis come to convert. Hadji Mazen's sergeants, Abu Mahdi, Omar, Ayad and the other three carry as much ammunition as they can so they would defend themselves and fight back in case of an ambush by any possible Kurdish Iraqi fighters remaining in the city.

Each Isis squad consists of several soldiers, a machinegun - mounted pick-up truck and three or four motocross carrying two armed riders. There are usually three or four soldiers at the back of each pick-up truck. Typically, a machinegun operator and his two assistants who are responsible for reloading the machinegun. There's normally a third person at the back of the truck as the look-out. Also, as a replacement for any of the other two guys. In case they get shot, injured, can no longer operate the machine gun or unable to attend to their duties for any reason.

Aside from the driver, there is enough space for two other individuals to sit inside a truck's cabin. One of the two available seats is reserved for the sergeant all the time while sergeant's guest, assistant or anyone else accompanying the squad sits between him and the driver. That is usually a squad traveling formation. Any extra number of soldiers in a unit are mainly ordered to sit at the back of the truck. The team would use an armored personnel carrier in case the number of soldiers exceeds the space available at the back of the truck.

It isn't long before each squad arrives at their designated sites. They all take position and are ready to execute orders issued by their sergeants.

The driver stops the pick-up truck. The two escorting motocross also stop one at each side of the truck. Omar opens the door to exit the vehicle and sees his driver rushing out of the truck faster than him the moment he stops the vehicle. As if he is counting every second to reach the destination so he can get out. But Omar doesn't think much of it and doesn't even bother to ask him why? The driver has his window pulled all the way down the whole-time driving.



Omar has an infected wisdom tooth which has caused him a foul breath and produces a terrible and intolerable smell inside the truck. Because he is seated inside the truck's cabin with his window closed. Sergeant's driver finds it difficult to breathe. But he is both afraid and shy to tell his sergeant anything about it and asks him to pull his window down. He cannot wait to arrive at the site. He jumps out of the vehicle and saves himself from inhaling Omar's terrible breath.

Omar steps down the truck and looks at his machinegun crew at the back. He figures they are probably waiting for him to tell them what they are expected to do. So, he waves at them and orders everyone to leave the heavy machine gun and get down. He takes a piece of cloth out of his pocket and wipes his sweat off his round, sweaty and swollen face.

Sergeant Omar pulls his trousers up. He sizes up the temple he is sent to demolish. The way he looks wearing all the baggy clothes that seem are much larger than his actual size makes his soldiers want to laugh. But they are afraid of the consequences knowing how short-tempered and low-capacity Omar is.

Omar orders his assistant to get him his tooth spray from the truck's dashboard. The assistant brings him his spray immediately. Omar spits out a mixture of saliva, blood and pus after a moment. He opens his mouth and sprays over his infected tooth while moaning loudly. He rubs his cheek for a moment until the spray begins having its numbing effect on his tooth. Everyone waits for him to issue orders.

The driver suddenly notices Omar's very filthy heels that are protruding from the back of his sandals. He is about to burst into laughter. But he bites his own lip and controls himself. Omar's heel's skin has become so thick and dirty that the driver imagines he is staring at a horseshoe.

"Ok. Let us get in and see if we can find any valuable items first." Says the newly assigned sergeant Omar.

Omar spits on the desert hot sands a few more times before he begins walking towards the temple. There is literally no one in the alley and around the temple. It is apparent that people have run away and hidden after they saw Isis pick-up trucks and the two-motocross approaching. Everyone, even the youngest children can identify Isis's vehicles from far away by seeing the black flags on each moving vehicle.

Omar orders two of his soldiers to enter the temple. There are a few small chambers inside the temple none of the Isis soldiers can figure why they've been built. Omar and his assistant follow after they make sure it is safe for them to enter.

A middle-aged man exits one of the chambers suddenly holding a little boy's hand as soon as Omar and his assistant enter the temple. The man and the five-year-old bright-eyed boy startle everyone. The middle-aged man shields the little boy and holds him behind the moment he sees a few armed men pointing their guns at him and the boy. He realizes he has come across an Isis squad. The little boy begins crying after he hears every gunman yelling, cursing and shouting at them to freeze and hold their hands over their heads. Their voices echo in the temple and become even scarier.

"What the fuck are you doing in here mister?" Yells Omar's assistant.

"I brought my grandson to see the temple." Replies the man, shaking. He's still holding the boy behind himself. "I had promised to show him inside a temple weeks ago. I knew we were not allowed in here anymore. I knew you will destroy the temple sooner or later. So, I thought I would show him what he wants to see before it gets demolished and take him back home. I'm sorry. We're leaving now."

"Leaving?" Asks Omar sarcastically.

Omar orders two of his soldiers to hold the man and his grandson outside while he finishes inspecting the temple's chambers. Soldiers escort the man and the boy out while the man begs them to at least let his grandson go as he is only a little boy and unaware of what is going on around him. Omar asks everyone to lower their weapons, spits a few more times and points his finger at a soldier and then his own assistant.

"You two. Go search inside those chambers." Orders sergeant Omar. "There may be a handmade bomb planted somewhere inside."

The assistant and another soldier check all the chambers and make sure no bomb is planted. They all check the entire temple and find no item worthy of taking. Omar walks outside the temple followed by his assistant and another soldier. Omar paces towards the middle-aged man directly and slaps him

before he has a chance to beg for mercy. He then calls his other two soldiers and orders them to prepare the explosives for demolition.

Omar gives a scary look at the man and tells him he has to be the one taking the explosive and plant it inside the temple if he wants the boy to live. The man is terrified as he knows he has no other choice but to accept. But he's happy deep inside as he is told they are going to let his grandson live.

Explosives are ready a few minutes later. The boy cries non-stop and asks his grandfather to take him back home. The grandfather does all he can to calm and comfort the terrified boy but to no avail.

"Hey, devil worshiping man, go demolish your own devil worshiping temple with your own hands so your grandson would learn how we deal with a place having evil spirits in it." Says Omar. "I will let the boy live. Tell me why you went to the temple though? But I want the truth this time."

"I wanted my grandson to see and remember what a temple looks like before it is demolished. That's all. I swear that's the only reason." Replies the man. He bursts into tears.

Omar's assistant hands a box to the man minutes later. The middle-aged man sees a wire attached and inserted to some kind of substance like modelling clay-like material. Like the one used to make sculpture. The man's hands are shaking.

The middle-aged man gives his grandson a meaningful look, kisses his forehead, eyes and cheeks before he walks towards the temple. Omar's soldiers escort the man to the temple's entrance while Omar personally holds the boy. The middle-aged man turns his head and gives a last look at his grandson. He pretends to be smiling and gets inside.

"Tell me when you are done planting the explosives." Yells Omar, sneering.

"Okay sir." Replies the man.

Omar asks his assistant to give him the trigger key. It isn't more than thirty seconds after the man enters the temple when Omar yells asking the middle-aged man if he has placed the bomb down in the middle of the temple. The man responds "no", also yells replying. "It's still in my hands." Confirms the

man loudly trembling. That's when Omar pushes the button and the entire temple explodes.

Fire, smoke, dust and debris, blood and flesh spray out of the temple's windows. The little boy is speechless. He is too young to realize what Omar has done to his grandfather. His wet cute round eyes gazes at the smoke and fire. He is shocked as he has never seen such a blast. Omar's coldblooded act has turned the boy's grandfather into pieces by pressing the button, knowing that the man was still holding the explosives in his hands.

"There. It's done." Laughs Omar devilishly. Every other soldier, assistant and the driver yell Allah o Akbar while holding their ears. The little boy is still confused what has happened. "Let's get going. We are done here."

"What about the boy?" Asks the driver. "What do we do with him?"

"Well. We will take him with us, make a great Muslim out of him. We'll send him for military training and train him. He will be ready to fight for jihad in less than a year. He'll be a well-trained suicide bomber. The youngest man in heaven. The kid has no idea how lucky he is."

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#### ELSEWHERE

Cabin lights, no smoking and seatbelt signs turn on altogether. An elegant and soft voice of a female flight attendant is heard from cabin speakers.

*"Ladies and gentlemen, as we start to descend, please make sure your seat-backs and tray- tables are in their full upright position. Make sure your seatbelt is securely fastened, and all carry-on luggage is stowed underneath the seat in front of you, or in the overhead compartment. Thank you."*

Sammy opens his eyes a little, returns his seat to its original upright position and fastens his seat-belt like the flight attendant instructs. He glances at Robert who has closed his eyes and fallen asleep again. Sammy and Robert have been on the plane for hours. They are flying from Beijing, China's capital to Damascus.

The exhaustion of the journey can be clearly seen in their withered pale faces. Long Journeys by planes are annoying and unpleasant for Sammy. He feels desperate and uncomfortable throughout the flight. Because he had an accident a few years earlier that led to crushing his left leg after which he limps a bit and cannot be seated for a long period of time. He has to move his leg every now and then. But now, he has to be seated in the aircraft, sometimes with his seat-belt fastened, for as long as their flight takes. The fact that he can't move much makes the trip irritating, annoying and boring for him. Sammy prefers long trips by trains though. At least he is free to sit, lay down, stand up or even walk in a train if he wants to.

There are not too many passengers on the plane. Just about thirty to forty people are onboard most of which are napping. Others are whether busy with their smartphones, an inflight magazine or watch a movie that is playing on the little screen in front of them.

Passengers are waking up one after the other when they hear the announcement and feel cabin lights turning on. They all look tired, restless and worried though. Sammy knows he does not have enough time to go back to sleep since the plane has already begun descending and the flight attendants are preparing for landing. Besides, he is fully awakened already and cannot go back to sleep again when he thinks about it. So, he opens his eyes completely, yawns and glances at Robert once again. He is still asleep.

Sammy calls Robert's name a few times to wake him up. But it doesn't work. Robert is in a deeper sleep for Sammy to be able to wake him up just by calling his name. So, Sammy gets his face as close to Robert as he can and jolts him while yelling his name simultaneously. Sammy's crazy way of waking his best friend up doesn't feel less than an electric shock to Robert. It really frightens him.

"What the fuck?" Growls Robert angrily frowning after he opens his eyes suddenly. 'What's wrong with you asshole?' Continues Robert in his sleepy rough voice, shaken, startled, confused and mad gazing into Sammy's eyes. "You crazy son of a bitch. You are a freaking moron. You know that?"

Robert shakes his head meaning he feels sorry for Sammy for being such an idiot. He looks away after he sees Sammy laughing and making funny faces in response.

"Shut up. Crazy monkey shit. Are we there yet?" Asks Robert after a pause. he turns his head and glances at Sammy. Robert rolls his eyes. His eyelids begin to close again.

"No." Replies Sammy yelling into Robert's ear, again. "Not yet. But we will land very soon buddy. Wake up. Wake up." Continues Sammy pulling Robert's shirt acting like a child and laughing.

Robert pulls himself together, raises his eyebrows a bit, lifts his eyelids up so his eyes would remain completely open.

"Act human you animal". Says Robert shaking his head in disbelief.

Robert stretches his muscles like a cat, sits up on his seat and looks out the window. But Sammy doesn't seem to want to let go of Robert's shirt. He continues mocking him.

"Oh my God. Stop already. Can't you see I'm awake already? Why did you wake me up anyways you lunatic?" Ask Robert complaining. "I was dreaming. My brother Robin was with me in my dream. He looked sad but he was alive. I wish it wasn't a dream." Continues Robert in his emotional voice.

Robert sighs, his face turns sad and falls silent, again. Sammy decides to leave him alone after he hears Robert talking about Robin, his brother. So, to get himself busy with something else, Sammy takes his document bag out from his front seat's back pocket, zips it open and takes his little mirror out. He inserts his fingers in his trousers back pocket, takes a small green comb out and begins combing his straight dark brown hair while looking at himself in the mirror.

Robert has now laid his head back on his seat, thinking. He has his eyes on Sammy staring at him to see how carefully he combs his hair while holding his mirror in front of his face. Robert looks calm, but it is obvious his mind is elsewhere thinking about a different subject while his eyes check out the operation Sammy performs on his hair.

Sammy gets the little mirror closer to his face and stares at the moon shaped scar he has on the top of his left eyebrow for a few seconds without paying any attention to people around. He raises his eyebrows a few times checking how does

his scar look when he makes different facial expressions when Robert surprises him suddenly by snatching the mirror off his fingers.

"Hey. What's wrong with you?" Asks Sammy looking shocked. "Ask me so I'll give it to you. Scared the shit out of me, dude." Continues Sammy trying not to laugh.

"Because it takes you longer than women to look in the damn mirror and make sure you look fine. I want to fix my hair, too." Replies Robert frowning.

"You are an idiot. You know that? Ask me to give you the damn thing in a civilized manner so I would give it to you. Besides, I have told you a million times. You cannot uncurl that hair of yours with a comb. That's the kind of hair quality you are born with." Replies Sammy shaking his head pretending he feels sorry for Robert.

Still laughing and giggling, Robert holds the mirror in front of his face, takes off his glasses and begins turning his head to the left and right so he would see how he looks from his side views. He moves the mirror back and forth, closer and farther to his face, checks out if the short beard and mustache he always wore looks alright.

"And you say it's me who spends longer time than girls do in front of a mirror." Says Sammy sarcastically looking at every move Robert makes. "Four minutes so far and counting." Continues Sammy pretending he is glancing at his wristwatch.

Like Sammy, Robert tries inserting his fingers into his trousers back pocket, also to take his comb out. But he can't do it as easily and effortlessly as Sammy. Robert is slightly heavier. That's why it is more challenging for him to lift his whole body up and take his comb out considering how narrow the plane seats are and how tight the space is for him and many other heavy built passengers. He keeps on moving left and right struggling to reach his comb when Sammy takes Roberts comb out of his pocket and hands it over to him.

"Oh, thanks dude. All goddamn Chinese made products I've seen are way smaller than standard size." Says Robert annoyed, trying to find a comfortable position on his seat. "Even their damn plane seats are smaller. We are two medium height Twenty-Two-Year-old guys. We are the same height and still do not fit in our seats. Imagine, how an extra-large lady or

gentleman would feel sitting on this tiny space which is too close to its front seat? There's no space for us to stretch our legs. These seats are too small for me, man. Of course, I'm a bit fat. But still." Says Robert while combing his hair.

"Oh my God. Don't start with your weight again, dude. You are not fat. Hell. You are not even chubby for heaven's sake. You are just a bit heavier built than Amer and I. That's all. Amer and I have told you this a billion times already and believe me, we are not trying to be polite or nice because we are not. Please stop."

"Still. I wish I had a body like yours. Slender yet strong." Says Robert. He finishes combing his light brown curly hair and puts the mirror back into his pocket. Sammy also places his mirror back inside his document bag, checks the contents carefully and makes sure everything else is there inside, zips the bag, closes it and hangs its strap around his neck.

Sammy glances at the passengers who are seated near and around him. Some of the ladies passengers are making sure they look alright. Sleepy faces of the Passengers, their ragged hairs and red eyes amuses Sammy. He is about to burst into laughter when he sees how awful everyone looks in the plane.

"Oh, my god. Dude, look at people's faces." whispers Sammy into Robert's ear to make him laugh and to change his mood. "Look at them. Oh, dear God. Fail Army."

"you think we looked any better than them when we woke up?" replies Robert having a ridiculous smiling on his face. He glances at the passengers around him. Also, to see whether Sammy is right. "Did you look yourself in the mirror when you woke up you dumb ass?"

Sammy, medium-height, slender yet strong, is a friendly guy. He is polite, reserved and sensitive. Sammy is from Al Darrah, a small town in Al Raqqa province, North East of Syria. He was born in a middle-class family. His mother is a housewife and his father owned an industrial workshop. Sammy can be generally described as a people's person. He is very sociable, but also a bit shy at times. Sammy is known for his politeness and good behavior amongst people of the town, his neighborhood, his friends, family, and relatives.

People of Al Darrah like Sammy, at least all those who know him. He is, in fact, liked by a wide range of people. From



school children to elderly men and women. It doesn't take long for a person to realize how sincere, kind-hearted, positive and friendly Sammy is after getting to meet him.

Sammy's family, relatives, and friends are well aware of the fact that he never forgets he has to try hard in order to achieve his life objectives, despite difficulties he has encountered throughout his life. That no matter how cruel and Merciless obstacles and challenges in his life, they still can't prevent him pursuing his dreams. Sammy's primary aim is to continue studying, graduating from the university in mechanical engineering first and working hard to qualify for Olympics in shooting along with his best friend Robert.

Robert is from the capital city, Damascus. He is the same age and as tall as Sammy. He is a bit heavier though. Robert wears eyeglasses. He has a light brown curly hair and always wears short beard and mustache. He is always happy, cracking jokes and enjoys making people he likes laugh. Sammy and Robert were twelve when they first met.

Robert's father was an assistant manager at a semi-government bank in the capital, Damascus back in the day. Until he got an offer for a managerial position at Al Darrah branch. He was offered a Four-year contract, which included a number of benefits he did not enjoy before that. So, he accepted the offer, and they moved to Al Darrah, where Sammy lived with his parents.

Sammy, Robert and Amer, Sammy's cousin, became classmates, very close and inseparable friends ever since. They were together all the time and consider themselves as "The Three Musketeers".

The contract of Robert's father in Al Darrah branch ended Four years later and all his family had to move back to the capital, Damascus. Sammy and Amer stayed in touch with Robert though after Robert left Al Darrah. They texted each other, sent emails to one another until Sammy and Robert, both entered the same university in the capital a few years later just like they had planned way ahead. Amer, however, decided he wanted to join the job market rather than continue his studies.

Sammy and Robert are both very much into shooting sport, even long before Sammy moved to Damascus to attend university. They are both permanent members of target shooting clubs of

their hometowns. Sammy is a member of Al Raqqa shooting club as he lived in Al Darrah, a little beautiful town under Raqqa province jurisdiction, and Robert was a member at Damascus youth club, which covered many different types of sports, including target shooting.

With Sammy moving to Damascus temporarily to attend university, he had to separate from Al Raqqa club and join Robert in Damascus youth club so they would participate in shooting exercises together. Both Sammy and Robert study mechanical engineering at the university. They became classmates just like when they were kids.

Sammy loved playing soccer professionally since he was very young. He just loved it. He watched football matches between the team he was a big fan of and other football teams. He closely followed every football match that happened in any league. But he had to kiss his dream of playing soccer goodbye after he met an incident that led to breaking his left leg's bone in a few different spots. The accident caused him to limp after the accident. Sammy just became content to watch football and paid more and more attention to shooting after his injuries.

Sammy's father motivated him to give shooting games a try. He knew better than anyone how talented Sammy was in shooting, as when they went hunting, he has witnessed Sammy's concentration, speed, and accuracy in aiming and shooting the game.

Robert is the only friend Sammy has in the capital. So, after being accepted in university and moving to Damascus, he went home with Robert and stayed with him instead of staying at the dorm with other students he didn't know. Sammy stayed at Robert's place overnight and headed towards the university together with Robert the following morning. This was fun for both of them. They enjoyed each other's company a lot.

Chinese shooting Federation invited shooting athletes from several countries including Syria a few weeks ago to participate in a friendly tournament held in Beijing. The whole tournament was going to take around a month. Sammy, Robert and another guy, Hamid, were selected by their club's officials and coaches to travel to Beijing and represent their countries and club in the tournament. Sammy and Robert managed to make specific arrangements in their class timings after coordinating with few professors and the college dean, so

they could participate in the tournament. They had to stay in Beijing for around Thirty-Two days because Chinese shooting federation had arranged certain activities for the participants to entertain them before and after the tournament took place.

Sammy and Robert were super excited to be traveling to another country for the first time, together. But Hamid, the third shooting athlete and part of the team, decided he did not want to participate. He wanted to stay back home for some reason he did not mention. So, it was only Sammy a Robert who traveled to Beijing, where they actually had lots of fun and enjoyed every bit of Chinese hospitality. They had an enjoyable stay. Lovely hotel, good transportation, nice looking tour guides and most importantly, the very famous Chinese food and restaurant were a few of what Sammy and Robert had enjoyed and experienced while staying in Beijing for the tournament.

Robert was able to claim the first place and Sammy took the second at the end of the match. But winning first or second place did not really matter to any of them. The fact that they were together in a foreign country was significant enough for both of them.

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There are still a few minutes left to the end of the flight. Passengers are already preparing themselves for landing. A kind of worry can be seen and felt in their faces and eyes. As if they are not really excited and happy that they are finally arriving at their destination, their home country's airport.

Almost all passengers are awake already. Their voices can be heard talking to each other about different concerns they had. An old man with an entirely white beard and mustache is worried about terrorists attacking the plane before it landed. He is saying he had read an article that Isis terrorists had threatened they were going to target Airlines, too.

A middle-aged woman, wearing a maroon scarf holding a small Quran and an amber rosary frowns and shakes her head expressing she does not take such threats seriously. She actually tries calming the old man and others. The woman has a kind face. The kind of face you see in children's movies, where an angel-looking old woman tells the tale of a legend for young cute little children at night. She is playing with

the beads of her rosary while praying. She encourages others not to allow fear and negative thoughts take control of them and their minds. What she is actually saying and believes is that there are many other ways one can die rather than being attacked by Isis terrorists on the air inside a plane. That's if it is her turn to die, if it is her time to go already and she is indeed destined to die. So, she believes she is alive simply because it is probably not her time to leave this world yet.

There is a young couple seated near the old woman. Unlike others who have serious concerns though, they really do not take anyone's worry seriously. They whisper to one another and laugh at people sitting close to them, making fun of their choices of words, the way they look and how naïve they are.

A young girl who has enough of the couple's childish behavior has been trying to say something for a while. She finally gets the chance to say what she wants. She gets the attention of others and expresses that insecurities of the countries and the region, not only worries her for her own sake, but also for the future of her young family members, her countrymen and the generations to come. As what it seems to be happening to the country is insecurities and violence are not going to end anytime soon.

Sammy is listening quite carefully to what the girl is saying.

"Are you listening to what they are saying?" Asks Sammy whispering into Robert's ear. "They are right, man. Should think of going away somewhere. Seriously though. I agree with most of them and give them the right to be concerned."

Robert nods as he pulls an in-flight magazine out of his front seat's pocket.

"come on man" Replies Robert. "We both know what's happening to this doomed country. We heard the news. Remember? Let's get home first. we'll talk about what we are going to do or where we will run to. We will make a serious decision. Dude, we are not going to wait until last moment. We will not wait until those murderers get to us. Those Isis shits. Think positive. Like the lady said earlier. Think about good possibilities. Like the fun you and I had back in Beijing. Think about what you have achieved in the tournament".

Robert smiles, glances at Sammy and fixes his glasses on his face.

"You know and you remember what kind of fun and how much fun exactly I'm talking about?" Continues Robert naughtily while smiling only on one half of his face taking a devilish meaningful look. "Don't you?"

Robert's facial expression makes Sammy ponder and smile. He leans back on his seat and listens to the Passengers having a conversation.

"Isis terrorists will not stop killing and terrorizing innocent defenseless people. They wouldn't hesitate to commit any crime to gain control of the whole country".

A flight attendant, a girl of Twenty-Seven, is saying that despite the fact she does not have any political backgrounds and knowledge and she doesn't even listen to The Daily News, she can figure out the severity of the situation in the country. She says she has recently heard rumors from people who are traveling, colleagues and even some of her friends about the formation of certain groups to fight certain factions. And she would really like to know who is fighting for what cause and which group is which. Sammy is listening to the girl and is actually quite surprised she doesn't know what is going on in their country.

What is in fact happening is that inspired by Arab Spring movement in neighboring countries, many people in Syria also start complaining about the high unemployment rate, corruption, lack of political freedom and freedom of speech Under President Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father, Hafez al-Assad. Until pro-democracy demonstrations erupted in the south when the government used deadly forces to crush the recent protests demanding the president's resignation nationwide.

The unrest spread and the crackdown intensified. Opposition supporters took up the arms, first to defend themselves and later to rid their areas off security forces. The violence rapidly escalated, and the country descended into a civil war. Different groups and factions were formed, some supporting and some opposing the government. But when Isis entered the country's soil, all groups and camps, not only fighting each other, whether supporting or opposing the regime, now had to fight Isis too.

About Isis Though, Isis is a radical Sunni Islamic group. With the outbreak of civil war in the country, Isis found the country unstable and seized the opportunity to enter the country.

They came from the Iraqi border and rapidly advanced into Syrian territory, capturing area after area, province after province and city after city. In addition to Syria and Iraq, they also have parts of Libya and Nigeria in control and its allied groups are active in other parts of the world like Afghanistan and Southeast Asia.

A few days ago, when Sammy and Robert were still in Beijing for the tournament, they were at their hotel room and they were watching the evening news saying that Isis militants were able to capture a vast area in the northeast of the country and now they were fighting to take control of Al Raqqa. Sammy and Robert got very concerned when a military expert and analyst in a popular news commentary anticipated that it would not take much longer for Isis terrorists to take control of Al Raqqa province completely.

Analysts and experts were hence advising people of Raqqa province to immediately evacuate the area and leave while they still could, if they were still living in towns and villages of the region as according to an Isis spokesman, they would continue their offensive and attacks to eventually advancing to other provinces.

According to one of the news commentators who is a very well-liked and respected person amongst Syrian people, the leader of the ISIS terrorist group, had declared a worldwide caliphate and himself as the caliph. The man said the caliph would not stop fighting until he has control over the whole country.

Caliphate is an Islamic state led by a group of religious authorities under the supreme leader called caliph.

After hearing the disturbing news that night, Sammy and Robert immediately contacted their families back in Syria to talk about what they had just heard and to decide what to do. But in their telephone conversation, they decided to hold a family meeting when Sammy and Robert returned home, to decide when and where to move to.

Isis is known for their brutal violence against the Shiite Muslims, Christians, and Yazidis, etc. They enforce Sharia laws in cities they control. They cut off hands of Thieves before public eyes. They make brutal mass executions on the streets. They don't allow women to visit doctors. They established Da'wa offices to advertise their ideology. They pay no attention whatsoever do human rights. They destroy ancient artifacts and Antiquities. The rape and enslave women and young girls, put them for auction or rent. Dismember and cut down their prisoners and Force everyone to convert to Islam. They use younger kids for suicide attacks and assassinations. They make human shields by their captives.

They kill elderly men and women. Anyone older than fifty or sixty in some cases. They lash people if they disobey. They rape girls over nine-year-old and put them on display, auctioning and selling them. Crucifying the captives in the streets. Throw some of them from High Rise buildings.

Isis takes hostages and ask for Ransom. They send kids and teenagers for military training camps and train them to become executioners, beheading and torturing enemies and opponent. All the boys and girls would be sent to labor camps to undertake exhausting tasks and many other brutal activities are a few of what Isis is known for under the umbrella of Islam and Allah.

On the name of Islamic Allah, Burning, smothering, hanging, splitting chest using a non-sharp dagger, beheading, slaughtering is only a few of punishments their enemies and those opposing them would face in case they are caught.

They cover their expenses by attacking and occupying cities, controlling banks, oil and gas reserves, taxation, extortion, theft of capital resources, ransom for hostages and captives, external financial and arms support, non-profit organizations.

They have chosen a black color flag for their caliphate, which indicates the darkness and fear, that wherever they go to, they will take with them. And now, they are on Syrian soil and advancing. They move forward day after day, and defenseless civilians have no other choice, but to flee from their homes and leave everything behind.

People with better financial capabilities migrate to European, Asian or at least neighboring countries. Families

with less cash choose any country which grants them with asylum. But the truth is that a substantial percent of people has no money, therefore no choice, but to stay and face their bitter Fates.

The main concern of Syrian people in general and residence of Raqqa province in particular is to get somewhere safe before falling into a bloodbath of Isis terrorists.

Sammy and Robert know very well that Al Darrah is no longer a safe place to stay. They know they have to leave their homes very soon and get as far away as possible from their little town before Isis animals reach them.

One of the cabin crew, a white thin and tall girl with light makeup stands by Sammy's seat,

"Hello Sir." Whispers the girl with a soft and kind voice: "I just wanted to request you to kindly let all other passengers leave the aircraft first after landing. Because it's only then my colleagues on the ground can bring you a wheelchair. I'm sure it will be more convenient for you sir."

"Wheelchair?" Asks Sammy looking a bit embarrassed. "Thank you very much, sweetheart. That's very thoughtful of you. But I don't need a wheelchair. I can walk."

"Very well." Replies the female crew. "As you wish sir. I just said that because your seat number and the name has been marked in the passenger manifest. It's written seat 9B, which is your seat, needs assistance for the reason of disability. Maybe there has been a mistake. Sorry to bother you, sir."

The girl checks the passenger manifest she is holding in her hands to make sure she is not making a mistake. She turns the pages one after another looking for a particular document. She finally finds what she is looking for. Sammy, unaware of what the girl is looking for, is only waiting for her to say something. The girl finds the document.

"Here it is." Continues the girl more confidently now. "You see? Like I said sir. Here. Look. It's written passenger with disability."

"Oh okay" replies Sammy smiling, now realizing what the female crew is looking for. "I can see. It's correct actually, but I am half disabled. I can walk. I just limp."



All passengers keep quiet. Sammy notices curious eyes of passengers around him who have pricked up their ears to hear his conversation with the girl.

"That's actually correct miss." Continues Sammy holding his Cain close to his face. "I've got this thing I normally use in case. I don't have that kind of disability that requires me moving around with a wheelchair. Although I am very much thankful to you and your kind colleagues for taking good care of your passengers. Thank you so much dear. But don't worry I can walk easily. Like everyone else. Thanks anyways."

"All right sir." Replies the girl giving Sammy a satisfied smile. "But if you change your mind or you need anything else, please let me know. I'm at your service."

"Thank you" Replies Sammy, "God bless you."

The girl walks towards the back of the aircraft.

*"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Damascus International Airport. The local time is Twelve minutes AM and the outside temperature is Twenty-six degrees Fahrenheit. For your safety, please remain seated with your seatbelts fastened until the aircraft has completely stopped and the exit doors are open. Passengers holding onward connections are required to proceed to the transfer desk. On behalf of destination Airlines, captain Rimi and the crew, we hope that you have enjoyed your flight with us and thank you for flying with destination Airlines. And hope to see you soon. Thank you."*

The plane skids to a halt and all passengers are waiting to exit the aircraft. The plane jerks-up and almost everyone jumps on their feet to take out their handbags and small suitcases out of the overhead compartments. Sammy too gets ready to leave the plane. He fixes his knee strap, which to be more comfortable during the trip, he has removed at the beginning of the flight. The voice of a lady flight attendant can be heard from the speakers again, requesting passengers not to rush as the exit doors are not yet opened.

Sammy stands up too. He also opens his overhead compartment, pulls out his sports backpack and throws it on his shoulder. He then looks around where was seated to make sure he did not leave anything behind.

Robert is still sitting and his seat looking around Sammy's seat to see if he left anything behind. A lady crew is intentionally standing near Sammy. Apparently to make sure he can get out of the plane without assistant. Sammy opens the overhead compartment once again looking for something. But he is not tall enough to reach the deep end of the cabinet. The lady cabin crew who knows the overhead compartments of that particular plane are quite steep and Sammy might not be able to find what he's looking for, asks him if he is looking for something. Sammy requests the lady politely to hand him over his championship cup that seemed to have slept into the back of the cabinet. The lady smiles and begins searching the overhead compartment accordingly.

The overhead compartments are quite high and her hand cannot reach the cup. So, she has to stand over Sammy's seat and see if she can find the cup standing? She is finally able to find Sammy's championship cup and hands it over to him.

A silver-colored cup, with Sammy Samaha's name carved on it in English and there is some other Chinese text, which is probably Sammy's name in the Chinese language. There is also a strange looking logo under Sammy's name, which is apparently the logo of Chinese international target shooting federation. There is a little figure on the top of the cup. Statue of a man holding a rifle, targeting in a seated position.

All passengers around Sammy are looking at the championship cup when the girl takes out another one from the very same overhead compartment and Robert takes it from her. The other championship cup looks precisely like the first one, but it is in gold color and instead of Sammy Samaha's name, Robert Shafi, Robert's name and the family name is Carved on it instead. The lady who is curiously looking at Sammy and Robert's cup can't help but asking.

"Cool." Comments the girl in an excited tone. "Are these cups yours? Wow. How nice. Congratulations".

Sammy is tremendously proud of his championship cup. He is feeling a bit shy too at the same time. He winks at Robert.

"Yup." Replies Sammy. "My best friend and I are coming back from a target shooting competition in Beijing. My best friend won the first place and I took the second. What can I do? He is the best. He is the man. One of my best friends in life."

Robert glances at the lady, waves his hand jokingly and says hi. Others are trying to listen to Sammy's conversation with the lady crew. An old man standing near Sammy and the girl shakes his head in a pitying way.

"Now why the hell did you even come back?" The old man asks Sammy. "Didn't you think for a second? Is Syria really the place to live in? Everyone I know is trying to escape this shit of a country. But you were abroad already and you come back? My god. You young people have no brain. You should have stayed wherever you were. You have no future here and you know it. You made a terrible mistake by returning son. There is nothing for you guys in this shithole."

"My mum is here." Replies Sammy innocently smiling, not being used to hearing this type of comments. "I can't just leave and not come back. I know my mum very well. I know that even right now she is looking at the door every ten seconds, waiting for me to arrive. She's getting older. She is old and I am all whom she has got. You expect me to leave and never look back?"

There is also a lady standing near Sammy, who has a little Quran in her hand. She was praying during the flight. The lady is listening to Sammy's response and waits until he finishes talking.

"Bravo." She spits. "You did the right thing coming back because of your mother. I wish all younger people treated their parents like you do. Did you know that the prize you are holding in your hand," pointing at Sammy's championship cup, "is in fact presented to you by the universe as a reward for being such a kind person and good son? Later you will see that all good things will come your way, just for caring, loving and respecting your old mother. Because you are a good man and a great son?" she closes her eyes, enters into kind of a trance and continues her prayers.

The exit doors of the plane open at last. All passengers are standing on the line to exit the aircraft. A cabin crew is standing by the exit door to say goodbye to the Passengers leaving the plane. The line moves very slowly. Sammy too, holding his cup in his hand and having his backpack on his shoulder advances slowly with the line, while Robert follows him from behind.

There is a strange sensation in Sammy, telling him someone is staring at him. He automatically turns his head and looks behind. One of the Passengers who is actually staring at him catches his eye. A middle-aged man with a wrinkled face and neck. He nods at Sammy and Sammy gives the man a fake smile and nods back at him. Sammy has never seen the man before. Maybe he is also one of the participants at the tournament. Just like himself and Robert? Maybe. But no way. If he was, Sammy would have surely remembered him. The strangest thing is that it is quite obvious the guy is actually staring at Sammy and he is not even trying to hide it.

Sammy whispers into Robert's ear telling him to turn back and see if he knows the man from somewhere. And to make sure the guy is staring at him or Robert? Robert turns his head, like Sammy asks him to, gives a long look at the guy, pretending he is looking for someone he knows. But Robert has weak eyes and still cannot figure the direction of the man's gaze. Even with his glasses on. So, he asks Sammy not to pay any further attention to the weirdo. According to Robert, if the Guy knows them from somewhere by any chance, he can simply approach them after they get off the plane, introduce himself and say what he wants.

A few times, on various occasions, Sammy turns his head to see the man's face again and if he's still staring. Sammy wants to find out if he remembers the middle-aged man from somewhere. But no! Sammy has never seen the man in his entire life. He and Robert reach the exit door. They too say goodbye to the crew and get off the plane finally. Sammy loses interest in the weirdo staring at him a bit later. He and Robert head toward the exit hall and passport control.

The distance from the plane's exit door and passport control kiosks is long. Especially for Sammy who limps and has to stroll. He has no need for a stick or a wheelchair as long as his knee strap is tightly fixed and adjusted. But he has to walk slowly and carefully to not hurt his leg and loosen his knee strap. Otherwise, he has to stop, adjust and fix his knee strap and this is a time and effort consuming process. Well aware of this, Robert tries to adjust his walking speed with Sammy. They walk in a hall-way that crosses departure gates and ends in passport control section. They see a huge number of passengers while crossing the gates. The number of passengers they saw at the airport four weeks ago going to Beijing is definitely not comparable to the number of passengers who are now at the airport leaving the country.

The airport is so crowded that there are very long lines of passengers in front of each and every single one of the boarding gates.

Walking towards passport control, Sammy and Robert come across a furious and angry man who is complaining about the airport changing its boarding gates for the third time and a very long delay in their departure. He is yelling, criticizing and complaining about the airport staff and the way they handled flights. He is shouting and expressing his anger, saying he has checked the train and bus stations to buy tickets to get his family somewhere safe. But he faced the same crisis both in the train and the bus station.

There are so many people trying to get tickets for their entire families to flee to safer cities that the staff can't handle. They find it impossible to attend to a huge number of clients and serve them all. The man is desperately saying that he was, in fact, willing to pay extra and get air tickets so he can get his family away faster. But it looks like he is facing the same issues at the airport as well.

Many travelers at the departure area have their local outfits on and are waiting to board along with their family members. You can say they are not from capital or anywhere close hearing their accent they speak in and what they had on as cloths. They obviously are from war-torn cities and provinces. Almost all of them are coming from war-torn areas of the country to the capital's airport, waiting to get inside the plane and leave the country for good.

Sammy and Robert are flabbergasted to see a huge number of passengers crawling over each other at the airport. They are truly speechless, looking at the number of people in the departure hall.

Strict security measures are taken in the airport by the police, military and security forces. Security men can be seen every thirty to forty feet, watching closely to see if they can detect any suspicious, unusual activity. By looking at the travelers, their worried faces, fearful looks, their hurry to escape the country plus what they have heard inside the plane, Sammy and Robert realize that everyone is expecting something bad to be happening soon.

"Oh my god." Sammy says looking astonished. "Look how crowded this airport has become, man. It's quite obvious they are

going where they will not come back for a very long time. Do you see that Rob? It wasn't like this when we came to the airport. was it? I think something bad has happened while we are out, man."

Robert nods at Sammy. He's also very surprised. The airport is literally filled with people of northeastern provinces with different local outfits, different accents and different looks. Men, women, children, adults, young, old, all carrying big luggage that indicates they have packed all their possessions and carried whatever they had space for with them. It's obvious they are never coming back. At least not for a very long time. They have basically packed their entire belongings and carried with them.

Those who have friends or relatives outside the country are considered the lucky ones. Because they can travel and take refuge in their relatives or very close friends abroad. But they are only a few percent of people. Many others, neither have friends and family overseas nor are in a stable financial situation to do so. Traveling abroad is expensive and out of the question for them as they can't even afford to buy an air ticket. Let alone other expenses they would have at their destinations.

Sammy and Robert arrive at the passport control. The officer congratulates them both after seeing their championship cups. He calls his colleague who is at the neighboring kiosk "Look Rashed" Says the officer making fun of Sammy and Robert. "everybody is escaping this shit of a country. These two idiots are coming back. Despite being abroad and the fact they are apparently champions. That is what I call patriotism."

The officer gives them both a head shakes and look at them with regret. He welcomes them back to the country as he stamps their passports. Sammy and Robert just look at each other after their passports are stamped. They say goodbye to the officers and continues towards arrival hall.

Sammy notices people's reaction after observing the championship cup in their hands. Especially girls, who whisper to their companions, directing each other's attention to the cups and them. This gives Sammy a strange Sensation. His feeling is influenced by the way people, especially girls, look at them. Sammy has an exceptional kind of feeling that he has never experienced before in his life. He feels shy and

embarrassed, yet happy and proud. Sammy has no pride in him basically. He never boasts and brags. Maybe because he sincerely thinks he is no better than others and has no advantage in comparison to others. Or possesses no specialty that makes him better than others. But now he feels somewhat different. He thinks he is actually better than others and this feeling makes him ashamed of himself at the same time.

While Sammy and Robert are walking to exist from arrival and go out of the airport, they see Amer, Sammy's cousin from Far Away. He has two wreaths of flowers in his one hand and waving at them with the other. Amer is the same age as Sammy and Robert. He is just a little shorter than them, and he only has longer hair. Amer grows beard and mustache all the time. You can see Amer with some different styles of beard and mustache every week. He loves changing the way he looks. He loves experiencing variety. Amer is funny, too. He smiles most of the time. Sammy is pleased to see Amer. He misses Amer a lot. Sammy starts limping faster and asks Robert to step quicker, too. After getting closer, Amer and some other people standing around him suddenly start cheering, clapping and whistling for Sammy and Robert.

Sammy and Robert are surprised by the gesture and don't know what to say or how to react. They finally get out of the arrival's exit. Amer Runs towards them. He hangs the flower rings around their necks. Amer hugs Sammy and Robert and congratulates them. People who are with Amer, are cheering for Sammy and Robert. They're apparently there at the airport to welcome them. They are members of Damascus target shooting club, who also came to the airport to welcome Sammy and Robert. In a completely random way, they found out that Amer was at the Airport to welcome Sammy and Robert. So, they had spent around an hour getting to know each other, while all of them waiting for their Champions to arrive.

They welcome Sammy and Robert one by one and congratulate them. Sammy and Robert who did not expect such a warm welcome, are feeling a bit shocked and embarrassed. Some of the guys ask to take selfies with Sammy, and some wants a picture with Robert. Some want a picture with the championship cup and some others want a picture standing between Sammy and Robert. There are some other guys and girls recording videos with their smartphones.

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There is still time until sunrise. A cool breeze is blowing. Sammy, Robert and Amer are exhausted, and all that they think

about is to reach home and rest. Robert lives with his parents in the capital. His house is the closest to the airport. It is only around twenty minutes away. But Sammy and Amer have a long way ahead as they live in Al Darrah town, which is hours away from the capital. Amer has just come to the capital city to go to the airport and pick Sammy and Robert.

After saying goodbye to the members of target shooting club, Sammy, Robert and Amer walk outside the airport Building and head towards the parking area. They reach Amer's car, get in and Sit. Robert suggests they go to his house first and take a rest before sunrise and move towards Al Darrah when the day breaks. Sammy is too tired to sit in the car again for hours to go home. He has been sitting on the plane for a very long time already. So, he readily accepts Robert's offer and decides to go to Roberts house, rest for a few hours and move towards Al Darrah after the sun is up. He glances at Amer to see what does he think? Amer is tired too. He is the dedicated driver.

Sammy doesn't really want Amer to drive when he's tired and sleepy. But before Sammy says anything, Amer tells Robert that he's tired and he would want to sleep for a while. So, they all decide to go to Robert's house first. Before Amer Drives the car going to the main road, Robert asks him to take the North Road and go over the bridge, which takes them to his house faster. Because he is not sure about that particular Road being open at this hour of the morning or not.

The north Road is a road that takes them over a bridge, which crosses over the very famous and beautiful Mohtalik highway. Amer is driving and Sammy is seated beside him. Robert is at the back seat. Amer looks at his rearview mirror. He sees Robert has laid his head on the car window and calmly watching streets and alleys the vehicle crosses. Sammy is laying back and relaxing motionlessly. Everyone is quiet until Amer's cell phone starts ringing. He answers his phone immediately and says his aunt Zahra's name. Amer gets his head closer to Sammy's.

"It's your mum." Whispers Amer.

Amer connects his headphones quickly and starts talking. Zahra, Sammy's mum, wants to know if Sammy and Robert have arrived and are out of the airport already. Amer speaks very quietly to avoid disturbing Robert. He tells his aunt Zahra



that they are out and they are fine, but they are going to Robert's house to take a rest for a few hours before moving towards Al Darrah. Because it's dark and everyone is exhausted.

Sammy is trying to snatch Amer's phone from his hand so he can talk to his mom. Discomposed and disturbed by Sammy's craziness, Amer removes the headphone from his ears and hands the cell phone over to Sammy without being able to say goodbye to his aunt.

Sammy speaks to his mother quietly, adores and praises her, sends her a few kisses over the phone and assures her everything is alright. He asks his mother to go to bed and relax. He promises her to see her by the afternoon before saying goodbye.

Amer drives over the bridge Robert was telling him about. But they see a heavy and strange traffic jam as soon as when Amer's car reaches the top of the overpass bridge. The traffic jam is far from expectation at that hour in the Midnight. Robert claims he has never seen so many vehicles over that particular bridge in his life. He peeks at the vehicles ahead to find out what is causing the traffic jam.

The driver of the vehicle behind, an old but energetic man, steps out of his car trying to find out the cause of the traffic too. He Returns about two-three minutes later. He is passing by Amer's vehicle when Amer pulls his window down and asks the guy if he can see what causes the traffic. The man tells him about a car that has run out of fuel and obviously stopped. The man proceeds by saying that the problem has been solved. A few men are pushing the vehicle out of the way. The man is a fast speaker and is super excited about the whole situation.

The guy is right. Because vehicles begin moving forward one by one after a short while. Amer's vehicle enters a clean, beautified and flowered high-way after crossing the bridge. A quiet and less traveled road. Not only that highway, all other highways and roads are quiet. A car can be rarely seen at that time of Midnight. Robert is enjoying cool breeze hitting his face since Amer lowered the window. The temperature reaches the coolest at this hour of the night. Robert lowers his window too, asks Sammy to do the same and enjoy the fresh cold air.

With their windows lowered, fresh air quickly enters the car and hits their faces. They enjoy every bit of it. Amer known for catching a cold soon after being exposed to the cold air, is afraid that his health is threatened after Sammy too lowers his window. He slows the car down and pulls over. Amer switches the ignition off and steps out of the car and walks back to the trunk. He opens the trunk, gets a sports bag out and searches inside until he finds a brown mountain climbing hat. Amer puts the bag back into his trunk, closes it and returns back into the car. He wears the hat and fixes it over his head and forehead properly, starts the vehicle and drives away.

Sammy hears a continues long car horn coming from a distance suddenly. He thinks there is something wrong with a car's horn somewhere nearby. But the horn sounds like it's approaching fast. Amer and Robert also notice it.

Headlights of a bus that is coming towards them from far away at the opposite side of the road catches Sammy's attention. The bus's lights are flashing, getting turned on and off constantly. It looks like the bus's horn and headlights have a problem. Sammy points at the bus and shows it to Amer and Robert.

The bus is headed towards them from a steep slope, which is around five hundred feet away, strays to the left and hits the middle curb that separates the two sides of the road. It then loses control and slips to the opposite side, where Amer's vehicle is at. It suddenly crashes into a pole and slips sideways, turns slightly and starts rolling over, coming towards Amer's car.

Sammy, Robert and Amer are holding their breath as all these happens only in a matter of two-three seconds. It is an unbelievable scene. The bus rolls over and over and its passengers get tossed out of its windows gruesomely and in a horrible way. It is a scary yet a sad scene. After overturning and overturning for around six-seven times, the bus comes to a halt about fifteen to twenty feet away from Sammy, Amer, and Robert. They are frozen. The only thing Amer thinks of doing is to step on the brakes, stop the car and prevent crashing into the bus. No one says anything for a few seconds.

Stunned and shaken, they don't even look at each other. The highway is covered with the passengers, broken pieces of the boss, medical equipment and shattered glasses.

It takes Sammy, Robert, and Amer a few seconds to figure out what has happened. Robert is the first person who reacts and makes a move. He gets off the car. While getting out he yells at Sammy and Amer and asks them to call emergency and police immediately and report the accident. Amer is quite jumpy. He pulls himself together and calls the police. He has difficulty holding the cellphone in his shaky hands initially. Shaken by what just happened, he reports the accident with a quivering voice.

Robert gets to the bus quickly. He walks around the bus first to make sure that fuel is not leaking from the bus's tank. He notices gasoline is leaking at the rear side of the bus, where it's engine is situated. That means the bus may engulf in flames and explode any second.

The air is filled with the sound of injured men who moan and cry for help. Especially three men who have been thrown out on the asphalt. Shrieks of a young woman who is asking about her leg can be heard coming from inside the bus, which is now on its roof rather than its wheels. She is asking about her leg and where it is. Robert cannot figure what she exactly means by asking where her leg is at.

Robert has his feelings, nerves and thoughts under control. He enters the bus with difficulty somehow and comes back out after a while carrying a young woman in his arms. The woman's leg is missing though. It is evident that her leg has been cut off. He puts the woman down slowly a few feet away from the completely wrecked bus and realizes the woman has lost consciousness because of the amount of blood she has lost.

"This isn't a normal bus." yells Robert trying to be loud so Sammy and Amer can hear him. "There are beds inside instead of seats. They have turned the bus into an ambulance. What is this guy?"

Robert walks back inside the bus again to pull out other wounded people. There are no other vehicles or people in the highway yet. So, Robert, Amer, and Sammy cannot rely on anyone's help. They need to do all they can to help people who are severely hurt. Seeing Robert's dedication and confidence, Amer gets off his vehicle and joins Robert to help.

Sammy is still in shock seated in the car. He cannot move a muscle. The accident has brought some of his bitter memories to life. It has reminded him of the day he met an accident himself. He is just shaken by what has happened. His face is pale, his lips are dry, and his whole body is soaked in sweat.

Sammy is thinking about his own accident when a helicopter appears in the Sky with its powerful flashlight moving over the bus and its surrounding areas. The chopper has apparently come to make sure there is indeed an accident as reported by some callers or maybe it has come to find out the depth of the disaster. To see if ambulances are needed and how many if they're needed.

A car driven by middle-aged man appears moving on the highway after a while. The man sees the destroyed bus, people scattered on and around the bus and the road, all injured and hurt. He initially steps on his car's breaks to stop. But he is not sure if he really wants to stop and help. He probably thinks what help he can provide with this massive number of Injuries.

Amer waves at him trying to make him stop and help. But the man does not seem to be interested in getting himself involved. He actually does not even know what to do to help. The middle-aged man sees Amer waving hands for him. But he passes by Amer and continues driving.

The man suddenly changes his mind after driving crossed the scene and stops the car around fifty feet further down the road. He puts his car in reverse and drives backward towards Amer. He gets off his car and starts thinking of an excuse because he didn't stop in the first place. But Amer saves him the embarrassment. He interrupts the man and briefly tells him what happened to the bus. The man starts helping Amer and Robert immediately by pulling the injured out of the bus.

Robert initially informs the man and Amer about the fuel leak and the possibility of an explosion. His voice is shaky and warning. The three of them do their best to get as many people out of the bus as possible. Robert looks around to see if he can find Sammy. He asks Amer about him. Amer seems like he is just reminded of Sammy. They both look back at Amer's car and they see him still in the car, scared, shocked and worried. Sammy is in the car observing what the others do. He has the palm of his hand over his mouth and just stares at the bus.

Robert pauses for a second and runs towards Amer's car. He stands by Sammy's window and sees Sammy staring at the accident scene in shock. Robert opens Sammy's door and asks him to get out of the vehicle. Sammy steps down the car. Robert stands in front of him.

"Look at me." Demands Robert shaking Sammy. "Look at me, Sammy. Here buddy".

Robert shakes Sammy's shoulder again. Sammy closes his eyes and shakes his head. He opens his eyes and pulls himself together. As if he opens his eyes after waking up in an unfamiliar and strange environment.

"Hey." yells Robert. "I am talking to you. Answer me Goddamnit".

"What?" Replies Sammy after collecting his thought "I... I... just... I. Became. Tell me what should I do".

"I don't know to be honest." Replies Robert walking back to the scene. "Believe me, Sammy. I Don't know it myself. All I know is that if we do by the book and be quick in helping these people, we may be able to save some lives. Just go and look who is still breathing. Moving? Who is alive."

Robert says that and gets back quickly to help the passengers. Sammy is just looking at the scene ahead of him thinking they would have ended up like the accident victims laying on and around the highway if Amer did not stop to get his hat from the trunk. Sammy thinks for sure they would have been waiting for the emergency personnel and police to arrive and help. Except there would have been no one to help them. Because the accident has taken place in a quiet and less commuted of all highways.

Vehicles are rarely seen traveling at this time especially in this particular highway. So, if they were a part of that accident, he wasn't sure if they would have even survived their injuries.

Sammy tries to focus on people who need help the most instead of thinking what would have happened to them. He knows every single second counts and he may be able to save someone's life. Some of the victims cry for help and pull Sammy's trouser leg by any force left in them. By looking at the wounded passengers though, Sammy starts sauntering and

observing to see who is in the most critical and life-threatening situation the most.

Sammy is walking almost in the middle of the highway trying to locate those who are thrown out of the bus. The ground is covered by different objects that are also thrown out of the bus along with the passengers after it turned and rolled over. Two wheelchairs, several first aid kits, two blood pressure measuring devices, few serums which are still connected to needles and tubes, oxygen masks and oxygen capsules, all on the ground and around passengers who are terribly hurt.

Sammy is stunned to see those objects on the road. He glances at Amer with a pale face, shocked and terrified and wants to ask him why such medical instruments are in a transportation bus in the first place? But Amer is busy performing CPR on one of the passengers.

Robert is still trying to free the victims stocked in the bus. Sammy is checking the Passengers one after another when he suddenly notices one of them moves his leg. He is actually a bit far from where Sammy is standing. But still Sammy sees a slight movement on the corner of his eyes and rushes to attend to him. Sammy is trying to reach to the guy faster despite limping himself.

Delighted and excited to find someone alive, Sammy thinks it would certainly be the time now for him to help a human stay alive. Just before Sammy reaches the guy though, he asks for water with a trembling voice. Sammy remembers that he has seen a bottle of water in Amer's car's door compartment. So, he limps back towards Amer's car as quickly as he can and gets the bottle. Sammy gets back to the wounded guy. He reaches him and kneels beside him. Sammy opens the bottle's cover, lifts the man's head up slowly and gets the bottle very close to his mouth.

The guy drinks a few Sips, coughs, drinks a few more sips and coughs again. The guy keeps on touching his left hip "Easy." Says Sammy. "Relax. What's your name"?

The guy introduces himself as Ghanem. Ghanem is in his early thirties and has an athletic body. His hair is military short and he has beautiful eyes. Ghanem can't talk properly because of pain and probably fear of death. A strange grunt can be heard coming from his throat while breathing. Sammy notices a deep cut on the right side of Ghanem's chest and his hip,

which are apparently not caused by the accident that happened minutes ago. Those wounds look two or three weeks old. Ghanem is in pain and tears roll down his cheeks. He has Sammy's trouser leg in his hand tightly and does not want to let go. As if he knows he is not going to live for long and doesn't want to die alone. Ghanem begins hallucinating. Sammy feels a great deal of pity for him.

Sammy begins examining Ghanem's body to see if he can find any other injuries. He notices Ghanem's outfit which is exactly like other passengers of the bus. A white soft linen hospital gown. Sammy wants to ask him the reason all passengers are in white gowns. But he figures that Ghanem is not in the position and his most significant health to be able to answer any questions of this kind. It is apparent that Ghanem is tolerating a great deal of pain.

Sammy has lots of questions he wants to know the answer to. But it is neither the right time nor the right place for him to question Ghanem. With the situation Ghanem is in, he cannot answer the most straightforward questions, let alone questions Sammy has about them, the bus and its passengers. Sammy is trying to sympathize and calm Ghanem, make him realize he is not alone and there's someone there with him.

"My name is Sammy Mr. Ghanem." Says Sammy. "I know. You are in lots of pain. My friends called the emergency and the police before I found you. Help is on the way. Just hang in there, buddy".

Sammy cleans Ghanem's face with his sleeve. He wants to tell Ghanem a joke to make him distracted from his pain. but he changes his mind. He figures it is not the best idea. Especially with the critical situation Ghanem is in, fighting for his life. So instead, Sammy takes a tissue out of his trousers pocket and wiped Ghanem's ears, mouth and cheeks off the blood. Sammy looks around to see if he can find any other living passenger while seated by Ghanem. He scans the area to see whether he can find any other human in need of immediate attention. Sammy's mind is clouded by very distressing, alarming and saddening thoughts. He doesn't know what he should really do for Ghanem. He has become bewildered and lost. Sammy stans up to get a better grip of his surroundings. But Ghanem is naturally in lots of pain. He is pulling Sammy's trousers leg again.

"I want my mother." Mumbles Ghanem in a low trembling voice.

Unable to hear what Ghanem murmurs, Sammy sits next to him and gets his ear as close as he can to his mouth.

"My mom". Mumbles Ghanem. "I beg you. I want my mother with me here now. Tell her I said I am very sorry. Finish them. The Isis. Kill them all. Ah. You should finish it faster. I. my mom."

Ghanem breathes heavily. His eyes, nose and mouth's form change as if he is about to sneeze. The grunting sound coming out of his throat gets louder for a second. Sammy tries petting Ghanem's arm and shoulder. But his body has stiffened like a piece of rock. Sammy seems more flustered. He bursts into tears now. Tears are rolling down his face uncontrollably. Ghanem's mouth has become foamy. A blob is formed by the foam on his mouth and it gets bigger and smaller by the rhythm of his breathing. Sammy is calling Ghanem's name continuously while shaking his body. Ghanem pulls Sammy's trouser leg one last time before becoming eye to eye with him. All his body becomes loose suddenly. His fingers release Sammy's trousers. He looks at the sky and takes his last breath. The blob on his mouth stops moving. It bursts after two or three seconds. Ghanem is dead.

Sammy is seated by Ghanem's motionless body weeping. He glances at Robert and the middle-aged man and witnesses their generous efforts and devotion. Each of them is solely attending to three or four causalities at one time. He glimpses at Ghanem's pale face and cries louder. Sammy thinks he couldn't even keep one single victim alive. He is moaning louder and louder. "Oh god. What kind of religion is this?" Yells Sammy angrily. "What is that fucking religion those bastards, Isis terrorists are doing all these for? Did the Islamic prophet really expect such cruelty from his followers? Did he expect such crimes? Where is God to see what they are doing in his name? They make people homeless and refugee. They betray, dishonor and rape girls in Allah's name. Islam means peace. Means Friendship. Which act of Isis have anything to do with peace and friendship? Why is Isis doing whatever they want to defenseless people? For how long should this go on?" Sammy's hatred for Isis goes back to the time his father was shot dead after a terrorist attack by few of their members.

Sammy is confused. He is talking to himself. The situation reminds him of all bitter memories of losing his father. He starts thinking. What was Ghanem asking him to finish before he took his last breath? Is that just a pure coincidence? Or



the Universe has a message for Sammy? Did Ghanem mean to ask him finish his late father's unfinished project? Is that really a coincidence? Sammy is crying and wiping his tears with his sleeves. He suddenly notices someone lifting him up, grabbing him from his underarm. Like a person who has an electric shock, Sammy is startled. He turns his head to see who is pulling him up. He sees his cousin Amer. "Stand up." Says Amer with an agitated voice and a pale worried face. "Who the hell told you to get off the damn car? For god's sake Sammy?"

Amer looks at Robert who is standing by one of the injured passengers near the crashed bus. Amer starts muttering angrily about Sammy.

"Robert." yells Amer in a very rough and angry voice. "Did you ask Sammy to get out of the car and wander around injured passengers? Don't you know how he is? you idiot? You do stupid stupid things sometimes. Goddammit Robert."

Robert looks at Amer with a sorry remorseful face. He looks at Sammy without responding to Amer. Amer is still angry murmuring. He holds Sammy's hand and pulls him towards his vehicle. Amer cannot stop muttering. Sammy is trying to hear what Amer is growling about and he listens to him confusedly. Amer is still angry at Robert it seems.

"Stupid asshole. As if Sammy can fix something if he gets out. You get stupid sometimes. For heaven's sake." Growls Amer.

Sammy can't get Ghanem's death out of his mind. Especially the part he took his last breath. Sammy squeezes Amer's hand and stops him.

"Did he really die?" Asks Sammy with the broken words and a sorrowful voice. "He was asking for his mum. He asked me to finish something. Finish what? What did he want me to finish though? He said something about finishing Isis."

"I really don't know what to say Sammy." Replies Amer trying his best to have his own emotions under control. "I guess he's dead alright? May God have Mercy on his soul. The bus rolled over a few times Sammy. It was a pretty bad crash. You were on the other side and you didn't get what happened. One of the Passengers came to for a few minutes and he is in terrible shape. Before he lost consciousness again, he told us something. He said they were at war zone fighting Isis. They became wounded and transferred to Safa hospital in the capital which is about four-five miles away from here.

Apparently, they were at the hospital for a couple of days. That's why all of them have hospital outfits on. It looks like the hospital didn't have the required medical equipment and technicians to help them. So, hospital officials decided to transfer them from Safa to Mowasat hospital. Because of a huge number of casualties, ambulances and nurses are quite busy these days. So, they have removed the bus's seats and replaced them with makeshift beds instead. They turned the bus into an ambulance. There are fourteen people in total and they were being transferred to the new hospital I just told you. The driver was obviously exhausted. He has fallen asleep while driving and this disaster occurred. Did you see the helicopter coming and leaving a while ago? I guess it went to report the accident being real. So that they can send ambulances if there are any available."

Amer sighs and looks up at the sky.

"I want you to get in the car and sit in there. We'll be back soon. I don't understand why you got yourself involved. We all know you have no tolerance for such things. Stupid Robert. Seriously. My god."

Sammy feels ashamed hearing Amer's comments. It's obvious how he and Robert think of him as a guy with disability, softness, and inability to tolerate disasters. Sammy asks himself the reason why he doesn't have to be like Amber, Robert, the middle-aged guy or any other average person. Why not be able to take his emotions under control, have his behavior, movements and feelings under control. Why not be helpful and useful in situations like this. Sammy asks God why does he have to limp so much to the point it affects his ability to help others.

Robert didn't actually want to involve Sammy handling injured passengers. Because of his disability and the fact that he cannot handle matters of this nature emotionally. Because he knows Sammy is emotionally unable to face similar situations aside from his disability. Robert initially thought why to involve Sammy knowing he really can't help much. But at the same time, so many passengers needed help. So, he had no other choice but to get Sammy to do something.

Sammy, Robert, and the middle-aged man hear the whirring sound of the helicopter's blades above them. But this time the appearance of the helicopter in the sky is followed by ambulance sirens. The middle-aged man looks at his wristwatch.

"Can you believe it?" Asks the man. "It's only been twelve minutes since I arrived at the scene. We have pulled so many injuries out of the bus within so much time. It felt like a long time though. It's only been twelve crazy minutes guys. Isn't it strange?"

"Of course, it is." Replies Robert. "It's not strange though. When you're having fun, time passes faster. But things like this will make time go much slower. For me the strangest part is why were they being transferred to a new hospital at this hour? And the other strange thing is that they only sent two nurses along with fourteen patients. Plus, the driver which I guess was the first one who died."

"Yeah." Replies the middle-aged man. "It's strange alright. When you were helping a young man to release his leg so you can get him out of the bus, I asked the same question from one of the Passengers who was still conscious and could talk. He said the bus had been scheduled to join the northeast war zone where our men fought Isis. He was saying that Isis had targeted most of their ambulances and they are in desperate need for ambulances now. That's why the hospital manager decided to send this ambulance-bus to them instead. The hospital officials had ordered the driver to transfer these passengers to a new hospital in the early morning because there is less traffic and highway and roads are much less travelled."

Robert nods surprised. Ambulance, police and fire department vehicles can be heard approaching. Their sirens are getting closer to the accident scene. Three ambulances and three fire trucks stop near the crashed bus. Several police vehicles join ambulances and the fire trucks at the scene. Traffic police closes three Lanes of the highway immediately. Police officers are using their megaphones to ask all civilians who have gathered around in their pajamas by now to leave the scene and give space to the firefighters and Medics.

Amer is still with Sammy by his car. He leaves Sammy and joins Robert and the middle-aged man. A police officer begins asking Robert questions about how the accident occurred.

Robert tells them everything he saw. The officer thanks Robert and the middle-aged man and asks them to leave the scene as soon as possible and get their vehicles out of the way for the firefighters and Medics to easily traffic and attend to the injured passengers. Robert obeys the officer's order.

Before Robert leaves the scene though, he informs the officer about the fuel leakage of the crashed bus, warning them of a possible explosion.

Using his walkie-talkie, the officer shares the information about the fuel leakage with all other police officers and fire fighters. He warns all the units to get away from the bus.

Amer and Robert thank the middle-aged man for helping and say goodbye to him. They then walk towards their vehicle. A helicopter appears on the sky and begins landing this time. The helicopter is so loud that Amer and Robert have to shout talking to one another. They reach and sit in the car. Amer put his car to reverse gear and starts moving away from the accident backwards. But the number of police cars, fire trucks and medical emergency vehicles are rapidly increasing. So Amer can only get his vehicle back in a limited speed and distance.

Sammy, Amer and Robert are now looking at the helicopter which is descending slowly. They suddenly notice flames which have covered the rear and the engine of the bus in a blink of an eye. All those who see the fire start running the opposite side. The helicopter is only a few feet from the ground when the pilot notices the glow of the fire. The pilot changes his mind and lifts the helicopter up again. The bus explodes two minutes later.

The shockwave of the explosion shakes the entire neighborhood. The fire engulfs the bus immediately. A police vehicle with few high-ranking police officers inside arrives at the scene and stops beside Amer's car. Using his vehicle's megaphone, the driver asks other police vehicles, fire department trucks and ambulances to park orderly to open space for the rescue vehicles that are required at the accident scene immediately.

Amer, Robert and Sammy are stained with blood. Knowing that the police force, firefighters and Medics are already there to help injured bus passengers, Robert realizes there is no more need for them to be present there. There are many well-trained individuals who can take care of the victims.

"Ok. Let's go." Says Robert. "Let's go home. They don't need our help anymore. Let's go sleep now. Poor guys. I can't stop thinking about them. I really honestly pity them."

Amer starts driving and heads towards Robert's house. Non-of-the three speaks a word on their way home. Not about any of injured and not about the accident itself. The accident seems to have had a big impact on them all. They reach Roberts house fifteen minutes later and sneak into Robert's room on the second floor. They quickly wash up, change and go to bed.

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Amer wakes up with the sound of splashing water coming from the bathroom. He glances at his watch. 10:53 AM. He sits on his mattress and checks his cell phone for text, emails and other notifications. He notices the long list of calls he has missed. All of them are from Sara his fiancé. He calls Sara back, talks to her for a few a while and tells her he loves her. Amer provides her with a brief account of all that had happened the night before. Sara gets very sad after hearing what happened to the bus passengers. She speaks to Amer to calm him down. She says what happened to the bus passengers has been God's will. She asks Amer to forget about last night, think positive and focus on their plan for a beautiful happy life.

Sara is an olive-skinned cute girl, thin but with curvy features. She is almost the same height as Amer. Amer used to be a bank teller. One day, a few months ago, he had to visit a notary office to do some paperwork. Sara used to work at the same notary office. Amer fell in love with Sara the moment he laid eyes on her. He started visiting her at the office a few more times using anything as an alibi to go to her office and talk to her. A few weeks later, Sara and Amer were officially dating.

Sara's dad who is the owner and director of the same notary office, noticed Amer's unexpected perpetual visits and suspected him of having a secret relation with his daughter. He watched them both and had them under surveillance for a week or two until he found out that he was right.

Amer however, in love with Sara, wanted to be with her all the time and tired of seeing her secretly, proposed to her and she said yes. Respecting the traditions and going by the rules, Amer asked Sara's dad for his blessing and permission to marry his daughter. But Sara's father didn't agree with him having any kind of a relationship with his daughter to begin with. Let alone them getting married. He believed love

by itself was not enough to start a married life. Sara's dad was somehow right. Especially considering the high cost of living, which had become much higher because of the situation their country was in.

Sara's father believed Amer's love for his daughter was great and necessary, but it was not enough. He believed it was not purchasing power and definitely not the ability to put bread on the table. He thought Amer's salary was not even enough to pay for the most basic living expenses and like any other parent, wanted to make absolutely sure his future son in law could at least handle their daily expenses and support his young family financially. Until one day he realized his daughter's love for Amer and finally agreed to her marriage with Amer under certain conditions. If Amer could overcome those conditions, he could go back to him and get his blessing. His terms were for Amer to resign his position at the bank as a teller, go to a notary institution for three months to learn notary office business and start working for him after graduating. Amer who would have agreed with any condition to marry Sara, accepted her father's terms and resigned his position at the bank immediately. He enrolled in a notary work training program. Three months and a half later he graduated with excellent marks and proved that he was worthy of marrying Sara. He had to start working for Sara's father two days after his engagement ceremony. But with the terrible situation and security threats on the country, who knows what would happen? Finally, dates were set for two months later for an engagement ceremony and wedding party.

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Sammy wakes up the moment his cell phone rings. He picks up his phone and sees his mum's picture on the screen. She wants to hear Sammy's voice and to know how he is. Sammy speaks to his mother for a few minutes, kisses her a few times over the phone and informs her that they'll move towards Al Darrah in a few minutes. Sammy's Mother can sense something is wrong. Sammy is not talking like he always does. Something is bothering him. She knows her son very well and is aware of him being quite sensitive. It is apparent to her that Sammy is trying hard to sound normal. That's why she cannot help asking him what is wrong.

She tells Sammy she knows him better than anyone else did and can immediately say when something is not right. In the beginning, Sammy is trying to deny he is sad because he

doesn't want to upset his mother. But at the same time, he knows well that he can't hide his feelings from the person who raised him and knows him best. Sammy realizes that he cannot pretend anymore and tells his mother briefly about the night before, the accident, Ghanem's death right in front of his eyes, the explosion and everything else that had happened. He promises her he'll tell her all about it when he's back home.

Robert walks out of the shower and signals Sammy that he can now go and take a shower. Sammy speaks to his mother a few more seconds and promises her to be in Al Darrah before sunset. He says goodbye to her and gets in the shower.

Robert goes downstairs after drying himself and starts preparing breakfast for the three of them. The house is quiet and strange. He can typically see his mom and dad at the kitchen every morning. But no one is there. He calls his mom, dad and his sister's. But no one answers. No one seems to be at home. He figures they have probably left the house to run errands before he woke up.

Amer joins Robert in the kitchen downstairs to help him prepare breakfast. He begins by toasting some bread.

"Ok. You go get ready." Says Amer. "I'll do the rest. Move. Sammy will get out of the shower anytime now. Go get your things so we can immediately move after having breakfast."

"I don't have so many things to take really." Replies Robert. "Oh my god. Good you reminded me. I need to bring Robbins documents along with me, so if Hadji Al Ameen's son asks for it, I have the papers to show him. Thanks dude."

"Who is Hadji Al Hamid?" Asks Amer lifting his nose.

"Al Ameen." Replies Robert correcting Amer. "Not Al Hamid. He is my dad's ex-colleague. His son has become a major in the army. Lucky me, he is based in Al Namar military base near Al Darrah. I'm supposed to meet him. He may be able to help me find Robin." Robert gets quiet for a moment gazing at the floor remembering. "My dear brother Robin."

"Anyways," says Amer. "don't forget your shit. I mean suit, tie, shoes, socks, I don't know. Perfume maybe, toothbrush whatever. You're going to be there for a while. Take whatever

you think you may need dude. Focus on what you really need. You're such a forgetful neglected piece of shit."

Amer's way of talking makes Robert burst into a loud laughter.

"You son of a bitch." Responds Robert laughing. "You don't stop criticizing and nagging. Do you? Stop growling like an old fart. Neglected? Really? You asshole. What do you mean suit? Where are we going?"

Amer stares into Robert's eyes in astonishment.

"You are really something" Replies Amer. "Seriously? have you forgotten everything after traveling to China? Seriously. It's my engagement ceremony after nine Days genius. My engagement ceremony. Engagement with Sara. You don't remember you jerk".

"Oh shit." Says Robert holding his head with his two hands. "yes, yes yes yes. I'm sorry man. Forgive me please. Really dude. I've started losing it since Robin went missing. I'm sorry dude. I'm going to get everything ready right now".

Robert is right. The disappearance of his brother has cost him so much sadness and trouble that he has forgotten prior plans and promises he has made. Not only Robert, but every single member of his family is searching for clues to find Robin, Roberts brother. Helen and Ellen are Robert's sisters and Robin is his younger brother. His sisters and brother are younger than him. Robin started his military service eight months ago. He was deployed shortly after he finished his military training.

Robin used to contact his parents at least twice a week. He would send photos to his older brother and two sisters whenever he could. But in the past thirty-nine days no one has ever heard of him. He has not contacted anyone at all. This sudden disconnection caused his parents to be distraught.

Any military base and garrison Robert and his family members called, they were referred to another base or barrack. They were told there was no info about Robin. Robert's family began to realize they had to be prepared for anything. After so many follow ups from military headquarter, Robert was finally told that Robin's name was last seen in a list of thirty soldiers who were initially transferred to Al Namar base.



Where he was later deployed to the war zone somewhere in Syrian Iraqi border to fight Isis. The best solution was to follow his trace from where he was last deployed. Luckily, Robert's father has an ex-colleague who had told him about his son becoming a major in the army. The surprising part was that his son was in charge of a department at the same Al Namar base in Al Darrah. Where they'll be heading. Roberts father requested his old-time colleague to ask his son to meet with Robert and help him find out where they can possibly find Robin.

Hadji Al Ameen did what he promised. He spoke with his son and told him someone named Robert Shafi will pay him a visit at Al Namar base in a few days. He asked his son to assist Robert. The major, Hadji's son, who is also a very kind-hearted individual, promised his dad to do all he has in his power to help Robert find his brother. So, Robert decided to go to Al Darrah with Sammy and Amer to follow up about his brother from Al Darrah's Al Namar base. Besides, Amer's engagement ceremony is around the corner and Robert, as one of Amer's best men, has to go to Al Darrah to attend the ceremony.

Robert hugs Amer tight and congratulates him so he would not be disappointed with him and think he has forgotten his engagement ceremony's date. He wishes Amer and Sara happiness and prosperity in all stages of their married life.

Sammy gets out of the shower and joins Amer and Robert downstairs in the kitchen. He enters the kitchen and sees them hugging. Robert explains to him the reason he's hugging Amer. Sammy, too, congratulates Amer once again. The three of them sit at the kitchen table and begin having breakfast. They eat quickly and leave the house carrying their bags and suitcases.

Amer opens the trunk and car's doors. Sammy puts his backpack in the trunk. Robert places his small suitcase beside Sammy's at the trunk. He hangs his suit cover from the grab bar above the car window. Amer drives towards their destination, Al Darrah. They have a long way ahead of them. None of them speak about the accident and what they have witnessed the night before. They probably want to forget all about it as it was a heartbreaking scene. But each and every one of them are quietly thinking about what had happened the night before and feel really sorry for the victims of the accident.

Amer's vehicle reaches the main road after a few minutes driving inside the city. The road which leads them to an intercity road going out of the capital and takes them to other cities and provinces. There is a toll a few miles ahead. After reaching the toll kiosks, vehicles should stop and pay a certain amount as road & transportation Tax depending on the kind of vehicle they drive and purpose of their travel.

Amer's car almost reaches the toll when they surprisingly see a massive traffic jam ahead. Cars are standing on a very long line. Vehicles move little by little. The traffic jam is not caused by vehicles waiting to pay the toll. But because there is a police checkpoint right after the toll.

Police stops each car, checks the driver's identity, open their trunk and inspect its contents to see if there is anything suspicious. So many cars are waiting on the line to be inspected and sent on their ways. Robert asks Amer and Sammy to look at the other side of the road. Both sides of the road have big traffic jams as on the other side of the road, too, cars are being checked. But the jam on the other side of the road seems even more massive. Sammy, Amer, and Robert are not obviously aware of the number of vehicles waiting behind them. But what they can see in front of them on the other side of the road amazes them.

There are so many vehicles waiting to be checked by the police and security forces as far as the eyes can reach. Isis terrorists are attacking and capturing northeast provinces and they are advancing. The Eastern regions of the country have become a hub for crimes committed by Isis and they are fighting to take control of other areas as well. Even though many towns and villages of Eastern provinces such as Al Darrah are still not captured by Isis, many of the residents do not think staying in their towns and cities would be a safe choice. So, they decide to move to safer cities, mainly in Southern provinces, to save their own and their family members lives.

Passengers seated on vehicles on the other side of the road are in fact residents of unsafe towns and villages. People are fleeing to save their families, leaving their houses and properties behind. Many drivers have installed roof racks on their vehicles and loaded all that they could carry with them. The number of passengers in most cars exceeds the permitted number of passengers allowed by traffic police. But no one seemed to care anymore. The law enforcement officers and

security forces, not only ask passengers to get off the vehicles for body search but also to lay their luggage, baggage, boxes and any other packed items they are carrying with them off the car.

Checking each car takes even longer at the other side of the road and this causes long lines hence a heavier Jam. Most of the travelers consist of women and children seated in their cars, tired, worried and miserable, waiting to cross the checkpoint and continue their journey. That's aside from some heavy vehicles such as cargo transportation vehicles, buses and trucks.

Amer's vehicle is headed towards the eastern part of the country. They arrive at the toll. Amer hands some cash over to the toll personnel sitting in the kiosk and receives a small receipt. He passes the toll kiosks and waits behind other vehicles that are standing on the line to be inspected. Amer, Robert and Sammy are weary and bored by the monotonous waiting for such a long time only to reach the checkpoint after which they can continue their journey. The three of them know though that there are much more critical issues to be worried and unhappy about. Mainly the Isis advancing rapidly. They are really anxious but none of them expresses any of their concerns and worries to the other.

Amer's vehicle reaches the checkpoint at last after around an hour and fifteen minutes or so. One of the officers asks Amer for his license and registration. Amer hands him the documents. The officer looks at the papers, goes to the rear side of Amer's car and compares the information on the registration and license to his plate number.

Other officers come to the car window again and ask for all their IDs. One of them checks their IDs one by one and begins questioning them about where they are coming from, where are they going to, why are they traveling towards the east and so on. The officer returns their documents and waves them through after they answer all his questions. Amer thanks the officer reluctantly and drives the car. Massive traffic jam, long waiting, what happened the night before and all other negative thoughts has spoiled their morning's good mood and freshness. They are staring at the road ahead quietly.

Amer is the first to break the silence. He claims he has never seen a checkpoint at that particular spot before and he thinks something is going on in the country that they are not aware

of. Sammy spots three combat helicopters at the same time, flying parallel to them at their left side. It looks like they are on a special mission or something. Sammy points at the helicopters showing them to Amer and Robert. After seeing the three helicopters, Amer says he believes that those helicopters are a proof of what he was just saying about something being wrong in the country. What he means to say is that seeing those helicopters, the unusual checkpoint and other weird things are without a doubt linked to the fight between government forces and ISIS terrorists. Robert and Sammy nod and seem to agree with Amer's logic.

Everyone's mood seems to have changed after a few minutes. But nobody seems to be forgetting about the bus crash the night before. It had a big impact on every one of them. Especially on Sammy who is way softer than Amer and Robert. That accident would surely stay with Sammy for years to come.

To change the mood in the car, Robert asks Amer to play a music on the car's player. Amer plays the newest version of an old song. Robert takes a pack of dark chocolate from the dashboard compartment and offers his buddies. They enjoy their snack while listening to a nice piece of music. Robert and Amer are singing along with the singer loudly. It is one of the most popular Arabic songs. No one can be found who has not heard of the song or doesn't know at least parts of the lyrics. Most of the adults have romantic memories with the song. Not for Sammy though. That song makes Sammy sad on the contrary. It reminds him of his late father. This song actually used to be his father's favorite song when he was still alive. Sammy remembers the time his dad went to take a shower and sang the song for as long as he was inside the bathroom. Sammy remembers his father. He gets quiet and Robert notices Sammy's mood change. He gets his head closer to Sammy's so they can hear each other.

"What happened to you?" Inquires Robert. "Why did you get quiet? You look sad suddenly? Is it about last night?"

"No." Replies Sammy. "I'm ok. Really. This song was my dad's favorite. It's just that I miss him so much." Continues Sammy after a long pause. "That's all."

"May God bless his soul". Prays Robert. "Dude, can you not think about him right now please? Oh, by the way, you said you'll tell us about that thing with your father. Something

to do with a rifle or something. What is that? Tell us. It's fun to hear the story."

"I will." Replies Sammy pondering, "yeah. But man, I'm not in the mood right now. I'll tell you all about it later. Now we should be happy and celebrate. Our best friend is getting engaged and married."

A long-lasting smile forms on Amer's face anytime someone talks about him and Sara getting engaged or married. Amer overhears Sammy talking to Robert about his engagement.

Amer lowers the music and pricks up his ears to hear what is being said about his engagement ceremony. He doesn't hear anything else after that. Amer decides to cheer Sammy and Robert by telling them an old corny story. He tells the tale laughing. But Sammy and Robert just stare at him for two or three seconds after hearing him repeat the same lame and humorless tale or joke they've heard tens of times already. Looking back at his buddies, Amer realized how lame his so-called funny story sounded to them. That's when the three of them start laughing at Amer's embarrassment. Amer cracks one jokes after another and the three of them laugh and have fun while on the road towards Al Darrah.

By making Sammy and Robert laugh, Amer wants to make the long and exhausting drive they still have to their destination pass faster and easier for everyone. Amer stops making his friends laugh. His face turns serious as he ponders. He seems to be facing a dilemma whether to say what he has in mind or not. He makes up his mind and tells Sammy and Robert that he wants to share an exciting and happy news with them. Sammy and Robert who think this too is one of Amer's jokes, do not take him seriously and continue laughing. But they notice Amer is not laughing with them anymore. Amer maintains his serious face.

"Wait a second." Says Sammy to Robert while staring at Amer. "looks like he really wants to say something."

Robert grows more and more curious after hearing what Sammy says. He keeps quiet and all his attention is turned towards Amer who is smiling and driving peacefully.

"Fine." says Sammy eagerly and enthusiastically, "You have our attention. We're all ears dude. Tell us already for god sake".

Amer has a proud smile on his face. He slows the car down, pulls over and stops the vehicle gradually. Sammy and Robert are puzzled with curiosity. Amer pulls up the hand break and turns on his hazard lights.

"Just want to tell you a secret guy." Says Amer in a sincere tone. "You just need to promise me that under no circumstances will you reveal what I'm about to tell you to anyone. Ever."

Amer makes them promise to zip their mouths, be tight-lipped and quiet about it.

"We are pregnant Sara and I." Reveals Amer happily. "We found out right before I drove to the capital to pick you idiots up."

Tears of joy well up in Amer's eyes. He is tremendously happy and delighted. Robert and Sammy are influenced by an indescribable pleasure. They are absolutely astonished. The atmosphere inside the car turns serious, emotional and hopeful.

"OMFG." Yells Robert amusingly. "you are probably aware of the fact that if her dad gets to find out, he will turn you upside down and hangs you from your balls. Right?" Continues Robert after a happy pause.

Their sudden loud laughter breaks the silence inside the car. Sammy and Robert kiss Amer and congratulate him. Amer seems very excited. He can't stop smiling. They still have to drive for two to three hours before arriving Al Darrah. Sara's pregnancy has become the main topic of their conversation. Amer really needs to share the great news with someone. He needs to talk to someone so he can get things off his chest and share his happiness with trustworthy buddies. And of course, who else better than his best friends. Amer is thrilled about the whole thing. He is happy that now he can talk to someone and probably take some advice. Sammy and Robert too are quite excited for Amer.

"Where's the engagement party going to be held?" Asks Robert curiously. "When is that exactly? I mean I know. But just tell us again about the whole thing so we have something exciting to talk about. Because as I remember, Sara's family had decided to come to your house to discuss the dates, venues etc. with your parents. Am I right or am I right?"

"This is what's going to happen." Explains Amer. "In the morning of the ceremony, we will go to Sheikh's office so he would marry us as per Islamic laws and of course, after witnesses sign the required papers in the presence of older members of both families. A Sheikh is an Islamic religious cleric by the way. Just for you to know Rob. Because you are Christian. The Sheikh registers our marriage, makes it legal and announces us as husband and wife. The whole process of marrying us at Sheikh's office would just take less than an hour altogether. Then later in the evening, guests will arrive at the venue, which is a garden called Al Majed garden. We're not hundred percent sure it will be held there though. To be announced. This would be where the main party will take place. I mean where the music, dancing, food and beverages and such will be at. I'm not sure if you've heard about our engagement traditions or not! But Sammy knows it very well that according to traditions in most of Syria, which are mainly Islamic based traditions of some Syrian people, senior members of both bride and groom's families should walk both bride and groom to Sheikh's office. Yup, you heard it right buddy. That must only happen walking. Because according to the ancient traditions, people of villages, especially men would witness the bride getting married and from then onwards they'll always treat her with respect as she's already married and unavailable. So, the walking part is inevitable. You couldn't use donkeys or chariots those days, and you can't use a vehicle now. You should know though; Sara and I, don't frankly give a damn about these kinds of traditions. But we really have no choice. We should respect our parent's wishes and do as traditions dictate. Anyway, this is what our parents want from us and we do it to respect them and make them happy. That's all. Besides, it's not a long-distance walk from our house to Sheikh's office. It will only take us somewhere within five to seven minutes to reach the office, which is quite close to Al Darrah roundabout. So, we go to Sheikh's office, he marries us and we get registered right there. Only then we can be considered legally intimate, each other's confidante and considered husband and wife by law. After that and again, according to traditions, everyone should walk us back home to start getting ready for the main party. Everyone begins to prepare themselves for the main event. Like Sara going to a hair salon, I visit a hairdresser, wearing tuxedos and getting ready for the party. Everyone starts showing up at the party in the evening. Sara and I have decided to schedule the timing of our engagement party so it wouldn't be prolonged until very late in the evening. Because when my

mom, dad, and sisters sent out the invitations they called the invitees also to make sure they have received the invitation letter. Many of our friends and relatives ask about how long is the party going to take? They are actually concerned and worried that they may be required to stay until late in the evening. I'm sure you are thinking how can we prolong a party or how is it possible to make it happen faster. It's possible. For example, we are going to decide when to bring out the engagement cake. We can instruct the kitchen staff what time to serve the dinner. Anyhow, like I said, people don't want to stay out late. I guess it's because of what happened two or three weeks ago. After you guys left for China, three Isis spies were spotted around Al Darrah taking pictures secretly. This happened very late at night. I have heard on many occasions that when Isis is planning to invade a city, they would initially send spies to gather important information so they know when, how and from which angle to attack. I've heard they have beheaded three young men somewhere around the town. Probably the young men discovered that they were Isis and wanted to give them up to people. But to buy enough time to escape, Isis spies had to stop those younger men by killing them. Thank god there's no sign of them in Al Darrah so far. But you never know. Everyone says they are fast approaching. What I'm trying to say is many invitees are terrified to stay late. So, we decided to schedule the party from eight to ten thirty P.M. People can get home earlier and feel safe like this. Because we honestly want them to enjoy the party instead of being worried all the time, while there at the party, not knowing what's going to happen. We want our guests to enjoy every second of our engagement party. Not to let them come in and go out worried and unaware of how long they will be staying. Your second question was about the venue Robert. Well, you know it yourself that Al Darrah is not a big city. All townhouses, main roundabout, the main street and a few side roads and alleys. That's all Al Darrah is. There's no party hall for weddings and engagement ceremonies in Al Darrah. People would mainly use their houses if they need to throw a party or celebrate some occasions. We could do the same. Use our house for a few hours and get this over with. But because it is hot and we didn't want our beloved guests to suffer the heat, we thought it was best to hold our ceremony outdoors and in a wide-open land. Now do you remember Mr. Al Majed's garden before he sold it to the agriculture guys? Well, it's still a garden and untouched. The watchman of the garden is one of Sara's relatives. He asked the owner for his permission to use his garden for an engagement ceremony. Luckily the guy



has agreed and that's where the ceremony will be held. But let me tell you in advance, it's not a very classy five-star hotel standard garden with waterfalls, fountains, and the statue of angels everywhere. But it's good enough for an event such as ours. Also, we figured everyone knows everyone in Al Darrah. So, we decided to make it a mixed party instead of separating men and women like many do in Syria. We dedicated a table to each family so all family members would sit together. We have also hired five musicians to play live music for our guests. Oh, I almost forgot. There'll be so many beautiful and sexy bachelorettes who will also attend the ceremony. They are my beautiful Sara's friends and relatives. I'm giving you the information you need to know in advance. How you use the information I'm giving you, is up to you. I know you very well Robert. Right now, you are thinking what to wear so you can impress those single available girls. But I'm going to ask you to help me find Sammy the coolest clothes so he can get a few girls too. Sammy should find someone at my engagement ceremony. Like I said, there will be too many lovely girls. Most of them are beautiful. I know it. Some hot girls will be there my man."

Robert looks quite excited to hear what Amer is saying about the girls. He starts clapping and whistling, showing that he's looking forward to meeting those girls. This is how Robert acts when he hears something about Amer and Sara's ceremony. Sammy however, has a bitter smile on his face. Whenever someone suggests him with finding a girlfriend or starting a relationship with a female, he immediately remembers that he limps and thinks of it as a weakness. A reason for girls to back off. Sammy is quite conscious of his bad leg. He thinks girls would not want him because of the problem he has with walking. He has always asked himself that why a girl should choose him over so many other choices she has among more prosperous, healthier and better-looking guys around! So, Sammy does not even try to start talking to girls. Let alone getting to know them and beginning a relationship with them.

Sammy has very low self-esteem. Sometimes his friends think he has completely lost his confidence. While Robert and Amer speak about the girl invitees, Sammy lowers his head. He has been angry for years that some stupid accident has caused him to limp, even though he has never let his limp stop him achieving his goals. But he has always asked himself, why him and what has he done to deserve such punishment?

Amer and Robert are deep into their conversation about Amer becoming a father. Sammy feels sorry for himself. He places his hand on his bad leg and once again remembers the day he had that life-changing accident.

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Sammy was eleven years old when his mother volunteered at a charity office. He used to go to his mother's office every day directly from his school. He would have his launch there with his mom and help her for a few minutes before heading home together with her. After reaching home, he did his homeworks and read scientific and industrial magazines, or joined his father at his makeshift workshop he had created in the basement. Sammy was keen to learn how to operate industrial machinery such as milling machine or lathe machine.

Sammy's father was a mechanical engineer and owned an industrial workshop in Al Darrah. His father took projects/assignments to build technical components for various factories and organizations. Sammy's father was also a certified welder, chipper and miller. He spent his free time at home calculating and designing modern pieces. Sammy's father loved his job. He had a keen interest in renovating old and useless pieces of machinery.

He had turned the basement of his house into a small workshop and had thought Sammy how to operate each and every single one of the modern pieces of machinery. This might have triggered the interest Sammy has in mechanical engineering science. Sammy's mother was not a religious woman at all. But she firmly believed she has to be thankful to the universe for the comfortable and happy life she and her family had. So, she expressed her appreciation to the world by volunteering in charity activities. Sammy's mother had asked him to meet her at the charity office every day after school so they can go home together after she finished her work. Because if Sammy went back home, he had nothing to eat. So, he had to wait at home alone for quite a while. Besides, she wanted to teach Sammy ways by which he could thank the universe by involving him in charity-related activities.

Sammy was given a new assignment every day. He went to the charity office after school. Where his mother or other members of the office would give him something to do.

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One particular day though, Sammy went to the charity office after school as usual. He had lunch and had laid down on a sofa. The office manager called and asked him to go to an address and bring back with him an old man to the office. Apparently, the old man could not find the charity office himself. He might have gotten lost trying to locate it again. The old man was waiting at a car seat repair workshop on the side of a highway. So, Sammy was given the exact address by the office manager and left the charity office.

Sammy rings the bell when he gets there and explains why he is there. The owner of the car seat repair shop asks Sammy to get in and wait for the old man to get his things. But Sammy supposes he has to wait at least half an hour for the old man to get ready. He tells the owner he'd rather wait outside. There is a grocery shop, an ice cream shop, a restaurant and some other shops in the proximity of the car seat repair workshop. Some of the shops have arranged chairs and tables outside their shops so that the passengers and customers will be able to eat their food or ice cream outside. Sammy who is just a teenager and in love with ice cream and junk food, takes the opportunity to go to the ice cream shop. He buys an ice cream cone and sits down on one of the tables outside those shops. The ice cream shop chairs and many other chairs are almost filled with passengers and customers.

Sammy is enjoying his ice cream while waiting for the old man to get ready and come out. He also watches some teenagers playing street soccer close to him. Sammy loves soccer and grabs every opportunity to participate in any match himself. He finishes his ice cream and because he is exhausted, he lays his head on the table for a moment and closes his eyes.

All of a sudden Sammy hears a tire screech followed by people's terrified voices warning each other, shouting and yelling behind him a few seconds after he closes his eyes. But as soon as he turns his head to see what is happening, a cumbersome object hits him with full force and just as quickly he is unconscious. All these take place in a matter of seconds.

When Sammy wakes up for the first time, he sees a few nurses doing CPR on him. Giving him injections, putting the oxygen mask on his mouth, getting something around his neck, dressing his wounds and some other stuff he doesn't know what they are.

Sammy can see his father in the background holding his mother who is hysterically crying. His father is trying to calm her down. Sammy can't see clearly though. He can hear a woman's voice clearer among voices of a few other people talking at the same time. It is one of the nurses.

"Ma'am, Calm down." Shouts the nurse. "Sir, get your wife out of here please." Orders the nurse addressing Sammy's Dad. "Who allowed the parents in here Mr. Hamed?" Continues the woman angrily. "Please get out of this room sir and take your wife outside with you. I said please. Let the surgery team in. Guys, get him ready for surgery NOW."

Sammy has a serum connected to his vein. One of the nurses injects something into the plasma and Sammy does not hear anything after that. He can blurrily see some motions and colors on the background. Everything goes dark and quiet after that.

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Amer and Robert see Sammy with closed eyes and think he is asleep. So, they speak quietly not to wake him up. Amer is telling Robert how he met Sara and Robert tells Amer the bad break up he had with a girl called Frida. They are deep in their conversation and Sammy remembers the horrible memory of the accident that broke his leg bones into pieces and changed his life forever.

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When Sammy wakes up for the second time, no one is around. He can hardly open his eyes. The first thing the poor boy notices is the three-fluorescent lights on the ceiling in his room. He hears vague voices. Sammy tries to turn his head to his left or right. But he can't. Tears stream down. He cries uncontrollably. How is that possible he thinks. He has no control over his tears what so ever. Faint voices are becoming clearer slowly slowly. Sammy hears his parents talking to someone. Probably the doctor

"For how long he should undergo physiotherapy?" Asks Sammy's father. "What are his chances of full recovery doctor?"

"Unfortunately, your son's leg will never recover completely Mr. Samaha" replies Dr. Hashim. "there are more damages to

his bones than we thought. But with proper and serious therapy combined with strong willpower, there are still chances of him walking without a wheelchair. Provided he wears a special knee-strap. I'm so sorry to be the one giving you the terrible news."

Sammy hears his mom burst into tears and that's why he gets even more upset. He uses all energy left in him to call his parents. But his voice wouldn't come out. He could not be heard until he is finally able to get his father's attention. Sammy's father gets closer to him slowly.

"Hey buddy." trembles Sammy's father with a sad broken voice. "Are you in pain right now son?"

"Sammy, sweetheart." Weeps Sammy's mother. "oh my god. I wish this happened to me instead. I wish I laid down on that bed instead my sweet darling. Sammy, do you hear me. Honey?"

Dr. Hashim stands by the side of Sammy's bed, takes his pulse and asks him a few questions to make sure he has no problems with his short-term memory. When he sees everything is fine, he leaves Sammy alone with his parents. Before getting out of the room, Dr. Hashim tells Sammy he'll check on him on a regular basis.

Sammy comes to gradually and returns to his senses. He is still not feeling pain because of the pain-killers they've injected him with. His leg is hanging from a metal frame above his bed. A few strange-looking thin bars are hooked to his leg, which have made his leg look like an alien or robot's leg. He is feeling a bit dizzy. After Sammy complains about his dizziness, his father tells him that Dr. Hashim will explain the reason himself. Sammy's dad asks him if he remembers anything at all about his accident. Sammy just remembers being hit by something huge. That's all.

Sammy's mother has stopped crying. She sits by Sammy's bed and holds his hand. Sammy's father pulls a chair and sits on the other side of his bed. He begins telling Sammy cautiously what has actually happened to him and his leg. He explains to Sammy that based on the witnesses accounts; an eighteen-wheeler truck has passed by at a high speed when Sammy laid his head on the table in front of the ice cream shop. One of the semi-truck's tires got blown off unexpectedly and separated from the truck. The tire rolled at a high-speed

crossing the highway and crashed into chairs, tables and people including Sammy in a quite horrifying way.

Sammy was apparently in the wrong place at the wrong time. The tire hits Sammy hard and tosses him five feet high and eight feet long. Until Sammy crashes into the windshield of a vehicle parked nearby. The windshield smashes of course. Half of Sammy's body was inside the car's windshield when police and ambulance arrived. After hitting Sammy, the tire hits a pole and changes its direction towards the highway again, hitting several vehicles creating a terrifying pile-up.

"Sammy." Continues Sammy's father in a deep and miserable voice. "listen to me son, they've performed two surgeries on your leg so far. In case your leg doesn't heal the way, your doctors want, they're going to have to do a few more surgeries on your leg. You should undergo days, weeks or even months of therapy. You must fight. It is going to be hard. Very hard. But after that, you can walk again. Your mother and I will be with you every step of the way. You are a strong boy. You are my boy and I know you can do it. We have no doubt you can do it. Look at me son. God loves you. You still have your legs. Many of the people who are injured in the same incident are here in this hospital as you are and let me tell you, they're not in good shapes. A twenty-nine-year-old guy died on the spot. You hear me? He did not even make it to the hospital. But you are here, son. You are alive. I know. You are probably so sad about what happened to your leg. But your mother and I thank god for keeping you alive for us. The rest we'll fix together."

Sammy's dad gets up his chair and stands over Sammy. It is evident that he is trying hard not to cry. Sammy's parents kiss him. Sammy's tears roll down the whole time his dad is talking. He can't say a word. He gazes at the fluorescent lights above him on the ceiling.

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Sammy comes out of his memories by hearing Amer and Robert calling him. He opens his eyes and sees Amer and Robert laughing. To get him out of trance, Robert starts tapping Sammy's ear with his fingers and fooling him by saying they have already arrived at Al Darrah.

"wake up dude." says Robert chewing a gum loudly while laughing and making fun of him. "we arrived already. Why the hell are you sleeping so much anyways? Wake up. You see we are in Al Darrah now."

"wait." says Amer while trying to find his favorite song. "wait Robert. I will play a song that wakes a hibernating polar bear up in the cold of fucking winter. Just wait a second."

Amer finds the song he is looking for. He increases the volume. Amer and Robert starts singing along with the singer while they are both clapping and dancing. They want Sammy to take part in their happiness and do the same. Knowing that they'll not stop bothering him, Sammy too starts clapping.

They suddenly notice another traffic jam ahead of them in the highway. Again, a long line of cars waiting. Sammy, Robert, and Amer can guess what is still waiting for them. Once again, their happy smiling faces turns fretful and sullen. Precisely like a few hours ago, when they were stopped after the toll for the inspection. They are right. They see check-point stop signs around a mile before they reach the check-point. Amer reduces his car speed gradually and lowers the music. The three of them get their IDs ready as they are certain security forces or the police will ask for it at the check-point. Amer's vehicle stops behind a very long line of cars, which are all waiting to reach the check-point, moving forward a few feet at a time.

More than quarter an hour later, they finally arrive at the check-point and as they have guessed a police officer asks for Amer's license, his vehicle's documentation as well as all their IDs. But this time the officer takes all their documents to a police vehicle with him.

Several police officers are checking each and every one of the cars on the highway. Another police officer comes to Amer's window and waves something at him. Amer doesn't understand what the officer is trying to tell him. So, he pulls his window down and says hello to him. The officer tells Amer to pull over to the side of the road while their documents are being checked with police headquarter. Amer does as he is told. He pulls over very slowly and cautiously. When Amer's vehicle comes to a stop, the three of them notice that police officers have arrested around fifteen men. All hand coughed and blindfolded.

"Oh my god." says Robert in an anxious tone after seeing the arrested suspects. "Guys, I guess these people are members of god damn Isis. Oh shit."

Amer, Sammy and Robert's heartbeat increase. They get quite nervous and terrified after what Robert says. They have not figured the seriousness of rumors they've heard about Isis.

They are watching the arrested men when the police officer comes back to them holding their documents. He hands them their papers and asks them to move. But Robert has found an opportunity to ask something from the officer.

"Excuse me officer." asks Robert before Amer moves his car. "just out of curiosity, are those guys Isis members?"

"Not yet." replies the officer giving Robert a fake smile. "but they would have joined the bastards if we did not catch them on time."

"So, it's not bullshit." asks Robert after a pause. "so, these are not just tales people saying that Isis is approaching, sending spies, they want to attack soon, the beheading, raping and all this shit. huh?"

The police officer who seems like a nice guy doesn't want to scare them. He just smiles and answers Robert's question by waving his head meaning what Robert is saying is actually right. He asks them to go on and do not stop until destination. Sammy, Robert, and Amer are all quiet. No one says a word for a few seconds. The three of them are actually thinking about the same thing.

Isis is as a matter of fact approaching and their presence is way more severe than they ever imagined. They now are extremely concerned. It isn't a joke. This does not categorize as a rumor only. What they keep on hearing is actually real. To change everyone's mood in the car and cheer his best friends, Amer plays a relaxing song and continues driving. Robert and Sammy are laid back on their seats thinking and Amer is focused on the road ahead of him. Robert is the first one who starts talking after a few minutes of silence.

"ladies and gentlemen." announce Robert imitating the voice of a commercial radio narrator. "it's not a joke this time.



We have finally arrived beautiful, amazing Al Darrah town. Welcome to Al Darrah, home of the greatest."

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Al Darrah is a small town. It is located four hundred forty-five kilometers northeast of the capital, Damascus. Al Darrah is situated on a semi-deserted land with hills. Its environmental condition is hot and dry. Al Thawrah is the closest city to Al Darrah and it is located fifty-five kilometers north of Al Darrah. Al Yas is Al Darrah's only neighboring town and it is only nine kilometers east of Al Darrah town. Residents of the town are mostly comprised of engineers, directors/managers, government employees and factory workers who live with their families and almost all of them work at a company or factory located at the industrial area near the town. The industrial zone is only a kilometer and half outside Al Darrah. There are factories, companies, institutions and industrial workshops in the industrial area, mainly active in arms industries. The population overgrew in the town because of the industrial area attracting shopkeepers and other small businesses that moved to Al Darrah and brought their families along.

They established different kinds of shops, selling goods or services, cultural, entertainment, medical and educational centers. Government and non-governmental organizations such as hospitals, telecommunication centers, water and electricity, banks and municipality. Also established offices in the town to serve the citizens. Al Darrah, literally has all the facilities of a major city. Although Al Darrah is in a Muslim country, a small portion of the town's population are Christians. Like any other Muslim country, the majority are Muslims and the minorities are followers of religions and faiths other than Islam. But in this town, there are no differences and discriminations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Everybody respects each other and to recognize and support different beliefs and faiths aside from their own, people would attend each other's religious ceremonies and activities. People of Al Darrah are kind-hearted, hard-working and hospitable people. There are no talks of religious fanaticism. People love and respect each other and live peacefully.

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It is seven twelve PM and its getting dark. There are a few different shops at the entrance of Al Darrah. A sandwich shop, auto repair, ice cream shop, a grocery shop, etc. Passengers who are traveling and in their vehicles for a long time stop for a while, get something to drink or eat, check the air in their car tires, take rest and relieve their weariness.

There is a children's playing area on the other side of the street, opposite the shops. There is a small park or a green field with a few concrete benches for people to sit and relax. When Amer's car reaches the entrance of Al Darrah where the shops are, Sammy notices some army buses parked near and around the playground. Every single bus has a Syrian flag installed on it. Many soldiers are sitting on the grass, in groups and alone. Some of them are seated and some laid on the grass eating a sandwich, drinking soda's or having an ice cream. The strange thing is that all soldiers are armed to their teeth. Because there are so many soldiers, Amer has to reduce speed and this gives Sammy and Robert the chance to see what is happening there. Robert finds the opportunity to talk to one of the soldiers,

"Hello soldier." asks Robert while pulling his window down. "where are they taking you? Listen, do you know Robin Shafi? He's a soldier too. He's my brother. We haven't heard of him for a long time."

The soldier shakes his head expressing he doesn't know anything. Robert, disappointed by the guy's reaction, closes his window.

"it's impossible you don't know where they're taking you" grumbles Robert. "or they are probably told not to mention where are they being taken. Yup. That's it, I guess. Even a cow wants to know where is it being taken by the owner."

"Oh my God Shut the fuck up dude." responds Amer. "You keep on nagging like a grandma."

"Why do you think they must tell you where they're being taken Robert?" Asks Sammy.

"I don't know, you assholes. Leave me alone." Growls Robert.

Again, the three of them burst into laughter.

Sammy and Amer feel sympathy with Robert about his brother. Seeing his sad and disappointed face, Sammy and Amer comfort him a little, encourage him not to give up and to be strong. They remind him about the fact that he is his parent's rock and only hope. Like Robin, all those soldiers are also being taken to a war zone. Somewhere in the northeast or somewhere in Iraqi border to fight evil Isis. As per the rumors, they are planning an attack on other provinces and strategic cities. Sammy and Robert have heard these rumors on many occasions. Robert notices several military vehicles, armored personnel carriers and tanks in the desert when Amer's vehicle crosses Al Darrah entrance. They seem to be on their way to join military or security forces fighting Isis.

Sammy, Amer, and Robert see people moving boxes and luggage, loading them on the trunk of their cars. They are not surprised by what they see though. Men are saving their families by taking them to safer cities. They don't feel safe in their own homes anymore. Al Darrah doesn't feel safe to its people anymore. Sammy and Robert get quite saddened by what they are witnessing. They can see at least a couple of families moving out of town. Moving doesn't mean they take everything with them. They carried the most basic and necessary items they know they'll need on a daily basis. They look like people who are running for their lives.

Al Darrah somehow doesn't feel the same. People have installed roof racks on their vehicles so they can carry more things with them. Kids are waiting in the car for their parents would finish loading their items and join them so they can leave already. What Sammy, Amer, and Robert notice the most is people's down and disappointed faces. Everyone looks sad, humiliated, disgusted and degraded. Because they have to leave their home, city, neighbors and all they have behind against their will.

Amer stops the car right in front of his parent's house. The door is half open. The three get off the vehicle. Sammy's mom, Zahra, who has heard a car stopping, comes out. She knows it is them. She sees Sammy and Robert holding their championship cups and Amer locking his car. Sammy hugs his mom, kisses her a few times and shows her his cup. Sammy's mother, very proud of his son's achievements, congratulates him and Robert and asks everyone to get inside the house. Everyone comes out of the house to welcome the three. Amer's mom, Zinat, Sammy's other aunts, Zohre and Ziba and whoever else is in the house come out and congratulate Sammy and

Robert. They have been following the tournament Sammy and Robert were competing in from the TV. But since national TV did not dedicate much time to cover the tournament, they were not able to watch every competition and got contented knowing the results only. Sammy, Amer and Robert are starving, so they eat their dinner at Amer's parents' house and distribute everybody's souvenirs. Zinat informs them that a decision has been made for Sammy, Robert and Amer to stay at Sammy's apartment while they are in Al Darrah until Amer's engagement day. She continues that she went out shopping with her sisters, Zahra and Zohre the same morning and filled the refrigerator with foodstuff for them. So, they wouldn't worry about what they'll eat. Zinat also says she has asked all her sisters, including Sammy's mom to stay with her and help her prepare for her son's engagement ceremony.

Sammy, Amer, and Robert are so excited to be staying together in an apartment as they can act like they want. Bachelors without any moral or social rules. They know they'll have lots of fun without worrying about who would be there to watch them. After dinner during the dessert, Sammy and Robert reveal the news they had heard from the Chinese television about Isis advancing. Because after hearing the news, they contacted their families and discussed what they should do in terms of staying safe with them. They had agreed to make a decision about moving to a safer place after they returned back from China. Sammy, Amer, and Robert talk to their families about police and security check-points, soldiers they saw on the entrance of the town, seeing tanks, combat helicopters and armored personnel carriers moving towards the eastern part of the country and ask everyone to decide quickly where to take refuge to. Everyone proposes a different place. There are variety of suggestions. Others offer their reasons for rejecting or accepting the proposed places. After discussing this subject for a few minutes, and after everyone has their opinions heard it is decided that they would wait until Amer's engagement ceremony to take place. They plan to move out of town the very next day of the engagement without any further delay. They decide to begin packing and preparing to migrate to one of the south-western cities which are the safest cities in the country. The plan is for one of the senior members of the family to contact Mr. Al Anwar, a relative who lives in Latakia county, situated on the country's south-western part and inform him of their decision. The person who calls, would request him to help find them a house for rent.

Sammy, Amer, and Robert leave Amer's house after the verdict is finalized. They head towards Sammy's apartment. Amer tells Sammy and Robert he has to visit his fiancé Sara even for a few minutes after he drops Robert and Sammy at Sammy's building. Amer asks them to go ahead. He drops them and says he would join them later. Sammy and Robert take their things out of the car and head upstairs.

Sammy's apartment is located at the westernmost tip of Al Darrah settlement. It is situated on a hill, in the northwest of the town and on the fifth floor of a five-story building. Almost the entire town is visible from the windows of Sammy's apartment. There are only three five-story buildings in Al Darrah which are all located in a residential complex called "Sky Complex", where Sammy and his mom live. The rest of the houses are traditional Arabic townhouses of maximum two stories.

Sky residential complex is at the end of a street called Dream street, one end of which leads to Sky residential complex and the other to Dream intersection on Al Darrah's only main street, Garden street. Sammy's building is about four to five hundred yards from Garden street. From Dream intersection going to the east, Garden street crosses another intersection, called Flowers intersection. Then it reaches Al Darrah's only roundabout that is called "Municipality Roundabout". The street stretches further after the roundabout and crosses the graveyard and so on. It then becomes wider and turns into the wider road going to the industrial area and reaches Al Yas town after about three miles. From dream intersection going to the west, Garden street crosses schools, other residential areas, some warehouses and reaches Al Darrah's entrance and finally becomes a T-junction which is the road ending to other cities and provinces. The street cuts Al Darrah in half. The distance between Dream intersection and Municipality roundabout on the east is about two miles and it is about a mile away from the Al Darrah entrance road on the west.

There are an old dusty road people seldom use, about five hundred yards parallel to the main street and end alleys. This dirt road is known as the dirt road. The dirt road is one of the first roads going to Al Darrah long ago. It is a bumpy dirt road that used to be the only road to reach Al Darrah. Al Darrah is surrounded by the desert. Many people walk through the town to do their daily chores. Some trips are also made by motorbike and bicycle riders. Because there

is not much distance between places people need to do their chores at, like the bank, telecommunications center, the schools, kindergarten, grocery shop supermarket, etc. Most shops, shopping centers, and government offices are on the streets of Garden or the roads around it.

Sammy and Robert enter the building. Sammy notices the lift is out of order, again.

"There we go again." complains Sammy disappointed. "out of order again. This fucking elevator is out of order fourteen months of twelve months in a year"

"So, we take the stairs." replies Robert laughing at what Sammy says. "it's ok. It's a nightly exercise."

"Of course." says Sammy disappointed with Robert. "with this shit leg of mine, I guess I'll make it to the fifth floor around five or six A.M. He calls himself a building manager. That lazy ass piece of shit."

Robert is trying to cheer Sammy up, and after a few attempts, he is finally able to make Sammy laugh. They take the stairs up and make it to the fifth floor at last. Sammy opens the entrance door and they both get inside the apartment.

Sammy's place is a three-bedroom apartment. One of the rooms belong to Sammy's mom. Since Sammy has a lot of things, they have removed the middle wall of two other bedrooms adjacent to each other and turned them into a large room a months ago. Both rooms are master bathrooms and there is just one toilet for the guests use in the living room. There is a sofa set in the living room opposite the TV. There are a few pots of natural apartment plants, a wooden cabinet filled with antique bowls, several China sets, decorative plates and several other pieces of decoration in the living room. There is also a large window in the room overlooking the balcony and the main street.

Sammy takes Robert to his own room and asks him to set up his things there. The large window of Sammy's bedroom allows the sun to shine inside during the daytime. Sammy's bed, which is a single wooden bed, is on the left side and a study table with a computer, a printer, a few textbooks to the right of the window. Sammy's room has a closet. On the wall opposite the closet is a glass cabinet and on both sides of the glass

cabinet, are several certificates, appreciation letters, framed photographs of Sammy, his pictures with his mother, his old photos while playing football, pictures of Sammy and his father and some other family pictures. Inside the glass shelves are some small and big neat little sports championship cups. On the shelf itself, however, there are two small tripods which are holding a strange futuristic-looking rifle. The rifle looks like preps used in science fiction blockbusters.

In the room, at the far end on the left side, there is a mini milling and mini lathe Machine installed on a metal table. Under the metal table are tool boxes and cans of industrial oil and glue tubes. There is a blueprint on the table, a wall clock above the table, a very old deflated football on the floor that looks as though it hasn't been used for years and a Cain which Sammy occasionally uses as a walking aid that is leaning against the corner of the wall. There is also a white color sports air rifle next to the computer table.

This is not the first time Robert visits Sammy's apartment of course. But it is the first time he has to stay with him for a few days. The decoration of Sammy's house is entirely different from the last time Robert visited his place. Robert places his suitcase in Sammy's room. Sammy asks him to wear his pajamas, feel at home and tell him if he needs anything.

"Tea?" Ask Sammy while going to the kitchen. "Coffee? Whiskey?"

"Maybe tea." responds Robert. "Let us drink the whiskey when we celebrate finding my brother Robin."

Sammy fills the kettle with water and puts it on the stove to boil. He goes back to his room, changes his clothes and returns to the kitchen.

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Amer is driving to Sara's house. He calls her and informs her that he is going to be there in a few minutes. Amer knows very well that Sara's parents would not not want their daughter to stay out of the house after dark. Since Isis entered Syria, especially Al Raqqa province and rumors were heard about them advancing rapidly, people feel less and less safe. Not only because of Isis's presence in the country but because of their traditional way of thinking and Arabic

mentality, Sara's parents don't want her to stay out of the house after the dark. Considering all these factors, Amer decides to take a short drive with his fiancé. He misses Sara and is eager to see her even for a few. Sara is very excited to hear Amer is on his way to see her. She tells him she is ready and waiting for him to arrive. Amer enters the street where Sara's house is situated, in a few minutes later. Amer should give Sara a missed call on her cell phone as soon as he stops in front of her house according to their arrangement. Meaning Amer has arrived and it is time for Sara to get out of the house. Amer gives Sara a missed call. She walks out of the house and sits in the car. Amer drives away. He stops the car after exiting the street. Sara laughs. She knows Amer has stopped the car because like every other time, he wants to make out. This is what Amer does every single time after he picks Sara. Because he knows he cannot kiss her in front of her house as her parents would see him from a window or somewhere. Sara's parents who are very conservative and have a traditional way of thinking, strongly disagreed with Amer and Sara having any body contact before they are married legally. Depending on the situation, Sara's mom is sometimes way more conservative and has a stronger traditional mentality about certain things even more than her father does.

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Amer kisses Sara and drives the car around Al Darrah. They speak almost about everything. Amer asks Sara about their baby after caressing and cuddling her for some time. Amer's stupid question is out of his lack of knowledge and experience about women and pregnancy. But it makes Sara laugh again. Sara briefs Amer on her pregnancy, its phases, and related issues and many other things she thinks Amer must know now that he's becoming a father. Sara wants to make Amer understand the whole process scientifically and improve his knowledge in this regard. Amer's ignorance about women's affairs, childbirth, infant-related matters etc. are quite evident. Because Sara's pregnancy had been kept a secret and no one knows about it, Amer cannot talk to anyone about it or ask anyone's advice about it. If he did, he would have raised some suspicions for sure and that would not be what they need right now.

Amer really needed to share the news with someone. That's why he told Sammy and Robert about it. He wanted to share his happiness, freely talk about it and brag about becoming a father. But the main problem is their families. Both Sara and



Amer's families are extremely traditional and consider pregnancy of a girl before getting married a taboo and something that can never be forgiven. It would be considered as unchastity and adultery. And this is not confined to the family of Sara or Amer only. Many families have the same mentality, contemplating the pregnancy of a girl a great sin and a stigma attached to her family before she is married.

According to Islamic sharia law and traditions, a girl is not allowed to get involved in any physical contact with any man, not even her fiancé, before getting married to him or making their marriage officiated by a Sheikh, again as per Islamic rules.

A girl's pregnancy before marriage is an unpardonable crime in Islamic countries. It's not morally permissible and if it happens, the girl is sentenced to death by stoning or is banished and shunned from her house and the society. As Sara's body would have changed soon because of her pregnancy and people would have wondered why. But if Sara's pregnancy was exposed after the engagement ceremony, she and Amer would have been already considered Halal to one another as husband and wife. Then no one would wonder why Sara's stomach was getting bigger. That's why Amer and Sara insisted on having their engagement ceremony and officiating their engagement by a Sheikh as soon as possible. Also, because according to their traditions, the Sheikh will officiate the girl and the boy's marriage on the day of their engagement and a wedding party is just something that some couple want to have and some don't.

A party doesn't really matter anymore. An engagement means marrying according to the Sharia law of Islam and the whole engagement ceremony is, in fact, the real deal.

Amer drives around with Sara for a while. They speak about different matters. One of Sara's main concerns is that what if Isis reaches Al Darrah before their engagement ceremony! But Amer confirms her though by saying that everything is going to be alright. Amer calms her down by saying there is still a long time before Isis can reach Al Darrah. He knows that as a husband it is one of his duties to comfort his wife even if he isn't sure about what is going to happen himself. As a matter of fact, Amer is quite concerned about the same issue himself. He actually prays every day for all things to go smoothly, as planned and expected.

After about an hour later, Amer heads towards Sara's house to drop her back home. On the way back, Amer admits to Sara that he has informed Sammy and Robert about her pregnancy and the fact that he is becoming a father. But he assures Sara that Sammy and Robert are his best friends and their secret is safe with them. After he sees Sara is actually ok with that, Amer is relieved and happy. They reach Sara's home a few minutes later. Sara leaves the car and sends Amer a kiss with her hand. As usual, Amer waits for his fiancé to enter the house and when she does, he drives away. He plays his favorite song in the car and begins singing along with the singer.

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Sammy makes two cups of tea and brings them to the living room. He calls Robert into the living room. But Robert is entering the bathroom. Sammy places the cups on the coffee table in front of the television. Robert walks in the living room while drying his hands and face. Sammy keeps on changing the tv channels to find something interesting to watch. He finally decides to stop on the music channel. They listen to music and drink their tea. A few minutes later, Robert reduces the volume and tells Sammy he wants to discuss Amer's engagement present before he's back. Sammy pauses for a moment. Robert has a good point. But he mentions to Robert he thinks his mom would have certainly taken care of that matter already. Sammy picks up his phone and calls his mom. He speaks to his mom for a few seconds and tells Robert he thinks its best if Robert went ahead and bought a present already. Because like he has guessed, his mother has already purchased a wedding gift for Amer and Sara, and she is going to give it to them on behalf of both herself and Sammy. So, Robert thinks about what Sammy says. He tells Sammy that since there are not too many gift shops and ethical choices in Al Darrah's shops to look for, he decided to go to Al Thawrah the following day and buy a present for Amer and Sara's engagement ceremony from there.

Al Thawrah is the closest big city to Al Darrah, which has many more shops with much more choices to buy a good present. Robert and Sammy are discussing Amer and Sara's engagement present when Amer enters the apartment looking very confident and happy. Amer, like Sammy and Robert, changes to pajamas first, he goes to the kitchen, pours himself a cup of tea and joins Sammy and Robert in the living room. Amer asks them about their plans for the following day. Because he wants to take Sara to Al Thawrah for shopping in the morning. Sammy

gives a look at Robert, smiles, meaning he now have a free ride to go to Al Thawrah city. Robert looks contented. He can go to Al Namar military base to ask about his brother's whereabouts and go to Al Thawrah with Amer and Sara to buy them an engagement present. He tells Amer he wants to go with them to Al Thawrah in the morning if it's ok with them. Amer is happy to take Robert with them.

Sammy wants to go to the cemetery in the morning and pay a visit to his dad's grave for the first time after his body was laid to rest at his funeral. The plan is for Amer and Robert to drop Sammy at the cemetery first, go pick Sara, take Robert to Al Namar base and wait for him to finish his visit to a Major, and the three of them go to Al Thawrah city. After everyone is aware of their plan for the following day, they start watching a classic movie and go to bed after that.

\* \* \*

It's the morning of the next day. Sammy wakes up earlier than Robert and Amer. But he keeps his eyes shut and doesn't get up the bed. He thinks about his late father while laid on his bed. Sun is not up yet. It is still dark. This morning seems strange to Sammy somehow. He cannot stop thinking about his father since he decided to visit his grave. Thoughts of his late father, moments he had with him, his father's last days and hours keep Sammy's mind engaged. In fact, it was those thoughts that woke him up and they are the reason that Sammy can't sleep anymore. He is thinking about the last time he saw his dad and remembers wicked last days he had before his dad passed away four years ago.

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Four years ago, Sammy's father and his assistant who was also a mechanical engineer, left Al Darrah for the capital as they had scheduled a meeting to conclude a contract for building complex industrial parts for one of the most prominent organizations. They had reached the middle of their way when they felt hungry and stopped at a restaurant. It was one or two o'clock in the afternoon.

Three high-ranking members of the arms and ammunition industries had stopped at the same restaurant earlier to have lunch. They were on their ways to the capital, too, to attend a top-secret meeting. It wasn't long before three gunmen who had covered their faces with ski masks, attacked the

restaurant and opened fired to assassinate the high-ranking members.

Sammy's father and his assistant were also shot in the assault. In this terrorist act, two of the arms and ammunition industry members and assistant of Sammy's father died on spot. Sammy's father and one of the other high-ranking members were severely wounded.

One of the bullets pierced Sammy's father's throat and another one entered the side of his chest, near his left nipple and exited the other side. They were quickly rushed to a hospital in the capital. Their physical conditions were quite unstable. Doctors persistently struggled and were finally able to stabilize their situation temporarily so they will later have the opportunity to start the treatment that took an extended period of time.

When the bullet stroked Sammy's Father throat, he lost his larynx and was no longer able to speak. The round which entered the side of his chest almost hit his spinal cord.

Sammy's father needed another critical and delicate surgery which carried the risk of paralysis and even death. But specialists and surgeons decided to wait until his vitals stabilized completely. They did not see his physical and even emotional condition was ready for a surgery with that level of complexity.

Sammy heard a tv report accidentally on the evening of the attack that Isis had claimed responsibility for the cowardly and brutal terrorist attack on the restaurant. According to hospital regulations, no one was allowed to meet Sammy's father or any other attack survivors. Each patient could only have one overnight companion. Hospital officials and security forces had only approved Sammy's mom as the only companion to stay with her husband overnight. No one else could visit Sammy's father until further notice. Even Sammy himself could only follow up his father's situation through his mother and over the phone.

Sammy's mother had rushed to the hospital in the capital immediately after she was informed by the hospital officials about the attack and her husband's injuries. She was there at the hospital every single day supporting her husband. The saddest moment for Sammy was when he was informed that his dad could never speak again. The effect of this news on Sammy

was so severe that he thought he would have a seizure any minute. Sammy was about to have convulsions. He had no choice but to accept the reality. Sometimes he prayed all that had happened was just a horrible nightmare and he woke up realizing everything was okay.

Sammy's mother had already informed him that his dad was going to have a life altering surgery after four days. He was well aware of the risks involved and that had given him a bad feeling. The primary objective of the surgery Sammy's father was going to have was as a matter of fact removing the bullet from a spot near his spinal cord. Because of the challenges doctors faced to perform that surgery and the risks involved, Sammy was given a pass by the hospital to see his father and be with him for two hours before his surgery. The reason for that decision was that in case if Sammy's father did not make it out of the surgery room by any chance, Sammy and his dad could see each other for one last time and spent two hours together at least.

Sammy counted every second for those four days to arrive. Sammy was so desperate that for his father's successful surgery and his immediate recovery he had even entertained superstition and had started asking for paranormal assistance. The desperate young Sammy didn't really know what to do. He was just thankful to God for keeping his dad alive so far. Of course, Sammy's father was not completely recovered yet. But the fact that he was still alive and there was still hope for him to remain alive was something Sammy thanked God for.

Sammy was going to see his father in four days. He was going to see him for the first time after the terrorist attack. Though Sammy's father could not speak anymore, the fact that Sammy could see him, hug him and express his emotions was something he hoped for. He still had so many things to talk to his dad about. There were still so many advises his dad could give him and so many life lessons Sammy could learn from him. Sammy decided at some point to block negative thoughts and only let in positive thoughts. He believed he could send his father positive energy that could help him recover faster.

Sammy's father could not speak anymore. So, he had to write whatever he wanted to say. He always had a small notebook and a pencil next to his bed. He wrote whatever he wanted and gave it to the nurse. Sammy's father, too, was waiting for

those four long days to be over so he could see his son. He found that gap an opportunity to write his will.

Sammy's dad had decided to write two separate letters. One for his wife of course and another one particularly for Sammy. He figured those four days were the best time for him to attend to this important subject. He didn't know what the result of his surgery would be and he still had so many things to tell his son and his wife about.

Sammy remembers the day his dad had his surgery. Four days were over. He was seated at the balcony of their apartment and massaging his injured leg as usual. The house phone rang. Sammy picked his stick, stood up and limped towards the phone. He picked the phone up and heard his mom's voice. She asked him to get ready as he will be going to the hospital in the capital to finally pay his dad a visit. She told him that his Aunt Zinat, uncle Aser and Amer, his cousin, were going to pick him up in about an hour. She said they were going to bring him to the hospital with them. It was half past eight in the morning and they had five to six hours drive before reaching the hospital. The surgery of Sammy's father was scheduled to start at five o'clock in the afternoon. Sammy knew he had only two hours after arriving at the hospital and before his dad was taken to the operation hall. He only had two hours to be with his father when he reached the hospital.

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Sammy rolls over on his bed. A teardrop crawls down his cheek. Every single moment of that particular day's events is passing through Sammy's mind like a movie. He remembers his Aunt's family picked him up and they all headed toward the capital. Everybody was quiet in the car. Everybody was extremely sad but still hopeful. Amer was the only person who could comfort Sammy. Amer, his cousin and one of his best friends. Sammy and Amer were very close since childhood.

To calm Sammy, Amer told him about some Miracles and stories of people who were in a worse situation than his father and still survived. Amer talked about people who had to undergo worse surgeries and they still made it. That they were still alive and healthy.

Amer's mother, Zinat, kept on muttering prayers. She called her sister, Zahra, at the hospital every now and then, asking

her for updates, counseling her and informing her how far they have reached.

Aser had invested all his energy on driving carefully and paid close attention to the road ahead. He actually looked like a statue. Motionlessly driving while looking forward at the road.

They were on the road for the past two hours already going from Al Darrah towards the capital. A strong wind began to blow. The wind became stronger and stronger until it transformed into a sandstorm. A phone was ringing in the car. Everyone noticed it belonged to Zinat. She answered her phone and everyone in the car heard her just saying hello and nothing else after that. She then quieted down and listened only. Everyone pricked their ears trying to find out what's going on. Was the phone call from the hospital and regarding Sammy's father.

Every single person in the vehicle was quiet listening to the conversation Zinat had with the person on the other end of the line. Everyone was wondering why was she not saying anything and just listening. Everyone's sense of curiosity was vastly provoked. Sammy could see Zinat's face from the rearview mirror. She had become pale, motionless, quiet with her lips dry and a disappointed facial expression. She kept quiet for so long that Aser lost his patience finally.

'oh, for heaven's sake, Zinat' Shouted Aser demanding. 'what is it? Say something for god's sake. Who are you with on the damn phone?'

Aser was staring at Zinat when a strong wind lifted a piece of aluminum sheet from the side of the road and hits it hard to the side of the car.

'Shit' Continues Aser. 'Damn this storm. Shit. Shit. Shit' Zinat has her head lowered. She looked genuinely shocked,

'He's gone' replies Zinat bursting into tears. 'It's over. Oh, my God. What a disaster' continued Zinat with a trembling voice. 'But it doesn't make any sense.'

She turned her head backwards and glanced at Sammy.

'I'm so very sorry honey 'says Zinat crying with a pity. She turned her head towards the road, again.

Sammy was shocked. He pretended to be surprised to see aunt Zinat's face soaked in tears. Sammy has already realized what has happened to his father. But he's in denial. He preferred not to ask any question from aunt Zinat in regards to his father. Aser reduced speed, pulled over slowly and stopped the car. Sammy was in an absolute shock. He felt Amer's hand on his shoulder. Sammy opened the car door despite the sandstorm and exited the vehicle. Amer and his mother followed him out. They wanted to have Sammy in their sights. So, they followed his movements with their eyes wherever he went. Aser had his head on the steering wheel. He was crying uncontrollably.

"It's not possible." murmurs Aser crying. "There must be a mistake. He did not even have his surgery yet. There should be a mixed up, an identity mistake or something. Oh, dear God let it be a fucking misinformation".

Sammy leaned against the trunk after stepping out of the car. He could neither speak a word nor cry or even explain how he felt. He was just staring at the road, trying to process what had befallen. Zinat who was not emotionally stable herself, was trying to calm Sammy down and comfort him. Amer was standing by Sammy, also leaning against the trunk of the car. Amer too didn't know how to react or even what to tell Sammy to calm him. Sammy could not believe what has occurred. He could neither understand nor accept the fact that he was not able to see his father after that. All the memories Sammy had with his father were playing like a movie in his head. Sammy felt like he had a big scar on his soul. Emotional and numb, He started thinking about how mad he was at his father for leaving him so soon. About the God damn terrorists for killing his dad and finally about the fact that God's existence was just a stupid myth. Amer patted on Sammy's shoulder.

'I am so sorry man' said Amer in a desperate voice. 'let's get going, dude. We'll have to be at the hospital now anyways'

Amer held Sammy's hand and dragged him back inside the car. The car moved and once again a cold and disturbing silence took over. After driving for a few minutes, Sammy's uncle was the first who broke his silence.

"It's impossible." said Aser crying. "He did not even have the surgery you mean. How the fuck is this even possible? His surgery was scheduled for 5 P.M. Why did he"



Aunt Zinat was quite upset with what the news she had heard already and now her husband's non-stop questions pissed her off even more.

"Oh, my God" yelled Aunt Zinat furiously. "what's wrong with you? Question after question. How the hell am I supposed to know? Can't you see we are all upset? Damn it. Tears did not even let my poor sister talk. You expect her to tell me what happened over the phone? God. Just stop talking. Please."

And again, the silence. The only sound could be heard was a faint weeping sound in the car. Amer invited everyone to calm down and start praying for the soul of the departed instead of trying to chew each other's throat. Everyone quieted down and prayed in their hearts.

They reached the capital and arrived at the hospital minutes later. Amer's father parked his car in the hospital's dedicated parking space. They all entered the hospital building, directly went to the front desk and asked questions about Mr. Samir Samaha, and where his body was being kept. They had to use the elevators to go to the fourth floor according to the front desk. Sammy could already hear his mom crying when they reached fourth floor and the elevator's doors slid open. The sound was coming from the ward's corridor.

Sammy followed the sound and saw his mom screaming while two nurses seated on both her sides were trying to calm her. She stood up as soon as she saw Sammy. She ran to him and hugged him tight. But Sammy was numb. He was still in shock. Sammy clutched his mom but he had no expression on his face.

Everyone else gathered around Sammy and his mom, also crying and sympathizing with them. Sammy decided to go to the Nurses Station after he held his mom and calmed her for a few seconds. Amer didn't want to leave Sammy's sight. Not even for a second. He followed Sammy wherever he went. One of the nurses noticed Sammy coming towards their station. She had guessed who Sammy was. Because they only had one deceased patient that day at the hospital and Sammy looked like he had lost someone. So, she stood up behind the counter as soon as Sammy reached her.

"I'm so sorry for your loss" sympathized the nurse in a kind and compassionate voice. "You should be his son. I mean late Mr. Samir Samaha's son."

Sammy confirmed the nurse's guess by nodding. All other four nurses also stood up and offered their condolences once they found out who he was. Sammy thanked them all and requested if one of them could take him to the surgeon who performed his late father's final surgery. One of the nurses told Sammy that Professor Ma'amoun was the neurosurgeon who had to lead the operating team. She asked Sammy to follow her. The nurse had to take Sammy to another floor. So, they went to the elevators. Sammy and the nurse exited the elevator on the eighth floor after a few seconds. Sammy followed the nurse to the middle of a corridor. The nurse showed Sammy Professor Ma'amoun's office pointing at a room. She then made a U-turn and went back towards the elevators. Sammy waited outside Professor Ma'amoun's office. He knocked for permission to enter. Professor Ma'amoun was looking at the hospital's garden from his office window when he heard someone knocking. He turned his head and allowed Sammy to enter.

Sammy introduced himself, walked closer to professor Ma'amoun and asked him the reason for his father's sudden unexpected death. Tears rolled down Sammy's cheeks while talking. Professor Ma'amoun who seemed quite sad by the unanticipated incident himself, offered his condolences and asked Sammy to have a seat. He found Sammy mournful and confused, disorientated and in shock. Sammy sat on the sofa opposite professor Ma'amoun and waited for him to talk. Professor Ma'amoun, a man in his sixties with a kind and fatherly face looked at Sammy and starts talking

"First of all, I would like to convey my deepest condolences son. My colleagues and I are profoundly saddened for what happened to your father. Life and death, I believe are both in God's hands and us as doctors, surgeons and technicians are all just God's tools."

Professor Ma'amoun pulled out a folder from his desk's drawer and opened it. He observed Sammy's behavior and emotional response to what he said since he started talking. Sammy wept uncontrollably and gazed at a spot while listening to professor Ma'amoun. Professor Ma'amoun had noticed Sammy was not in a good and healthy emotional state. He glanced at the folder, nodded and placed the folder back on the top of his desk.

"Son! says professor Ma'amoun. 'You are clearly in a shock. I think it's best if you calmed yourself down first before we

talked about your father. I can see all the signs of shock in you and this is not good despite being normal"

Sammy forgot where he was at for a second. His head started spinning. He lost his vision. He wanted to say something but everything went black suddenly. All the sounds he was hearing were mixed up now echoing into his ears. Sammy recognized professor Ma'amoun's voice becoming clearer than other sounds he heard.

"Nurse" Shouted professor Ma'amoun calling. "Nurse. My room NOW."

Sammy opened his eyes. He was laid on a hospital bed and had a serum needle injected into his arm. Nurses had removed his knee strap. Both his legs were lifted up by some kind of rope and were hanging from a metal rod above his bed. Sammy could hear his mom crying. But she sounded as if she was trying to cry quietly. As though someone from the hospital Staff has warned her to keep it down and consider other patients in the ward. Sammy tried saying something. But he started coughing. Amer heard him.

"He's awake aunt Zahra" announces Amer loudly. "You see? Nothing to worry about. Like the doctor said. It's just the shock. He's ok now. Look. You see?"

Sammy opened his eyes and wiped his tears off his face. He was staring at the ceiling and remembering all that had happened earlier that day. Sammy remembered fainting suddenly while talking to professor Ma'amoun. When he regained his consciousness after a few more seconds, he was on a hospital bed staring at his Sarum drips dropping.

Sammy began to accept the severely bitter truth of losing his father. His mourning period has just started. He was miserable and depressed. He had no control whatsoever over his emotions. Sammy was constantly crying. He only wept and his tears were coming from depth of his soul. He knew the world was never going to be the same for him.

Professor Ma'amoun was quite concerned about Sammy's emotional and physical health. He stood up by Sammy's bed and checked his vitals. He looked relieved by the fact that Sammy had come out of shock and his vitals were normal. Professor Ma'amoun realized this was the best opportunity to offer his condolences to everyone when he noticed almost all relatives

of the deceased were present in the room. He actually wanted to answer Sammy's earlier question about the reason his father passing away before the final critical surgery he was supposed to perform on him. Professor Ma'amoun knew this was the question every one of them wanted to know the answer to. So, he cleared his throat and started talking.

"I had spent some time with the deceased and I got to know him to a degree. I know Sammy's father was a man with high spirits and a strong constitution. Mr. Samaha requested other doctors and myself to perform the final operation on him earlier than the date scheduled. The reason surgery team decided to operate on him four days after his last operation was that my team and I wanted to make sure if the bullet, which was near his spinal cord, was moving or not? And if it was, to what direction was it moving and how fast. But none of these were the reason he died. He actually died because of a severe internal bleeding which tests didn't initially reveal. The bleeding, unfortunately, could not be stopped despite all our efforts. It was simply too late. The bullet had taken a path to reach somewhere near his spinal cord after entering his body during which resulted into an organ destruction and internal bleeding. Now, I want to remind you all that the team members did not find any sign of that in the initial tests and scans."

Sammy was just looking at the ceiling without saying a word while professor Ma'amoun explained what has happened to his father. He glanced at professor Ma'amoun's lip movements every few seconds and then at everyone else who were carefully listening to his explanation. Of course, Sammy understood the cause of his father's death. But he didn't hear anything else after that.

Professor Ma'amoun offers his condolences once again. He tells the nurse that she can let Sammy go after his serum is finishes. Sammy is watching every last drop of his serum dripping down, wondering why couldn't he visit his father one last time, even for a few seconds, before he died. Sammy wanted to tell his dad how much he loved him and thank him for being the best father in the world. Sammy wished he could hug his father for one last time and kiss him goodbye.

Professor Ma'amoun told Sammy's mother she could go to the ward and collect her husband's belongings. Sammy's mother requested professor Ma'amoun to make necessary arrangements to transfer her husband's body back to Al Darrah so they could

have a proper funeral. Sammy's mother sat by his bed, waited for his serum to finish so they could go to the hospital administration together and do the required paperwork's. She and Sammy had already accepted the cruel and bitter reality of losing Sammy's father. He was gone and was never coming back.

Sammy's serum was finally finished. The nurse removed the needle off his arm and lowered his legs. Amer helped the nurse to fix back Sammy's knee strap and assisted Sammy to get down the bed. Amer was standing behind Sammy

"Dude" said Amer quietly so no one else could hear him but Sammy. "What the fuck! I mean" whispered Amer into Sammy's ear. "You are now officially the man of your house. If you show yourself weak and fragile, who would your mother rely on in situations like this? I know buddy. It's a difficult time. I get it. But get yourself together, man and stop acting like a little girl. This is just part of growing up. We all lose our parents sooner or later. You should now think of a proper funeral, a respectful burial. I'm here for you and you know I'll help you. But seriously. People expect you to take care of everything from now on. Like I said, you are the man of the house. So, be strong and act like one. Now, let's get out of here. Pull yourself together and stop embarrassing yourself.'

Despite being an emotional mess, Sammy pondered for a moment and accepted what Amer told him. Sammy realized Amer was right. Sammy made up his mind and decided to be strong despite being weepy and mournful for his mother's sake at least. He knew he must be strong. Even though he felt a great deal of frustration and anger towards circumstances and the ongoing situation. He did not feel like having a part in his father's funeral at all.

Sammy thought everything that had happened to him was unfair. The brutal terrorist attack which caused his dad his life, his bad leg and many other things had made him hate his life. He decided never to visit his dad's grave as it was not going to comfort him. It made him even angrier than he already was. Sammy went out of the room along with Amer after his serum was finished. He saw his mother, his aunt, uncle and a few other relatives seated at the corridor. His mother was still crying. Sammy kissed her forehead. He assured her everything was going to be alright and he was there for her. He told his mother he was going to take care of hospital paperwork.

Hearing what her son said to her, Sammy's mother felt much relieved and Sammy noticed it. She felt supported and secure. She calmed down a little bit after that.

After Sammy completed the required paperwork at the hospital administration, it was decided that everybody should go back to Al Darrah. Because there was nothing else to do at the hospital anymore. They were told by the concerned department that the body was going to be sent to them by an ambulance on the following morning. Sammy asked his mom to get back home with her sisters and her husbands. He said he would collect his father's possessions from the hospital and would also head back home with Amer. Sammy's mom left with Zinat and her husband. Other relatives left too.

Sammy had almost completed all the paperwork he was supposed to at the hospital. He had all the papers ready in his hand. Sammy went to the cashier and paid for his father's hospitalization expenses. The only thing left to do was to collect his father's personal effects. He headed back to the ward accompanied by Amer and asked nurses for his father's belongings. One of the nurses walked to the back room and brought back with her a plastic case and handed it over to Sammy. He thanked nurses for all they had done for his father, said goodbye to them all and left the ward. Sammy and Amer were waiting for the elevator, but they suddenly saw a thin short nurse running towards them from nurse's station which was located at the end of the corridor. The elevator had reached their floor, but Sammy and Amer waited for the nurse to catch up. Amer held the elevator. The nurse reached Sammy breathing fast holding two envelopes

"Sorry sir" said the nurse. "Which one of you is Mr. Sammy?"

"I am," replied Sammy. "How can I help you?"

The nurse handed the two envelopes she was holding over to Sammy.

"May God bless his soul" wished the nurse. "Good guy. He could not speak, but he asked me to give you these envelopes by writing, before his internal bleeding. There are letters inside. Like he knew it was his last day. Please accept my condolences Mr. Sammy."

"Thank you so much, miss." Replied Sammy with kindness.

The nurse turned back and walked towards the end of the corridor. Unable to hold the elevator any longer, Amer dragged Sammy inside. Sammy was stunned, speechless and just staring at the envelopes in his hand. Amer and Sammy reached the ground floor. They exited the hospital building and started looking for a ride to take them back to Al Darrah. They eventually found a driver, bargained and finally agreed on a fee. They got in the car and the driver drove away. Amer laid his head, closed his eyes and held his head in his hands as soon as they got into the car. He looked like he was suffering from a headache. Sammy didn't feel like talking neither. He also preferred silence.

The car was in motion and Sammy was looking at the avenues, cars passing and people walking. He was weeping helplessly and quietly as he stared at the envelopes in his hand. He was reviewing all that had happened that day.

They almost reached midway when the driver asked permission to stop for prayers and a quick snack. Amer was asleep in the car. Sammy, who was a little tired himself didn't object. He only asked the driver to choose a safe place to stop. It was dark and he did not want the car to be driven to the side of the busy road. A few miles ahead the driver chose a resting and praying area with a café close to it. He stopped the car.

Amer was still not feeling very well. So, he decided he wanted to sleep in the car. The driver went to the washroom to clean himself up first getting ready for his evening prayers. Sammy sat on a bench outside the café. The seat looked more like a bed than a bench. The only difference was that it had a carpet on it instead of a mattress. The weather was not bad. There were two willow trees by the bench Sammy sat on and there was a fountain in front of it. A blue fountain with red, white and gold fish.

There were no other customers around. Sammy was alone and he found this an opportunity to open the envelope and read his father's letter. Tears formed in Sammy's eyes again. But this time his tears were not because of the sorrow of losing his father, but because of the endless storm of bad luck, the tornado of misfortune that had ravaged his entire life. Sammy felt abandoned. He was extremely emotional because his father had left him. At least this is how he felt deep inside. Because his father was really gone now. Sammy felt a lump form in his throat. A chunk that grew in his throat by spite and hatred towards all the wicked things that have happened

to him and around him in his life. A lump he had no cure for. He was angry. Angry that he had not been able to see his father one last time before he died. Mad that he was not able to say a proper goodbye to his father before he died. Angry that his father hadn't waited so he could see him one last time. Sammy was mad that he has no means to take revenge for his father's blood. He was considered a cripple and would not be accepted in the army because of his bad leg. He had lost faith in everyone and everything. The only reason he wanted to live was his mother and the only thing he could do was to accept his Life's bitter realities and move on. That's all.

Sammy's tears rolled down his cheeks. His hands were shaking when opening his dad's letter. He didn't know what to expect. He did not know what his father thought was so crucial that he had to say it even by writing. Sammy had opened the envelope. But the cafe owner suddenly appeared in front of him to take his order. He was an old man wearing a hat. He had wrapped a piece of cloth around his left hand. But before he could say anything, he noticed Sammy's tears and sorrow.

"what's wrong son?" Asked the cafe owner. "Why are you so sad young one? I don't think it's about money, but if it is, I want you to tell me. We are human and should take care of one another."

Hearing affectionate words of the old man-made Sammy all the more emotional. His tears poured down his face. He nodded, glanced at the old man and gave him an artificial smile.

"Thank you, sir." replied Sammy rubbing his face with his sleeves. "I wish it was money troubles. God bless you, sir. My dad passed away this morning."

The old man offered his condolences and decided it was best to leave Sammy alone. Sammy looked at the envelope. There was a note written at the back of it:

To Sammy:  
My only son

Sammy's opened the envelope and started reading the letter:

"Hello, Son. I hope you are well and in a good mood when reading this letter. I miss you, son. I'm so excited that I'm finally going to see you after these few days and also, I'm disappointed with the fact that you will be seeing your father



in such a condition. Anyhow, I want to ask you to please be strong like always. Don't let disasters and mishaps of life wear you down and destroy you, son. Here, doctors and nurses keep on telling me that I should not lose my spirit. I should be thankful that I'm still alive and be positive. Specially towards my upcoming surgery. My response to them is that my son's presence is, in fact, the only thing that can help me stay positive and keep a high spirit at the moment. That's true. You are my only child and my best friend, son. I'm so happy that the door to my room will open today, you will enter and I will see you. I wish I could still speak so I could express myself and tell you the things I need to say to you instead of writing them. I wish I could still speak son. My dear boy, not because of what happened to me and put me in such misery, but it's been a while that I've been looking for an opportunity to tell you about somethings. There are certain things that I should say to you. It doesn't really matter what you want to call them. Advises, requests, wishes or anything else. These are the things I think I have to tell you as a father. Whether I'm destined to live or die. I have a weird feeling I can't explain. A feeling that says to me to write them down for you. The reason I decided to write you this letter is that I'm going to have a critical surgery today and God knows if I'm going to come out of the operation room alive. Life and death are in God's hands and no one can predict what destiny has in store for them. Knowing your spirit and morals, I know you're not at your best mood right now. But son, I want to ask you as your father, to be a rock but calm. I'm still alive. The only thing that has changed is that I can't speak anymore. That's all. Don't you think this is much better than me being dead? Don't you agree? You see? Tragedy may strike at any time in life. Bad things can happen. Stuff even worse than what happened to me. But we shouldn't let life's misfortunes and catastrophes knock us out and destroy us. Accepting life's disasters may seem, and they are as a matter of fact, are tough. The thing with tragedy is that it brings specific changes with it which we get used to over time. But life goes on my son. You should be prepared for Life's surprises all the time so you can handle them better. Son, over the years you have proven to me and all others that you are a strong and invincible guy. You have been struggling with the consequences of your accident. I dare telling you that in my opinion not only what happened to your leg did not make you feeble and weak, but it made you even stronger than before in some cases. You have achieved goals that could be hardly achieved by other guys who didn't have to face challenges you did. I'm so proud of you son. You

are a man now. A good man. A man who I'm so proud to say is my son. I want you to remain a good man no matter what Sammy. If you have any kind of weakness that you know of, I want you to work on them and get rid of them. I want you to be strong for your mother if something happened to me. Be strong for your mother's sake. Your mother and I have fought lots of Life battles together. I don't want her to fight any more battles after I'm Gone. Take good care of your mother and try keeping her happy. Be there for her all the time. I've always thanked God for giving you and your mom to me. Your mother is a real angel Sammy. I'm sure you already know it yourself. I wouldn't have a lovely son like you if God didn't give your mother to me. Son, you and your mother are all that I've got. You two are the best thing ever happened to me in my life.

Well, I guess they'll enter the room anytime now to take me out and get me ready for the surgery. My medical team says it's a very tough and sensitive surgery. But we both know that I don't panic easily. I promise you that I'll be strong and I want you to be strong as well. Like I already said, there are things I need to tell you in case I didn't make it out of the surgery. I need you to remember them all the time.

I have a concern. A kind of worry let's say since you met that accident and what happened to your leg. My concern is that you might lose your confidence in certain points of your life because of what happened to your leg. I am worried that your lack of confidence may prevent you pursuing your dreams and achieving your goals. But you proved me wrong after achieving success after success. Over several years you have shown that my concerns were in vain and there was actually nothing to be worried about. But I still feel I need to mention this son. Never let your limping and your bad leg become a reason for you to give up your dreams and forget about what you really truly desire in life. You are able to reach the heights, complete tasks and achieve anything you set your mind to. Do not let holding a cane in your hand, the strap on your knee or even sitting on a wheelchair give you the feeling that you are less than others or any different. Because you are not. Because you are not disabled really, son and you know that I'm right.

Remember that higher education is one of the main characteristics of a real gentleman. So, you will have to be thinking of a college soon. Thinking of studying a course, a subject you are interested in. I remember you have always been fascinated by engineering. You always said you wanted to

be a mechanical engineer like me when someone asked you what you wanted to become when you grew up. And I liked it when you said that. I remember you asking so many questions, observed everything I did when I worked on the machinery and power tools. Son, you know that all the tools and machinery there in the house belong to you now. I don't think I'll be working on them after this. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I want you to continue your studies. I want you to go to a college and make an educated gentleman of yourself.

A healthy athletic body is as important as having a proper education for a man. Do not forget exercising and sports son. I am well aware that you really wanted to be a soccer player. But, let's say you were not destined to after what happened to your leg. With your accident, it's consequences and all. I remember when we went hunting, you never missed a target. Target shooting may not seem like a very active sport. But it is a right kind of game for you, which requires lots of concentration, calculations and accuracy. Your mom and I were initially not comfortable with you getting involved with target shooting as a sports activity. But we both knew you would sneak out of the house every now and then and would go to the shooting field to practice. You are not a child anymore son. So, your mother and I decided we should no longer worry about dangers of target shooting. You can take care of yourself now. So, we have nothing to worry about. You can continue target shooting professionally like you always wanted. But if you really want to be a professional target shooting athlete, I expect you to be the best.

You'll meet a girl sooner or later, son. The one that just looking at her raises your heartbeat and leaves you speechless. A girl whose voice sounds like music to your soul and when you look into her wonderful and beautiful eyes seems as if you are looking at the stars in the galaxy, staring at the beauty of the entire universe. A girl that when she is near you, you can feel her body warmth taking over your existence as if energy is getting injected into your blood vessels. A girl whose absence you cannot endure. Even for a second and you feel like getting so close to her that you can hear her breath. When this happens son, that means you are in love. It happens to all men, it's a natural humankind phenomenon and one of the sweetest bitter experiences in a man's life. I want you to promise me something, son. Promise me that when you met a girl who made you feel a weird vibration in your heart one day, you would not freeze and you would not lose your tongue. I want you to promise me that at that

moment, you would not be thinking of your disability and bad leg. Therefore, afraid that you are not going to have a chance with her to make her yours. I've told you on many occasions and I am reminding you now again, that you are no different than others. You are just a bit more polite and respectable than others. Never let your leg problem give you the impression that you will not be able to get your dream girl. Girls look for more necessary specifications in a man they want to spend the rest of their lives with. Besides, your leg problem is not that severe. You can walk. You just need to fix your knee strap or use a stick. That's all.

There's this last Request I have and that is for you to complete modifying and developing our rifle. That's very important to me. It has a sentimental value to me and now it does for you. I've made a promise to your uncle Khalfan and swore I would finish its developing process. I made a vow on your name son. That rifle is a relic of your late uncle Khalfan. I'm asking you to do this because maybe I won't last that long to do what I wanted to do with it like I promised him. Perhaps you need to go through the drawings and make a research on the internet too if you need to understand guns better. The only work left is machining the part carefully. I need you to finish it for me no matter how long it takes. If you remember, uncle Khalfan had brought a box of ammunition for that rifle. When you made sure your work on the rifle is complete, get some bullets from the ammunition box and take it for a test shoot somewhere safe. As I said, this is very important to me. I wish we finished developing that rifle so it would now be used to take out all Isis members. At least those who put me in this hospital.

Don't worry about me, son. I will regain consciousness soon after my surgery and everything will be okay after that. Everything will get back to normal. I promise. I'm now going to write to your mom also. I'll have to write her about certain affairs before the nurses arrive and take me to the operating room. So, that's it, I guess. I want you to relax. I'll get out of the surgery just fine. Sorry for the long letter. Take care of yourself and your mom for me. She has no one but you and me. I'm waiting here wishing to see you before I'm taken to the surgery room. May God be with you, son. I love you. Your father.

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Sun is up and Sammy remembers he had planned to visit the cemetery and his late father's grave. The events that engaged his mind early in this morning are not some random events. They are the events that led to his father's death. A father who loved him dearly. Sammy wipes his face off his tears. He sits on his bed and prays for his father's soul for a moment. He stands up to go and have breakfast with Robert and Amer and get ready to go to the cemetery.

The sun light penetrates Sammy's room from the corner of his curtain. It is a beautiful morning. Sun has casted its light over Al Darrah town and its kind-hearted warm-blooded people. Birds can be heard chirping, wiggling between citrus and poplar trees on street sides and parks and flying from one tree to another. Their lovely chirping sound has woken up the town from the quiet and sleepiness of the dawn, inviting everyone to begin a new day. Traditional Arabic bread baked by Al Darrah's oldest bakery can be smelt. A bakery which has provided the daily bread of Al Darrah residents for years. There are still not so many vehicles on the town's only main street. It is a little bit too early for the town's main street to experience the crowd once again and accommodate the traffic. The municipal bus can be seen now crossing, transferring people from one point to another, diffusing the smell of burnt gasoline to the air. But that smell, no matter how awful and disgusting, is a symbol, representing that the cycle of life has begun rotating and business is going to start in the town as usual. A town, where most of its hard-working residents run the country's largest arms and ammunition factory.

Some people are on foot and others riding on bikes and motorcycles in the Street. The pleasant voice of people greeting one another, saying hello and good morning to each other fills the atmosphere with kindness, friendship, and love. Shopkeepers and store owners raise their blinds, open their shop doors and put their products on display beginning the business day in the name of God, so they will be blessed with a good number of customers and can earn a good halal profit.

Some of the shopkeepers are mopping and washing their shopfronts, some others clean the windows and display glasses, so their walk-in customers would enjoy the store's tidiness and cleanliness. There is still time before government offices and schools to start their business day. Women with student kids have begun waking them up, so they

would have their breakfast and go to school. Housewives are preparing breakfast for their clerk husbands and children to feed and send them out. Good people of Al Darrah live a calm happy life.

### **Daniel and his family**

Daniel throws his coat over his shoulder while exiting his house. He is obviously still sleepy as he covers his mouth several times and yawns. He walks toward Al Darrah's traditional bakery shop and on the way exchanges greetings with the neighbors and shopkeepers he knows. He waves, nods and says hello and good morning to whoever he comes across on his way to the bakery.

Almost all shopkeepers and people in the neighborhood know Daniel and his family members very well. He is considered a good family man, a hard-working and kind individual. Daniel is forty-seven years old. He lives in Al Darrah with Eva his wife, Ezra his mother-in-law, Nelly, his daughter and his three boys, John, Jacob, and Liam who are seven, nine and eleven years old respectively. Daniel is in transportation business. He owns a land transportation establishment in Al Darrah. He used to be an employee of a semi-government firm back in the capital. He worked as a transportation coordinator up to eleven years ago. Until one of his good friends informed him one day that an arms and ammunition plant has started operating somewhere in Raqqa province, located on the northeast side of the country near a nice little town called Al Darrah. That many people are moving there and putting up different businesses because of the proximity of the plant to that little town. His friend told him that there were so many business opportunities in that town that he could seriously consider. Daniel began his research on Al Darrah and gathered more and more information about the town. He found out his friend was right about the place and its available opportunities. That was it for Daniel. He had made up his mind a few days later. He had decided to establish a transportation office, taking his wife and children to Al Darrah with him. Daniel could now become his own boss. So, one night he shared his decision with his wife, Eva. They discussed the pros and cons, their finances and carefully evaluated the whole idea. Being a supportive and understanding woman, Eva agreed to take the step and support her husband. So, using all his savings, some money his wife Eva had inherited after her father passed away, plus selling some gold and jewelry his wife and mother-in-law had, Daniel

established a transportation office in Al Darrah. He purchased a few pickup trucks and rented a townhouse in Al Darrah.

Not only he hired some very experienced drivers to work for him at his transportation business, but Daniel also drives one of the pick-up trucks himself for transportation purposes. He and his drivers shortly began receiving orders to transport goods and commodities of government institutions, tradesman, industrial and establishments to different destination storages or even cities. This is how Daniel made a living after they moved to Al Darrah.

Like his dream, Daniel has become his own boss. He has become a successful businessman who almost everyone knows.

Daniel is a hard-working, honest Christian man who truly believes in social values and is close to God according to his friends and colleagues. He tries to attend the church every Sunday and most of other public religious ceremonies, rites and rituals. But generally, he is not a fanatic when it comes to religion. He is actually a very open-minded individual in many cases. Daniel and Eva love each other very much, and they both adore their children passionately, are both very much committed to their children's comfort and happiness.

Eva is seven years younger than Daniel. She is a lovely, beautiful, kind and well-mannered woman. Eva is usually seen smiling. She is in a good mood mostly. Eva has maintained her body and appearances very well despite being busy with the house and raising their children. She hasn't forgotten about attending to herself. Daniel and Eva are both quite satisfied with the way their children have turned out.

Daniel arrives at the bakery and sees a line of men and women waiting on queue to buy bread just like him. He stands at the end of the queue and suddenly notices the person standing in front of him. He is right. It's his old neighbor miss Salma. A talkative old woman. What a surprise Daniel thinks. He hasn't seen her for ages, and now, he would have to say hello, followed by listening to her going on and on, talking about every single aspect of her affairs currently making her unhappy with her life while waiting for his turn to buy a loaf of bread. The queue is not that short, and miss Salma never gets tired of talking. What a way to start the day Daniel thinks.

Miss Salma and her family used to live next to Daniel's previous townhouse, which he had rented since moving to Al Darrah before he bought his new house a few years ago. Miss Salma had a huge house. So, she asked Yasmin, one of her daughters and Yasir, her only son to move in with her. Yasir, his wife, and their two children plus Yasmin, who is actually her youngest Daughter, her husband and their infant child used to live with her in her big house. Miss Salma's grandchildren and Daniel's children became playmates back then. She had a very kind and warm-hearted family. The only problem with each and every single one of them was that they were extremely talkative. They could not stop talking if they were given a chance to start. This problem had made all neighbors and friends avoid miss Salma and her family members.

Daniel has to say hello, and he does. Miss Salma seems very happy seeing Daniel. Daniel asks how everyone is. Big mistake. She starts just like Daniel thought. She begins to screech and of course starts talking:

"My children are okay, I guess. I hope they are. Oh, I've heard that beautiful, gorgeous- looking daughter of yours is back from Damascus huh? Good for you Daniel. How is Eva by the way? Ezra? Your lovely son's? You've got good children Daniel. Very kind. Good for you. They love their parents. That's very important you know? Mine is not like yours though. None of them even want to see whether I'm alive or dead. Oh, Daniel. They may visit me once or twice a year. Once in a blue moon. One time for the New Year and if they need money. Oh god. Don't get me started. Good memories we have together huh? Remember my big beautiful house? I sold it after every one of them left me. I was very happy when my grandchildren were with me. I loved it. I wasn't alone back then you see. Since I changed the house, all of them disappeared. What should I say? I guess this is my life. My destiny.

The last person standing in front of miss Salma on the queue is already buying his bread and miss Salma is next. But she cannot see that. Daniel is facing miss Salma and the bakery. He can see that it is her turn. But Miss Salma has her back to the bakery facing Daniel. She is just talking and talking without a pause or paying any attention to the queue she is standing at. Daniel has to interrupt her



"I understand" nods Daniel. "I am sure your children have a convincing reason for not paying you a visit that often. And it's your turn by the way. You can get your bread now"

Miss Salma looks much older than the last time Daniel met her. She turns and steps toward the bakery's counter and buys a loaf of bread. It is Daniel's turn. He buys a few loaves next. He knows he is not yet free from Miss Salma's nagging and has to listen to the rest of her complaints. But he surprisingly notices miss Salma has forgotten to continue what she was saying. Daniel finds this the best opportunity to say goodbye and run away. So, he does. He politely tells her how happy he is seeing her again, says goodbye to her and races back home.

Daniel enters his house a few minutes later while carrying a few loaves of freshly baked traditional Arabic bread. He hears his wife Eva yelling as soon as he gets inside the house

"Wake up everybody" yells Eva. "Rise and shine. Wake up. Wake up. We must go. Hurry up, Nelly. You do remember your appointment with the doctor today. Don't you remember that I had to beg so many people to get you an appointment with this doctor? We are her first patient. Boys, hurry up. John, get your brothers down here, eat your breakfast and go to school. We must leave soon. Your dad and I should take your sister to the doctor. I want everybody at the breakfast table in five minutes"

Ezra, Eva's mother, is a bit short, chubby and one of the kindest old women people would ever get to meet. She moved in and stayed at her daughter's house after her husband passed away. Eva knows her mother is getting older and needs constant care and observation. That's why she asked her mom to rent out her house and move in with them. Eva knew that letting her mother stay on her own was unquestionably not the best idea. She used to worry about her all the time after her father died and she became all alone in her house. So, Eva asked her to come live with them. Like this, Eva could watch over her mom and take care of her. Also, she can ask her to babysit the kids every now and then.

Daniel entertained the idea of his mother-in-law living with them. He believes he can spend more quality time with his wife since his mother-in-law moved in with them. Because Ezra has nothing else to do, except helping Eva with her chores, watching the house and taking care of the kids. Ezra adores

her grandchildren and loves spending time with them. Just like most of the grandmas. Daniel has painted, repaired and furnished his basement with all necessary appliances she may need. So, she would also have. Ezra is quite happy to have her own sanctuary. Sometimes Ezra needs to be alone by herself and some other times she feels she has to give Eva, Daniel or even the children some space too.

Ezra comes upstairs from the basement and joins her daughter in the kitchen to help her prepare the breakfast. She greets everyone good morning as soon as she enters the kitchen and asks Eva to go get ready. She says she would prepare the breakfast instead. So, Eva leaves the kitchen and goes towards her bedroom directly. Eva can be heard calling everyone downstairs again moments later while entering her bedroom. She yells John's name. John is really annoyed with his mother's continues shouting to wake the whole house up.

"Oh my god mom" replies John. "How many times would you repeat yourself for heaven's sake mom? I swear to God we are coming. Stop already. Jesus."

Nelly, too hears her mother calling her again

"It's still God damn early mom" replies Nelly with a sleepy voice. "We still have a lot of time? What's wrong with you? You even woke the neighbors. Can someone please make her stop?"

Daniel remembers he has to take his wife and daughter to their doctor's appointment. His wife has scheduled a meeting with a well-known lady psychiatrist. She has waited three weeks for her to see Nelly. The psychiatrist stays in town for a limited period only, and Eva cannot lose this opportunity under any circumstances. Nelly is the first patient the psychiatrist would visit this morning. Eva has sent Nelly's medical records to Dr. Iman days earlier for her to have enough information and background about Nelly's medical history and her issues before hands.

Jacob, John and Liam's voices can be heard coming from their room, meaning they are already awake. They have woken up and begun fighting and yelling at each other as usual. Eva is seriously fed up with their behavior. Daniel is changing. He has to shout at the boys angrily to keep them quiet whenever they begin fighting. He orders them to come downstairs to the kitchen immediately and have their breakfasts quietly. John,

Jacob, and Liam run to the kitchen after hearing their father's warning voice. Eva also comes back to the kitchen dressed and ready to go. Boys say good morning to everyone. They sit at the breakfast table dressed in their school uniforms waiting for their breakfast. Daniel also goes to their bedroom and wears the clothes Eva has chosen and kept ready for him from the night before. He comes back to the kitchen and joins everyone. Eva arranges Daniel's next day clothes for him every night, so he would not think of what to wear or look for something to wear in the morning.

Nelly is still on her bed getting herself ready to get up. Ezra places a plateful of fried eggs and mushrooms over on the kitchen's table. Eva starts complaining after she notices Nelly is still not at the table. Eva looks at Daniel frowning

"You see?" Asks Eva disappointedly. "I've been calling her into the kitchen asking her to get ready an hour ago. Everybody is having breakfast except her. I bet she is not even out of her bed yet. I swear to God if we miss this appointment with Dr. Iman, getting another appointment would be a task next to impossible. It's a difficult thing to do. You see now? She doesn't even care. She has no interest in her health whatsoever."

Eva gets angrier by finishing each sentence. She is complaining when a loud, bloodcurdling scream startles them all. Daniel, Eva, and their sons Rush to Nelly's room quickly and find her crumpled under the window of her bedroom shaking. She is crying nonstop. She cannot even talk. Daniel and Eva are asking their daughter what has caused her scream and what scared her. But they suddenly notice an old, thin and dark-skinned man outside Nelly's window. He is sitting on the balcony floor shaking scared while covering his eyes with the palm of his left hand. The Old Man's appearance and the way he's dressed indicates that he is from a very low-income members of the society.

Daniel and Eva can already guess what resulted in Nelly's fear, screaming and crying. What has exactly happened is that Nelly has woken up in her sleeping gown like every day. The very first thing she did was she went to the window to open her curtains so sunlight would shine into her room. But she comes face to face with the old man who is actually cleaning her window that morning as soon as she slides the curtain open. This isn't the first time Nelly's family members witness such reactions from her. Eva tries to calm Nelly down

"Sweetheart," says Eva. "I told you last night that I had to hire someone to clean the windows. Honey, this poor old man does not look threatening. Look at him. Just have a look at him. He gets more startled and scared of hearing you scream than you, seeing him. Look how he is crumpled on the balcony floor poor old man".

Ezra is still in the kitchen. She strolls towards Nelly's room while complaining why no one would tell her what is going on. She keeps on asking everyone what made Nelly scream as she has no idea what has happened to her. Daniel is nervous and floundered himself. He looks at Eva quite worried and helps Nelly stand up.

"Let's go." Suggests Eva. "Take your clothes to our bedroom and wear them there, honey"

Nelly thinks it is a good idea. She goes to her parent's bedroom and Eva goes back to the kitchen along with her sons to give them breakfast and send them off to school. While going back to the kitchen though, Daniel explains what is going on to Ezra and they both go back to the kitchen. Nelly changes in the meanwhile and gets herself ready to leave the house. Daniel insists on Nelly to eat something before they leave the house. But she says she has lost her appetite and just wants to go visit the doctor and get that over with. She never like having breakfast. Daniel leaves the house moments later. He switches his pickup truck on and waits for Nelly and Eva to come out of the house, too. Nelly and her mother leave the house after a few seconds and sit in the vehicle ready to go visit Dr. Iman.

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Daniel's vehicle enters the parking lot of the clinic. He parks the car. Everyone gets out and the three of them walk inside the clinic building. They see the secretary seated behind her desk as soon as they enter. Eva goes to her first. She gets a piece of paper out of her purse and gives it to the secretary. The Secretary checks her computer for a moment and compares the information on the piece of paper with schedules recorded on the computer. She asks Eva and others to have a seat in the waiting room. A few minutes later, the secretary calls Nelly's family name and asks them to follow her. She takes them to Dr. Iman's office. Dr. Iman asks them to take a seat. She glances at Nelly first, she pulls a file

out of her desk drawer, opens it and starts studying the contents. She glances at Nelly again after a few seconds,

"Why are you nervous my dear?" inquires Dr. Iman. "Relax. You are going to be just fine. I promise"

Dr. Iman smiles at the three of them and continues checking Nelly's medical records. Dr. Iman looks at Nelly again a few seconds later and tells her they can talk alone without her parents being present if she wishes. Nelly is quiet for a second thinking. She gestures to her mom with her eye movements, pointing at her father hinting that she doesn't want him to be present when she speaks to Dr. Iman. Eva smiles and whispers something into Daniel's ear. Daniel gets up looking disappointed, but he does not lose his face, smiles and thanks Dr. Iman for seeing their daughter while exiting her office. He also tells Eva and Nelly that he'll be waiting for them by his car downstairs.

Daniel goes out of Doctor's office. He walks past the waiting room and exits the clinic building. Daniel lights a cigarette and lays against his pick-up truck. He is wondering why his daughter does not want him present there at Doctor's office. The man was actually more than surprised when his wife whispered into his ears asking him to leave the room. He knew all about his daughter's problems and what caused those issues. But he figured his wife would definitely tell him what she thought he should know. Daniel finishes smoking. He presses his cigarettes butt to a light pole and makes sure it is off. Daniel glances at his watch and sits into his vehicle. He switches the radio on while waiting. He is really impatient to know what the result of their visit with Dr. Iman would be. Daniel increases his car radio's volume to listen to the news. The news anchor starts narrating the news after saying hello to all his audience.

"According to the latest updates received from our reporters in central estates, in their constant attempt to rid our cities from Isis forces, our brave military personnel were able to take back parts of Al Raqqa city and its neighboring villages from Isis's brutal killers. We unfortunately lost eight fearless soldiers in the process who joined their other martyr brothers and sisters. Our soldiers were able to disarm many Isis members, forcing them to retaliate, during which thirty-two evil Isis members were killed and a substantial number of arms and ammunition were seized as spoils of war. During the attack, eight loyal soldiers of national guards

were also killed defending our country. Isis militants have begun small and unorganized attacks in Eastern and North East cities of the country, most of which are thwarted by the courageous efforts and dedications of our national forces. Now, I invite you to listen to the financial and subsequently today Sports news."

Daniel switches his radio off as soon as the next commentator wants to narrate the financial news. He has become quite concerned with the critical situation his country is in. Daniel is staring at the entrance door of the clinic building waiting for his wife and daughter to get out finally. They get out a few minutes later and sit in the car. Before driving the vehicle, Daniel asks about what happened and what was the outcome with Dr. Iman first. Eva knows how much her husband loves their children. She knows how important each and every single one of their children's well-being is for Daniel and since Nelly is their only daughter and has some psychological issues, Eva is willing to answer Daniel's every single question and as clear as possible, so he would not worry much for Nelly's problems. Nelly is quiet. She seems more relaxed than before. Eva begins explaining to Daniel their conversation with Dr. Iman and how she would treat Nelly.

"First of all," says Eva. "Let me tell you she is a very well experienced and nice psychiatrist. She's not one of those therapists who just graduated from the university and has no experience in such psychological challenges and illnesses whatsoever. You were there yourself in the beginning. She studied all contents of Nelly's file without haste and she didn't actually care how long it took. She read from A to Z of the file and began asking Nelly about the incident. She wouldn't let me talk if I want to reply instead of Nelly. She wants to hear everything from Nelly herself. My sweet daughter answered all her questions in details. She demonstrated her powerful personality by explaining to Dr. Iman everything about that incident and I was so proud of her for doing so. That's why the doctor said she was on the road to recovery. She said our beautiful daughter was almost there. she said Nelly didn't have to take some of her old pills anymore. She prescribed her new pills instead and told her to take one anytime she has a panic attack. Dr. Iman told Nelly to stop hiding from people in society. She has to act as if nothing has happened. Doctor Iman insisted Nelly had to appear within people, like everyone else. She told Nelly if she still finds it difficult showing up at places, she's not familiar with and interacting with people she does not recognize, she

initially has to start with people and places she feels comfortable with. She suggested to Nelly to start spending more time outdoors. Like at least two hours a day. In the end, she scheduled Nelly's next appointment, which would be around the fourth week of next month, to review her progress, new experiences and generally how she is'

As Eva explains everything, Daniel's facial expression transforms from worried and concerned, to calm and satisfied. He glances at Nelly and tells her he is so very much proud of her. Daniel asks her to follow her doctor's instructions precisely as she has been described. They are in the middle of the way when Daniel asks Eva and Nelly if they want to go anywhere else and they want him to take them to a shopping mall or something. But Eva tells Daniel that she cannot go anywhere else and needs to go back home, as she has hired the old man for cleaning the windows and the Balconies and she doesn't want to leave her mother alone at home. Daniel asks Nelly if she wants to go to school and attend her classes.

Eva had visited Nelly's school principal months ago and had informed her that Nelly wasn't able to attend the school for a few months as she would be traveling and staying at the capital. Daniel thinks now that Nelly's doctor appointment is over, maybe she wants to go to school if she has any questions from her teachers. But Nelly tells her father that she has decided to follow Dr. Iman's instructions and to spend some time out of their house. She says she wants to go to the cemetery and visit her grandmother, Daniel's late mother's grave. Daniel and Eva look at each other astonished if they heard what they thought they heard. They become quite excited and pleased with Nelly's decision. This is the first time Nelly has decided to spend some time out of the house alone after what happened to her. Daniel has become hasty of Joy

"Absolutely." responds Daniel happily. "Anything you want sweetheart. I will make a U-turn now and drop you at the cemetery."

Daniel's vehicle stops in front of the cemetery after a few minutes.

Before Nelly exits the car, Eva asks her how is she going back home. Does she want to walk home or she needs her father to pick her up later. Nelly ponders for a moment before responding. She says she's planning to stay at the cemetery for an hour or so. Then she would go to Liam's kindergarten

by walk, probably buy a book on the way, wait for Liam to finish and go back home together with him.

Nelly asks her father if he can pick them up from the kindergarten later. Daniel looks at his wristwatch, ponders for a moment and tries to remember if there are any immediate matters to be taken care of around that time. He replies he would pick them up for sure. Nelly asks her parents if she can have some pocket money. Because she wants to buy a book if she can find it at the book store. Daniel gives her some cash before she walks away from the car. Nelly thanks her dad, says goodbye to her parents and starts walking towards the cemetery's main entrance.

After Nelly gets out of the car, Daniel and Eva talk about Nelly's visit to her doctor. They are so cheery about the fact that she has decided to spend some time outside their house and be amongst the people who are not her immediate family members. Daniel and Eva have become blithe because of what Nelly told them she wanted to do that morning. They are hoping their daughter would recover quicker than they thought because she is showing signs of recovery and this makes them quite glad and excited.

After talking for a few minutes about Nelly's progress and the willingness she is showing to return to her normal self, Daniel and Eva speak about other subjects such as the war, Isis's inhuman acts and some news they have recently heard about them. Eva expresses how happy she is that the extermination, war casualties, Isis terrorists and the war in general has not embraced Al Darrah yet. Because with the news and the rumors she has been hearing, if Isis advanced and reached their town, of course protecting their children would especially be the priority for them and the most challenging task to consider.

Daniel agrees with Eva. He switches his car radio on again after hearing his wife talking about Isis. He wants to stay updated with the news. The radio channel Daniel tunes into broadcasts the news every thirty minutes. Daniel listens to the radio for a few minutes and waits for the reporters to narrate the news. But he suddenly realizes he is not alone. He thinks Eva is most definitely going to get very concerned and worried if she hears what he heard in the news a while ago about Isis getting closer. Daniel thinks his wife is inevitably going to panic and begin imagining terrifying scenarios, foreseeing what would happen to her family when



they get captured by Isis. What would happen to their children and every one individually. Daniel knows calming her down would be an almost impossible task as she would undoubtedly freak out big time.

Daniel knows his wife very well. He knows her way of thinking. Sometimes even better than Eva herself. He knows warp and woof of Eva's thoughts. Daniel decides to prevent any negative thoughts even to begin entering Eva's mind. So, he switches his car radio off immediately and masterfully. Daniel does not want to change his wife's mood that morning by letting her listen to stressful, scary stories about war and Isis terrorists while she started an optimistic day already by noticing changes in her daughter's behavior and improvements in her. Daniel loves his wife dearly and tries his best to keep her happy and in a positive mood. He and Eva are on the way home. They are happy and that's what matters to Daniel.

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Sammy, Robert and Amer are getting ready to get out of Sammy's apartment. They joke and laugh while having breakfast together. They have started a day and the three of them are in an excellent mood. Sammy takes his last bite of cheese and Arabic bread sandwich he has made. He is still seated on the breakfast table and is eating in peace. Amer, who is always in a hurry to see his fiancé Sara sooner, keeps on nagging and asking Sammy and Robert to hurry up. He has finished having his breakfast much earlier than the other two

"Ok, that's it." says Amer still nagging. "We're leaving the house right now. Come on, guys. It's getting late for God's sake. Mr. Sammy Samaha and Mr. Robert Shaffi, move your ugly asses."

Amer is staring at Sammy's mouth

"So, the plan is to drop Sammy at the cemetery. We then go and pick Sara and we'll go to Al Namar military base so Robert can look for his brother. Oh, by the way Sammy, don't wait for us for dinner. We will assuredly take till late in the evening. I mean we have a lot to do in the City. You eat your dinner I mean"

Amer and Robert are ready to go. They're just waiting for Sammy. Sammy enters his room, takes the sport outfits and personal stuff out of his backpack and puts his championship cup inside it instead.

"You don't need to change your route because of me." says Sammy. "I haven't had any exercise, any real movement for the past few days. That's not good for my leg. I better walk a little bit. Just do me a favor and drop me at the roundabout. I'll walk the rest of the way. It's better this way. I also want to think while walking."

Robert helps Sammy fix his knee strap and the three of them leave the apartment at last.

Amer, Sammy and Robert reach Al Darrah's only roundabout. Amer stops the car and reminds Sammy he shouldn't wait for them to return to have dinner together as they would only come back to Al Darrah after having their dinner in the city. Sammy gets off the car. Amer's car moves and Sammy begins walking towards the cemetery. But he suddenly remembers something after taking a few steps. He stops, searches his pockets and seems as if he has forgotten something. He examines every pocket of his clothes. But he cannot find what he is looking for. He double-checks his pockets. But no. It's not there. Sammy thinks of his backpack's pockets. He searches them, but still cannot find what he's looking for. Sammy is looking for the letter his dad wrote him before he passed away. That letter has sentimental values to him as it is the last words of his father intended for him to read. The message that Sammy considers his father's will, and he carries it with him wherever he goes. Sammy searches all his pockets for the third time. He searches all he's wearing. He looks extremely disappointed. He thinks he has lost his father's Memento. But his fingertips suddenly feel a piece of paper in his shirt's pocket. He has found the letter. He is relieved and continues walking.

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Amer, Sara and Robert arrive at Al Namar military base. Amer's vehicle exits the main road and turns towards Al Namar base's parking lot. A guard responsible for checking exits and entries of visitors stops Amer's vehicle. He gets closer and stands by Amer's window. Amer pulls his window down smiling and the guard asks him the purpose of their visit and the department they intend to go to. But Robert is the one who answers instead before Amer begins talking. He tells the guard that they have been referred by the headquarters in the capital and they are there to follow up his brother's whereabouts. The guard asks Amer for his license,

registration and everyone's IDs. He takes their ID's to his kiosk and comes back a while later and registers everyone. Robert explains that it will only be him to enter the office Building and his companions will remain in the car. But according to the base's security rules, the guard has to register any vehicle crossing the yellow line in front of the Kiosk weather entering or exiting and all visitors are required to obtain an entry permit first. Amer thanks the guard and drives his vehicle into the base's parking lot.

The parking lot is filled with personal and military vehicles. Most of the vehicles seem like they have not been used for quite a long time. The parking lot resembled a scrap yard or a car graveyard. Most of the cars are dusty and dirty. Some of the vehicle's tires are flattened because they have been under the sun for god knows how long without being used. Amer parks his vehicle next to the guard's kiosk. Before leaving Sara and Amer, Robert apologizes to them for having to wait for a while. He steps out of the car and promises he would try his best not to keep them waiting for long. He walks towards base's office building.

The base has an office building with a big bullet-proof glass entrance that Robert cannot even imagine he has to walk for so long to reach. No matter how long he walks, he realizes there is still some more walking to do when he looks at the building. The office building is a massive building which by looking at it from a far, one would think of it to be much closer than it actually is. Robert walks for six consecutive minutes until he finds himself at the front stairs below the building. His legs are already tired. But he has to take so many stairs up now. Robert takes the stairs slowly one by one and reaches the glass entrance of the office building at last. He stands putting his hands around his waist when he reaches the top of the stairs, leaning forwards and backward few times to stretch his back and leg's muscles. Robert crosses the heavy glass door and walks inside the building. He sees a wide hall in front of him.

There is an information desk located at the center of the hall. The entire floor is covered with shiny beige marble stones. The ceiling has a large dome. The hall has been engineered in a way that visitors can hear a needle drop. In contrast to what the building seems from the outside, the inside of the building is deserted. Nobody can be seen around, but the information desk attendant who is actually a soldier sitting behind the information counter.

There are several corridors and offices all around the hall. The name of each department and the name of the department's head is carved on each office glass door.

Robert ambles to the information desk. He takes a piece of paper out of his document bag and hands it over to the soldier attending the desk. Robert requests the soldier to contact major Al Ameen's office and inform him that Mr. Abraham Shaffi's oldest son is there to see him. The soldier takes a close look at the paper. He asks Robert to wait while he contacts major Al Ameen's secretary to make sure he accepts visitors at that particular hour. After contacting the concerned department, the soldier apologizes for keeping Robert and tells him he is just waiting for major's secretary to issue him an entrance permit so he can enter office levels. He tells Robert he has to go to support staff department on the 4th floor after his permit is issued. That is where Major Al Ameen is currently located.

The soldier asks Robert about his brother and Robert tells him briefly the story of his brother's disappearance while waiting for his permit to get issued. Robert notices the soldier looks bored. He sounds to be craving for a companion. Also, his facial expressions and body language clearly indicates that he really doesn't have much to do and is just there because he is a soldier and responsible for attending to the information desk. Robert asks him the reason the base is so quiet and deserted. The soldier nods with a big smile on his face. As if he knows it himself that their base is quite deserted. The soldier tells Robert that the base used to be so crowded with people before clashes between Isis and the government forces was initiated. He tells Robert that he had to acquire a number and wait in the line for few hours depending on his purpose of visit, before someone attended to him. But now, because of the war with Isis, over eighty-five percent of the staff, even office clerks have been deployed to war zones. That's why the gigantic building with a huge number of offices and rooms, does not have much staff and visitors.

The soldier is describing the pre-war situation of the base for Robert when the phone on his desk rings. He picks the phone and speaks a few words he tells Robert he is now permitted to go upstairs to Major Al Ameen's office. The soldier gives Robert a small laminated card attached to a chain and asks him to hang it on his neck and keep it there until the moment he is stepping out of the building. The

soldier points at the east staircases, asks Robert to go to the fourth floor and look for the sign saying "Support Staff". Robert thanks the soldier and walks upstairs. Stairs of the office building are higher than standard stairs. Robert is already tired. He has walked a long distance, has taken many stairs to reach the entrance and now should take some unusually high stairs to get to the fourth floor. He is quite annoyed by the fact that the building that modern, huge and beautiful, covered with precious marble stones and finishing, has no elevators installed for the visitors to use going down and upstairs to the higher floors. Robert goes the entire four floors by foot. He sees "Support Staff Department" Carved on a glass door and he knows he has found the office he is looking for. Robert knocks on the glass door twice and enters without waiting for anyone to allow him to enter.

There is a secretary desk opposite office entrance and another door to the right opening to a nicely decorated office, which apparently is the major's office. Robert enters the office and sees a tall, handsome, well dressed and sharp-looking gentleman. Robert would guess that should be major Al Ameen. The major is talking to his secretary who is of course another soldier like the guy on the information desk downstairs or probably any other clerk working at that base. The major is issuing certain orders and at the same time justifying his secretary in regards to his department's affairs.

The major is a forty-year-old gentleman. He looks brilliant having a well-ironed uniform on. Major smiles and welcomes Robert. He introduces himself and shakes Robert's hand as soon as he notices Robert entering his office. He also introduces his secretary as "Karim." Robert introduces himself too and thanks the major for seeing him.

The major greets Robert with a warm welcome since his father has already told him about Robert and the purpose of his visit. He directs Robert over to his own office and asks him to sit and feel comfortable. Major tells Robert he has been expecting him and he is happy to meet him. Robert hands major the same piece of paper he had shown to the soldier at the information desk downstairs. He also takes out a file he has prepared about his brother's military history by putting together copies of all documentation that he could gather since he has begun searching for Robin and hands it over to the major. The major opens the file and turns its pages having a quick look at its contents. Robert is snooping around the major's office. Major has a nice well-ordered office. There

is a golden plate with major's surname and his rank on it. "Major Abdi Al Ameen. Major is still on Robin's file. Robert wants to talk. He glances at the major,

"I would like to thank you and your kind father of course, on behalf of all my family members for agreeing to help. We are well aware that you are doing this despite being pre-occupied considering the country's current situation, having to attend to so many job-related matters being a military major. I also want you to know that this means a lot to us. Your father was kind enough to request you to help us find my brother. I am sorry for taking your valuable time, major. I hope I'm not disturbing you in such difficult times. That's very nice of you to have agreed to see me" continues Robert after a quick pause.

"As you can see in his file, my brother Robin, started his military service around eight months and a few days ago. I've got all his documents here with me. He used to send us letters, text messages and emails. We often spoke using internet. We skyped, chatted and were in touch. Therefore, we knew where he was all the time, what he did, how he was. As I said, we heard from him often. That's why we had no worries at all. He was deployed few days after he finished his military training. He was sent somewhere around the Iraqi Syrian border. I have gathered all the related papers. They're in that file you are holding. Yeah. I guess it's more than six months now since he was sent there to the war zone. I'm not sure whether it is on the border or near the Iraqi border. We've neither heard nor could find the location on the map. As I said, he used to write or call at least twice a week. We never got disconnected no matter what. My parents were also in good mental health since they knew their son's whereabouts. They were okay because they knew their son was at reach. They knew they could call or write to him any minute they felt like if they missed him. But it's quite a while now major that we haven't heard from him at all. I swear to God I visited any place you can think of to find out where he is. Because you see? If we didn't hear anything from him for a few days or maximum a week, we would say he is not able to reach us, he is busy, or there are no internet connections where he is located. We do understand, of course, he is a soldier and does not belong to himself and does definitely not enjoy the luxury of having his time to himself. If it was two or three weeks, we would still not be this much alerted as there may be a reasonable explanation for it. We can fool ourselves only so much major. It's now fifty-seven days since

we last heard of him. No one knows where he is. No one has heard from him.”

While Robert is talking about his brother's disappearance, major takes his eyes off the file every few seconds, glances at Robert, nods and continues reading again. Robert wants to keep talking when the major stops him, apologizes and calls his secretary, Karim, into his office. Karim responds he is coming in a second. Karim enters the office moments later holding two cups of tea in a silver plate. He places the plate right in front of Robert on the coffee table. Major takes a page out of the file, hands it over to Karim and instructs him to search for Mr. Robin Shaffi's name in the system by entering the file classification number written on the top of the document. Robert who is impatient to continue explaining what he has prepared to tell the Major about his brother's disappearance, decides maybe he has said enough after he heard what major instructed his secretary to do. He thinks it is better to just sit and wait for Karim to come back with some good news. Major picks one of the teacups and offers to Robert to drink before it gets cold.

Robert takes a cup of tea and they both drinks. Robert is under lots of stress and anxiety. He is quite worried and his hands tremble while holding his teacup. All Robert hopes and prays for is to hear some promising news at last. He is thinking what could have happened to his brother. Robert finishes his hot cup of tea without even sweetening it. Even the Major notices Robert's nervousness and anxiety. He asks Robert to be calm and think positive. He tells Robert everything is going to be alright.

Major's cell phone rings. He picks his phone and starts talking. Robert thinks it is a good idea to call Amer and suggest to them to go ahead without him if they feel bored, are in a hurry or tired of sitting in the car waiting for him. He feels bad as he has promised Amer his visit to the base and major's office would not take more than fifteen to twenty minutes. But Robert seems to be taking longer than that. It is twenty-five minutes since he has entered the office building and he does not know how long he should still stay there. So, he calls Amer and apologizes for making him and Sara wait that long. He tells Amer he is honestly not sure how long it is still going to take him and he does not want to be the reason for him and his fiancé not to be able to attend to their chores. Robert feels guilty, mainly because Sara also has no choice but to wait for God knows how long?

Robert asks Amer to apologize to Sara on his behalf and explains to her that he had no idea he was going to take that long. Amer has placed Robert's call on speaker. So, Sara has heard their conversation. Sara asks Robert not to worry with a loud voice so Robert would hear her clearly. She begins joking with Robert and asks him to relax and stay there as long as he needs. Amer and Sara tell Robert they are not halfway comrades and they would wait for him to finish no matter how long it takes. Robert is proud to have such loyal friends. He thanks them both and promises to head back as soon as he gets some satisfying information about his brother's whereabouts.

Major's telephone conversation ends moments after Robert hangs up the phone. Karim returns to the Major's office. He goes to major's desk and whispers something into his ear that changes major's facial expression. Karim steps back waiting for major's next instruction. The Major orders him to go back to his desk and attend to other tasks until he is told what to do next. Major pauses for a moment pondering. He seems like he is thinking of an alibi. He gazes at the file Robert has given him for a few second while Robert impatiently waits for him to say something. Major starts talking finally. He looks at Robert and says he needs to investigate his brother's case further while having an artificial smile on his face. Major asks Robert to contact him the following day so they would discuss their next step after he has done some more research on Robin. It is quite apparent that the major does not want to talk about Robert's brother anymore after Karim whispered something into his ear. This incident gave Robert the impression that the major is hiding something and sending him on the wild goose chase.

Major asks Robert to remain positive, attend to his daily routine as usual and contact him the next day. He picks one of his business cards from his card holder to hand it over to Robert. But he notices a change in Robert's facial expression. Robert seems aggravated, disappointed and desperate. Suspecting or knowing that major is trying to hide something from him, Robert seems very disgruntled. He refuses to take the card indignantly and asks major to listen to what he has to say first. The major who is surprised with Robert's reaction sits next to him

"My dear Mr. Shaffi" says the major in a kind caring voice. "It's better if you call me tomorrow morning my friend. Let



me have some more time to investigate. I promise to tell you everything I find out"

But Robert interrupts the major

"Major" replies Robert sarcastically. "I mean Mr. Major Al Ameen. Please just hear me out and listen to me and what I have to say for two minutes. Please."

Major gives up. He keeps quiet and waits for Robert to tell him what he wants to say.

"Major sir" continues Robert. "you are a very respectable and kind gentleman, major. I may be wrong. But I have a feeling your expressions changed after your secretary whispered something into your ear. You seemed like you were not expecting to hear what you were just told by your secretary. I clearly saw your mood changing or maybe you even got angry by what your secretary told you. I beg you as a Syrian, as a human, as a friend, to please tell me what's going on. Please major. You have no idea how difficult waiting is. Especially for a parent who have been counting days, waiting to see their child again. My parent's eyes are at the door all the time waiting for their son to open the door and enter. They have been waiting for almost two months for my brother to arrive. Look major, I swear to God if we know he's killed in the war by Isis we will not suffer as much as we are suffering now just waiting for him to show up not knowing whether he will or he will not. We pray for him, pray to see him every single day and try to think positive. Just tell me. What is it? What did your secretary tell you? I've been assigned by my parents to go look for my brother. They are now waiting for a phone call from me to tell them what I found out. They are waiting for their child, major. I'm absolutely assured you do understand how that feel. Should they still wait? Tell me. Please, Major. Will he ever return?"

Major Al Ameen is looking at his boots now. He is sweating on his forehead and seems restless. As if something bothers him. Something that only he and Karim know. He is struggling to overcome the dilemma

"Imagine it is your own brother God forbid" continues Robert. "Your own son or your own cousin, niece, nephew, I don't know. A relative. Just tell me. I swear I do understand. I mean I can take it. It's the war for God's sake and I know war comes with casualties. The whole package. Men get shot, wounded, burnt, killed. I get it. But how many would disappear major?"

Just help to bring a whole family out of Darkness. Out of worry and misery. I beg you to tell me if you know anything. God will give you a reward I tell you. This is the law of the Universe major. If you do good things, good things come back to you. Tell me anything. But please, I'm not leaving this office without an answer. Enough of darkness."

The major gets up and walks towards his office door. He tells his secretary not to connect any calls to him until further notice. He closes his office's door, comes back and sits next to Robert, again.

"I'm sure it's nothing" spits major Al Ameen. "But I just tell you what I know for sure right now. All that I'm about to tell you is as a matter-of-fact confidential information that we are not allowed to reveal to the public under any circumstances. But your case is a special case for me and we both know it. Now, I know you and I like you to be honest. I have so much respect for your father who is an old colleague and a good friend of my dad. So, I assure you that I would not hesitate giving you any information that may help you. I'm in my military uniform, Mr. Robert. But this does not make me any different than others. I am also coming from the same people and the same society. I understand people's concerns, their worries and issues. Just one thing I want to request you, to kindly keep whatever I tell you between us as a secret and never repeat it elsewhere. Like I said, my boundary of information is limited now in regards to your brother. According to the reports, around the same time you say you lost contact with your brother, some few events coincided, around and near the Iraqi border. One of the incidents was that two hundred and nineteen people of our army troops were captured by Isis around the same time. They were held by Isis as war prisoners. Another incident was that Isis besieged and cordoned off our martyr Evacuation team. These are the people who are responsible for clearing the war zone from the corpse of our troops and transferring them back to their families. They were transferring one hundred forty-three bodies to the back of the front. They're actually still under Siege as we speak. We have found your brother's name in the main list of soldiers we have sent to the war zone. Believe me, I'm telling you exactly what I know myself. But we do not know at the moment whether your brother is amongst the soldiers under Siege or not. If god forbid, he is amongst soldiers who have been captured, I'm so sorry. But I'll have to tell you frankly, I know, I mean everyone knows what those mother fuckers shitty evil Isis people would do to their

Prisoners of War. Look. You insisted on knowing, Robert and it's my duty as a human, as a friend to get you out of the dark like you expect me to. I also have to get your mind ready for everything. Anyways, even if your brother is among besieged soldiers, god forbid again, we military people and personnel know what Isis does after getting enemy soldiers surrounded. First, they kill as many as they can so that the number of soldiers fighting against them decreases and they then capture any number of those who surrender. In which case, again we know what their fate would be. I'm sorry, but you have to be prepared for any scenario. When Isis takes enemy soldiers under Siege, they kill as much as they can and if anyone is left, they make an example of them. They perform mass burials. Mass executions. They make a huge hole with the loader truck and pool the Prisoners of War inside and bury them all together alive. They are merciless fuckers. Sorry for the language. They behead their Prisoners of War and record them, or they torture them to extract information from them if they think whom they have as a prisoner may know something or may have specific information which is useful to them. Sometimes and in rare cases, they use their prisoners of war to exchange prisoners."

Having said all these, we still do not know what the situation of your brother is. I hope he is neither captured nor is under Siege. These are the information we have so far. Remember, I'm not saying God forbid your brother is dead, nor he's still alive. I'm neither saying your brother is captured nor is under Siege.

Robert nods. He pats on major's shoulder. He tells the major that he understands, while tears are about to roll down his face. He asks the major to continue.

"The thing is," continues major with a sad voice "even if he's dead, we wouldn't know. Because the team responsible for bringing the bodies back from the battlefield is under siege. We have no way of communicating with them. No means of communication whatsoever. Our forces are doing all they can to save them right now as we speak. They have enough food and water, fortunately, to survive while fighting back to get themselves out of the siege. But there is another possibility in regards to this case. Your brother may be alive and well, but under siege like many others. That's why he cannot contact you, and you cannot contact him obviously. I mean, military personnel such as myself cannot establish contact with any of them, let alone civilians like yourself. About what you saw, I mean Karim whispering something into my ear and my face

changing like you said. I gave Karim a document from your brother's file and instructed him to go check your brother's last seen status in the system. He came back to me and whispered into my ears that he had found out that your brother was one of code C 21. This code means all that I've been explaining to you for the past few minutes. Yeah. I got upset. I don't deny that. Because first of all, according to what Karim told me, your brother's case is an unusual case. I got a little upset because according to what I was told by Karim, you would still not get to find out what you are here to find out. I also got upset because I put myself in your shoes for a second. Karim, that stupid secretary of mine whispering those shit into my ears, while you are here, sad and anxious, trying to figure what happened to your brother. Of course, if I were you, I would also get worried with a thousand negative thoughts, thinking why something is whispered into major's ear instead of being told loud and clear. Now look, we receive a report about our forces who are under siege, those who are wounded and those we have lost twice a week. Tomorrow is the day we should receive the second report of this week. I suggest you don't waste your time here today anymore. You better leave now, call me tomorrow between eleven AM to three PM. I will investigate your brother's case further. I might be able to find out some new info about him. If I can find out something the better. Otherwise, I'll go to the capital. I mean the headquarters, which is located in the capital or I'll visit the defense Ministry to see if I can find anything about him there. I don't want to say that I will go to the capital particularly to find out something about your brother alone. There are some other friends, family friends, relatives, and neighbors that have someone with a similar situation I'll have to follow up. They're just like you Mr. Robert, waiting in darkness."

Robert pulls a tissue out and wipes his tears off. He thanks Major and his secretary. This time, Robert is the one who asks major for his business card. He shakes major's hand, says goodbye to Karim and leaves the office. Robert goes downstairs and notices the soldier at the information desk is staring at him with a curious look on his face. It is apparent that the soldier at the information desk wants to find out if Robert's meeting with the major was productive. Robert tells him he has to contact the Major the following day while walking out of the building.

Robert exits the office Building and starts running towards Amer's car. He knows he has made Amer and Sara wait for quite

a long time and wants to be back to them as fast as he can. Robert enters Amer's car breathing heavily. He immediately begins apologizing to them for keeping them for that long. Sara, being a kind and good-natured girl, doesn't want Robert to feel sorry and anguished,

"Oh, Mr. Robert" says Sara sarcastically, making fun of Amer. "No worries at all. Believe it or not, there were advantages in you being stuck at Major's office this long. First of all, I've gotten to know my future husband even better as I have discovered some new surprising facts about him while waiting for you. I didn't know he had another side to him."

Sara stops laughing and kidding.

"But seriously," Continues Sara, "even if we didn't come to the base and went directly to Al Thawrah city, again, we would have been sitting in the car, waiting for shops and stores to open. You could at least attend to something important while we waited here. But the waiting would have still been in today's menu if we went to the city directly, without coming to this base first. Believe you me. We would still be waiting. Because shops and stores I need to visit will only open somewhere around noon time. Besides, you didn't really take that long. Around thirty to forty-five minutes tops. The most important thing for us is for you to find your brother. That's what matters really.

Roberts smiles and thanks Sara for being such a nice and cool girl. But Robert's mind is wrapped around what major has explained to him.

"So, what happened?" asks Amer checking Robert out from his rearview mirror eagerly. "So? talk. What happened?"

"Stop asking him so many questions" says Sara interrupting Amer. "there may be things he can't talk about. I'm sure he'll tell you if he feels it is ok to tell them."

Robert says that is okay. Because there are no secrets between himself, Amer and Sammy. He says he is well aware that Amer asks him those questions because he is as well worried for his brother, Robin. Robert explains to them the outcome of his meeting with major Al Ameen. While explaining what the major has told him, Sara notices Robert's very sad and hopeless facial expression. But he also seems like he is trying his best not to let his tears slip out of his eyes. Sara begins comforting him. She and Amer speak to Robert,

give him hope, ask him to pray, stay positive and be patient. Because nothing is still definite about his brother's situation. Sara advises Robert to contact his parents and explain everything to them. Sara and Amer tell Robert not to rush and take as long as he needs. Because they are not in a hurry to leave. They ask Robert to get out of the car and talk to his parents in private. Robert pauses for a moment. He gets of the car and calls home. His mother is the one who answers the phone as usual. Disappearance of her youngest son has destroyed her. She is overwhelmed by the fact that she may never be able to see her child again, and Robert can feel it by hearing her sigh and her vibrating voice. She has been waiting to hear some news about his son for weeks. After hearing Roberts voice, she gets excited for a moment thinking that Robert may have something new to tell them or have good news. She asks Robert about his meeting with the major. Robert who has a substantial role in controlling his family's emotions, especially his mother's, tries to share what himself and the major speaks about using conversational techniques and appropriate words so she would take it slowly and easily. Robert tells her almost everything the major told him. But he sugarcoats the facts and explains everything, the way they mostly lean towards positive side. He gives her hope and promises he will soon find out everything and will hopefully have good news for her and his dad. Robert asks his mother to stay positive and pray. One thing that Robert's mother is very eager to know is, whether major Al Ameen has greeted Robert well and if he was enthusiastically helping? Or major thinks he has to help because his father has instructed him to. Robert explains to his mother what a kind-hearted well-natured gentleman major Al Ameen is. Robert says he has become good friends with him and there is nothing to worry about. He changes the subject and asks his mother how is everyone back home? He asks her to hand the phone over to his dad. He says he wants to say hello to him before hanging up. Robert starts having a conversation with his dad. He tells his dad whatever he told his mother. Robert's father, who is as concerned and worried as his mother, speaks with a miserable voice. He is also overwhelmed by the fact that his son is missing. Roberts father speaks with a certain spite that makes Robert sad. He asks Robert's personal opinion about the possibility of finding his brother alive. Robert ponders for a moment. He doesn't know what to answer his dad. He doesn't really have anything to say. Even if he wants his parents not to lose hope. Whatever he guesses and anticipates about his brother's fate is based upon the information major has given him. Hearing wobbly gloomy voice of his father, who

sounds like he is about to cry, Robert bursts into tears himself. Now he cannot speak neither. like his father cannot. Robert and his father know they cannot speak anymore as grief and sadness has taken over. They decide to postpone their conversation to the next day and after Robert's telephone conversation with the major.

After hanging up, Robert wipes his tears and returns to Amer's car. Amer starts driving. He stops by the same entrance and exit kiosk and collects everyone's IDs. The vehicle exits the parking lot and enters the main road moments later. They head towards Al Thawrah City.

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Sammy is walking slowly towards the cemetery. He sees Al Darrah's bookshop and notices several new books on display. He stops in front of the shop, checks the new titles for a few seconds and continues walking again. He suddenly feels a severe pain in his left leg. The pain forces him to stop and take a break. He has not walked that much for a very long time. Sammy is writhing in pain. His left leg is cramped. The pain forces him to lean against a low wall beside the sidewalk. He begins bending and stretching his leg until a few seconds later that he starts feeling a bit better. Sammy can already see the cemetery's wall. It is around five hundred meters away. But he is very tired and doesn't want to continue walking anymore. On the other hand, he has no other choice but to carry on. The cemetery is not that far for him to take a cab and not so close for him to continue walking. So, he decides to continue walking slowly to finally make it to the cemetery. He fixes his knee strap as tight as he can and begins walking again. Sammy's mind goes back to what happened to his father automatically. Thoughts of days he had with his father, hunting trips he had gone with him and stories his dad had told him on their trips.

It isn't long before Sammy finds himself in front of the cemetery's entrance. He enters the enclosed area of the cemetery and walks towards his father's grave. He has a strongly emotional feeling. There are not too many staff or visitors in the cemetery. Only two or three people can be seen at the Christian section.

Al Darrah's Cemetery consists of two different sections. Muslim section and Christian section. There is Muslim cemetery right by the cemetery's entrance. There are graves

at the left and right side of the pavement and at the opposite side, around hundred meters further, is the Christian cemetery.

Morning breeze blows and the smell of flowers and plants at the Garden of the cemetery delivers a relaxing sensation to numerate visitors. Sammy looks at the graves at his left and right, thinking all the people are laying dead in their graves, with different names, ages, genders, believes, educations and mentalities, who once upon a time walked, talked, laughed and cried like him when they were alive. But they have all become like a piece of wood, without soul or any sense, feelings, emotions and worries etc. Because they're already dead and that's what would be left after death. A body, a shape, a big mass of flesh and bone, with nothing else in it in terms of senses.

Sammy reaches his father's grave and sees his tombstone covered with dust, gravel and dirt. All the memories come back and he starts crying. It is evident that no one has paid his father's grave a visit for a very long time and this breaks Sammy's heart. He notices a lady at the Christian cemetery who is completely in black. She is around fifty or sixty yards away from Sammy. The lady has her back to Sammy. She has a white color bucket next to her and it looks as if she is washing a tombstone with the water in the bucket. Sammy thinks of going to her and barrowing the bucket from her, so he too can wash his father's tombstone. But he is extremely emotional at that moment and doesn't want anyone to see him cry. So, he decides to do it later if she is still there. Sammy sits by his father's grave while tears roll down his face. He is weeping, remembering all good moments he had with his dad. He opens his backpack, takes his championship cup out and places it next to his father's tombstone. A big piece of nicely shined marble stone has been placed below the grave for people and visitors to have somewhere to sit in case they feel tired. Extremely emotional, Sammy sits on the piece of stone and starts staring at his dad's picture, which is artistically engraved on his tombstone. He remembers all the fun he had with his dad. Memories he had with his father are crossing through his mind. He remembers his childhood and all those sweet memorable moments he had with his father. He remembers the day he reached home after school and noticed suspicious looks and smile on his mom and dad's face. It was the last day of school and the beginning of summer vacations. Sammy remembers losing patience wanting to know the reason his parent's suspicion raising smiles and looks. But he was



suddenly surprised after they unveiled the bicycle, they had bought him. It was the first bicycle he ever had in his life. It is a blue bicycle with nice looking tires.

Sammy remembers days he had become injured and hospitalized because of his leg injury. He remembers he saw his mother and father by his bedside, worried and shaky, waiting, any time of the day and night he opened his eyes. He misses his dad so much. He has felt an irreparable damage to his soul and heart since his dad passed away. A feeling that perhaps no one else can comprehend. And now, he is at his father's grave for the first time after his funeral to talk to him and tell him all what he had always wanted to tell him. He wanted to empty himself and his heart off all hidden unattended ignored feelings he had for the past four years. By being there and talking, he actually wants to finally cure the wound in his heart and soul. Sammy is also there to share his achievements with his father. Goals he has achieved. Objectives his father wanted him to achieve, that would have made him so proud.

The sob and gulp Sammy has felt in his throat for years, is probably because of the fact that he is angry at his father. That is also why he has not visited his grave all those years, and now that he is there, he has many things to tell his dad. Sammy has felt the absence of his father many times. He has strongly felt his empty place. He is thankful to God that his mom is still alive. But the presence of a father for a teenage boy is so essential that it's impossible to explain. Sammy is still crying. He has forgotten to carry his handkerchief or at least some tissue with him. He wipes his tears with his shirt sleeves. His shirt sleeve has become wet and multicolored. Sammy takes his father's letter out, stares at it for a moment and smiles bitterly. He unfolds the letter and starts talking.

"Hi dad. It's been four years already." says Sammy moaning. "It's been four years that I have thought of you every single day. I missed you every day and you are not there. I missed you every day, going to school and coming back. In this four year, before I go to sleep every night, I remembered the day I left Al Darrah for the capital, to go to the hospital to see you before you were taken to the surgery room. I am so excited to finally be with you, seated in the car, on the way to the hospital with aunt Aunt Zinat, Amer and uncle Aser. Oh god, how hopeful I was. How enthusiastic and Joyful. I really truly looked forward to seeing you dad. But. I have missed you so much that you can't even begin to imagine. I wish you

waited for me a bit longer dad. I wish I could see you one last time before you left us forever. This is a stupid demand of course. It sounds stupid I know. But four years ago, I was four years younger and considering my emotional estate, it didn't sound stupid at all. You may want to know the reason I did not come visit you here at your grave. Anger dad. Anger was the reason. I was angry that I couldn't see you before you were gone. Angry because you didn't wait for me. Angry because I had a thousand dreams and hopes for us both. Hopes of having you around the day I graduated. Hopes of sharing with you what interested me as I grew up. Sadly, you didn't survive bullets of those Isis bastards and there is nothing I can do about it. I am angry that I wanted to tell you about my happiness, sadness, disappointments and achievements and all my other feelings with you and you were gone. Oh, the happy moments we could have together, dad."

Sammy pauses for a few seconds. He continuously sobs. He cleans his cheeks with his shirt sleeve again.

"You see," Continues Sammy raising his tone. "At least you said what you wanted in a piece of paper before you left. Not me though. I couldn't even tell you what I wanted, not even in writing, and that troubled me every time I thought about you. You were gone so quickly that I didn't even have a chance to say goodbye. To be honest dad, I had a lot to tell you. I had many untold issues to talk to you about and I still do. God damn this life. You have no idea how much I wanted you to be around. To be around and see your son, your cripple son proving otherwise."

Sammy's face turns angrier. He starts looking hateful all of a sudden.

"Mother fuckers" Continues Sammy yelling angrily. "Bastards. Why you? Why my father? God, if you hear me, I beg you, just give me a chance to revenge my father's blood. Please God. Give me a chance to take revenge. Let me make them feel how losing a father, being an orphan is like."

Sammy is yelling angrily without paying any attention to his surroundings, without noticing anyone or even troubling himself to see what is going on around. He pauses and keeps quiet for a moment. Sammy is playing with his father's letter and giving it from one hand to another

"This is your last memento dad" Continues Sammy with a low voice, holding the paper up. "Your last memento. The letter you wrote me before leaving this world. Believe it or not, I've memorized every word of it. I have your letter with me all the time, dad. But all what you wrote, everything is carved on my heart and soul. I've brought it with me now, so you would see it and realize how important this letter is to me. Not only important because it's your last memento, but also because of its contents, your advices, your words and all what you thought me in it. I owe whatever I has achieved, to listening to you, taking your advice and being how you wanted me to be. I've tried my best not to fail you dad. Like you told me in your letter, I've never allowed consequences and disasters in my life, which losing you is the most significant one by the way, stop me pursuing my dreams. But dad, first I had to try adjusting to not having you around. Even if my efforts to do so proved to be inadequate and it's clear as day to me, that I'll have to carry the heavy load of your absence until the last moment of my life. Until last breath I take."

Sammy's voice has become softer now. He begins talking in a more relaxed and calmer way. He continues talking to his father, telling him all what he wants his dad to know. Sammy felt guilty for not paying his father's grave a visit for past four years. He apologizes to his dad for it and continues by telling him what he has rehearsed for a long time to tell him. Sammy is sobbing quietly. But he speaks with a serious face

"Mom's ok." Continues Sammy. "I won't let life be hard on her. At least, I do my best not to. I guess what I mean to say is, I've been taking a good care of her. I hope. She's at Aunt Zinat's house now. It's Amer's engagement ceremony in a few days. It's something like around a week or so. I couldn't believe it myself in the beginning. But yes Sir. Aunt Zinat's son, Amer is getting engaged. Interesting huh?"

I didn't tell mom I was coming here today. I wanted to be alone with you. Mom still misses you sometimes you know. She used to forget you were not with us anymore. She still placed three plates on the table when she wants to serve lunch or dinner. For months after you were gone.

Well, you'll be happy to hear that like you always tried to convince me, my disability never influenced my decisions and self-confidence. You'll also be happy to know that Robert and

I, just came back from a target shooting tournament. It was held in Beijing, capital of china. I pursued target shooting as my sport, like you suggested. I guess going hunting with you, was what triggered target shooting in me. Yeah, Robert and I came back the day before yesterday. Robert got the first place and I got the second. I've brought my championship cup with me here to show it to you.

I've continued studying dad. Again, Robert and I are both college students now. We are actually classmates. Most of the professors believe we are both amongst good students. They believe we have a good future ahead of us. We're studying the subject you know I loved ever since. Mechanical Engineering of course. We are currently on a break though. We had to take a short break because of the tournament in china. But soon, in a few days, we will go back to our regular college routine and continue studying.'

Sammy dries his tears

"Well? Let me see what else?" Continues Sammy smiling, thinking and trying to remember. "oh, yeah, you wrote me about a girl, which would one day make me fall in love with her. Unfortunately, or fortunately dad, I've not come across a girl who interest's me that much yet and I may not meet the girl for a long time still. But I promise you, if one day I get to know a girl, who is that attractive and nice that captured my heart, I wouldn't allow my disability to stand on the way and prevent a positive emotional revolution happening in me. I wouldn't let the problem I have with my leg, stop me trying to establish a relationship with the girl I fall in love with. I wouldn't back off because of my limp.

About the rifle, everything including the drawing, machinery, tools and everything are all still there at home. I've made some changes though. I relocated and rearranged everything dad to make them reachable. I actually did it for my own convenience. It is too difficult for me to go to the basement five stories below considering my limp leg. So, I transferred everything up to the apartment and placed them all at my room. But, to be quite honest dad, I have not even touched the rifle, machinery or any of the tools for a long time, let alone completing the modification and developing it. Because I had to study hard for the tournament and I got busy with other stuff after that etc. It was only around two or three months back when I looked at the rifle's drawings and studied it very carefully. Of course, I've figured the method by which

I can get that particular part made. I promise you, that I'll finish the work on the rifle and get it all done before your fourth anniversary. I'll take it out for a test. I knew about the bullet box you wrote me. I've seen it at the storage room and left it there for now. They're safer there I'm sure. I want to take the rifle out hunting with Amer and Robert when I finish working on it and making the changes according to its drawing. I promise that I will soon prove that there's nothing wrong with the design of that rifle. The only work left like I said, is machining the part, which I'll do it in the next few days. I've always believed in that rifle dad. Just by looking at it, even the most stupid person would know that is the most powerful and accurate sniper rifle in the history of sniper rifles. Oh dad, do you remember when we went hunting together? You remember you used to take me to shooting field? I used to beg you to let me pull the trigger."

Sammy pauses for a moment. As if he has forgotten what he wanted to say. He gazes at the horizon and begins talking again after a few seconds. As if he was daydreaming and something just brought him back.

"I know now." Continues Sammy nodding. "You didn't let me pull the trigger because you thought I was going to hurt my finger by doing that."

Sammy keeps quiet pondering for a moment. "I just miss you so very much dad". Murmurs Sammy. "I just..." Sammy gas at his father's grave and lowers his head.

"Well dad. I guess I'll have to go now. I'll see you next time dad, when I have good news about the rifle. The news of completing the work on the rifle I mean."

Sammy keeps quiet again. He has nothing else to say. He sits there quietly for a few seconds thinking. He takes a deep breath and begins staring at his father's picture. He starts crying quietly while having a smile on his face

"Forgive me dad for not coming to visit you and for whatever that may have broken your heart. For whatever I did and you didn't approve of. For failing you sometimes and for not listening to you while you were alive. I want you to know that you'll remain in our hearts forever dad. Your thought will be with us every second, minute, hour and all the time."

Sammy dries his face with his shirt's sleeve for one last time and stands up. He glances at the area where he had seen the lady in black as soon as he arrived the cemetery. But he sees no sign of her. Sammy wants to go to her and borrows the bucket from her, so he can wash his father's tombstone as well. He turns his head to see if he can find that lady somewhere behind him when he notices something on the ground, behind where he is seated. It is a white bucket, full of water and a box of tissues. Sammy is surprised. He guesses it right. This is done by the same lady in black he has seen at the Christian cemetery a few minutes ago. Sammy cannot believe what he sees. What a kind-hearted thoughtful lady Sammy thinks. He has no doubt in his mind that the same lady in black has left the bucket and tissue for him, while he was deep in conversation with his dad. What a noble gesture, Sammy thinks. Who is that lady? He had seen no one else around except her, when he entered the cemetery. It was only her who had the white bucket and no one else. But Sammy cannot find her anywhere. He genuinely admires the kindness and thoughtfulness of that lady and what she has done. Sammy prays to see her again so he can Just tell her how much he is impressed by her etiquettes.

Sammy washes up his father's tombstone. He kisses his father's picture, takes his championship cup and puts it back into his backpack. He takes the bucket and tissue box, says goodbye to his dad and starts walking around, looking for the lady. He is under the impression that he can find the lady on the pavement between the cemetery entrance and the Christian section of the cemetery. Because there is only one way to enter the cemetery and only one pavement connecting the street entrance to the Christian section. So, if someone cannot be seen inside the cemetery area where graves are located at, has to be on the pavement or outside the whole cemetery area. Since Sammy cannot see the lady in the Christian section, he walks on the pavement going towards the entrance. There are a few concrete benches on the pavement with a distance between them, for elderly men and women who are tired of walking or anyone who needs to take a quick rest to sit on. Sammy walks to the main entrance and comes back twice. His bad leg begins aching. He gets tired and decides to sit on one of those concrete benches for a moment. But again, he decides to continue searching. He cannot walk fast. So, he is walking slowly and looking around, hoping to see the lady in black somewhere. But there is no sign of her. Sammy is quite eager to find her. What the lady did, made something spark in Sammy's heart. It awakened something in him. It showed Sammy,

that there is still kindness and good in the world. That the universe is not completely taken and controlled by evil. Since Sammy cannot find the lady on the pavement, he decides to go to the Christian section this time, so if the lady is somewhere there or using the washroom, he would see her.

Sammy is persistently searching for that lady. His eyes turn to all directions looking for her. He is losing his strength little by little. He cannot walk or even stand for a long time. There is still no sign of the lady. Sammy remembers that she has a black shawl over her shoulders and a black scarf covering rear half of her hair. She is the only one wearing black amongst a few people at the cemetery and the only person at the Christian section. Sammy is at the Christian section looking around and still cannot find her. So, he loses hope after a few minutes looking and decides to leave the bucket and tissue box by the washrooms, so others can use it in case they need to.

He is planning to leave already when he suddenly notices a lady with the same description coming out of the washrooms, which are located at the far end of the Christian cemetery. She is adjusting her shawl over her shoulders. She sits on a podium beside a tree adjacent to the washrooms with her back to Sammy. Sammy cannot see her clearly from that far, but he has no doubt in his mind she is the same lady he is looking for. So, he moves towards her. The closer he gets to the lady, the more convinced he becomes that she is for sure the one. He reaches the lady. He is right. She is the one. Sammy says hello. The lady turns her head, answers Sammy and says hi too. But as soon as she turns her head and Sammy sees her face for the first time, Sammy comes face to face with the most beautiful girl he has ever seen in his entire life. Sammy's heart stops beating for a moment. She is extremely beautiful. Sammy is speechless. He feels his breathing stops for a second. Her beauty is indescribable. Sammy has never seen a girl that pretty. She is truly graceful and extraordinarily attractive. She has very light brown hair and blue eyes. The rear half of her head is covered by a black scarf and her hair at the front half, glow like gold. The sunlight that penetrates within her hair strings, reflects the light and makes her hair shine like the sun itself. Her eyes are having a breath-taking glitter to them. Her lips look as soft and delicate as bloom of spring blossoms. There is a perfect balance between her facial features, her eyes, nose and lips. As if God has artistically carved her, showing off his aptitude for creating the masterpiece of beauty and

perfection. She has a silk like skin. Her eyebrows are thin and slightly darker than her hair color. Sammy is just looking into her eyes, which has the kindest look on them. She has a kind of beauty that cannot be found in the streets and among people you meet on daily basis. She has a very unique kind of beauty. She looks around twenty years old. She is probably a few centimeters shorter than Sammy. She looks like a heavenly angel. Sammy's whole body is burning into a fever. The girl looks a bit afraid and uneasy though. She is waiting for Sammy to continue talking. She has an artificial but polite smile on her face, which is out of decency, but still makes her even more beautiful. Even if it is artificial one. The girl has noticed that Sammy is completely captivated by her beauty and lost his tongue. She certainly knows this because apparently, this is not the first time a man has reacted that way after becoming face to face with her.

"yes?" asks the girl. "How can I help you?"

Sammy who has no more courage and strength to look into her charismatic eyes, gathers up all the strength he has in him,

"Hi" stammers Sammy. 'err. Hello. I mean, hi again. Because I already said hello before I think. I mean, how are you? I. Err. I just want to thank the bucket for placing you for me and the tissue. I mean thank you for. Err. Any ways. Err. So., Thanks bucket for the.'

The intensity of the girl's attractiveness and Sammy's embarrassment, makes him start sweating. The way Sammy thanks her makes the girl laugh. But she obviously controls herself. She apparently knows herself the reason for Sammy to stutter. She is well aware that Sammy, like all other men who get to see her for the first time, are extremely lost in her beauty. Sammy is fascinated by exquisiteness of the girl. He wishes their conversation never ended. His heart rate has increased. For a brief moment, he remembers what his father had written him about meeting a girl. He remembers his father had predicted that he will see a girl who makes his heart beat faster. Makes him speechless. Sammy suddenly realizes he is experiencing the initial symptoms of falling in love. She is the first girl who has shaken Sammy's heart. The first girl who has touched him on his soul. He knows he doesn't have to lose his self-confidence. So, he does his best to act normal. The girl has noticed the bucket and tissues in Sammy's hands.



"you are welcome," replies the girl. "it's not a big deal. Really, I noticed you are deep in conversation with your dear departed. I thought I better avoid interrupting. I wanted to leave. But I thought it is best to leave the bucket and tissues where you would easily see. So, I suggest you do the same. Just fill the bucket with water and leave it for a person who you think may need it. Asks them to pay it forward Maybe?"

The girl, who looks somehow alerted, stands up, says goodbye and leaves. Sammy goes towards the washroom, to fill the bucket with water to do as the girl has asks him. He cannot get the girl off his thoughts. He cannot stop thinking about her. Sammy has discovered a different and a new kind of beauty that girl had. The beauty of her soul. What a sentient and humanitarian kind of a person Sammy thinks. What a kind girl. Sammy is wondering if all the girls who are gifted with that kind of beauty, are also as beautiful at heart and soul as the girl he just met?

Sammy can see her image any time he closes his eyes. He cannot stop thinking about her even for a second since she got up and left. He feels sad, but he doesn't know why? Probably because he doesn't want it to be the first and the last time, he gets to see her. But if the girl disappears, how would he find and see her again? Al Darrah is a small town, but still, finding the girl in Al Darrah seems next to impossible task. Sammy thinks for a second and makes up his mind. He decides to follow the girl secretly, in hope of finding out more about her. He gets quite serious with his plan. He can see the girl walking towards the exit slowly. Sammy has to move fast. He sees an old woman sobbing and doing prayers over a grave. The old woman seems to have just reached the cemetery. Sammy leaves the bucket of water and the tissue box near her, fixes his knee strap tight and starts following the girl, keeping a good distance between himself and her. The girl exits the cemetery and reaches the main road. She takes a left turn and heads towards the town's only roundabout and Sammy follows her. In a normal scenario, Sammy has to stop every now and then to relax his leg. But he is surprisingly not feeling tired or any pain in his leg while following the girl. This surprises Sammy himself. After a few short minutes walking, the girl reaches the same book store Sammy had stopped at when coming to the cemetery. She starts looking at the books from the display of the book store. She enters the book store. This gives Sammy a good chance to take a rest and relax his leg. Sammy leans against a wall. He bends his leg forward and

backwards a few times and waits for the girl to get out of the book store. It isn't long before the girl exits the store carrying a plastic case in her hand. Sammy is doing his best not to be spotted by the girl. The girl continues towards the roundabout. Sammy notices how other young men react after being blown by her beauty. Some of the younger men cannot take their eyes off her. Some others are performing funny acts to make her laugh and some others just try some magic acts trying to impress her. Sammy is getting angry. He cannot take it. He feels like he doesn't want any of other men to even look at her. He feels he wants the girl to be his and his only. Sammy feels like he had met the girl ages ago and has been in love with her since. But what is interesting to Sammy, is the behavior and the reaction of the girl towards those young men's desperate attempts to get her attention. He notices the girl has gone into a defensive mode. As if all those men intend to attack and harm her somehow. Some of those men's rood and unpolite behavior provoke Sammy's zeal and hostility. Sammy is determined to follow the girl no matter how long it takes or how far she goes. He is quite serious in finding out more about her. He wants to know everything about her. For example, one of the most important characteristics of a good lady to Sammy, is the decency and the chastity of a girl. Sammy notices that after what men tell her in the street and the way they behave, the girl continues walking without even looking at them or showing them a simple reaction. She continues walking and ignores what happens around her. In Sammy's vocabulary, this means nobility and decency. The girl crosses the roundabout and stops by a building with colorful walls and cartoon paintings. There are no signages on the building or its walls. But Sammy knows the building is actually a kindergarten, as he has companied her cousin "Rana" to the same building to drop or pick her kid to and from the kindergarten. Sammy and Rana are very close. They are almost the same age and had a very fun childhood together. After Rana got married, they met every now and occasionally. Whether in parties, new year dinners or other family gatherings and they has still maintained their attachment.

Sammy looks at his knee strap. He has followed the girl for a long time, so his knee strap has gotten loosened. While waiting for the girl to come out of the kindergarten, Sammy sits on a box he sees in front of a shop and begins fixing his knee strap once again. He is very careful at the same time not to be seen by the girl. The girl comes out of the kindergarten a few minutes later holding a little boy's hand.

The boy and her wait on the sidewalk. She looks at the left and right side of the street waiting for someone to arrive apparently. She takes her cell-phone out of her purse and begins talking to someone. she goes from the sidewalk to the street side with the boy. Sammy thinks she is waiting for a cab. But a white pickup truck shows up two minutes later and stops in front of them. The girl opens the pickup truck's door and sits the boy next to the driver. The driver is a middle-aged good-looking man. She sits next to the boy herself. The pick-up truck moves and disappears getting farther and farther in the street. The pick-up truck is gone, but Sammy is still sitting on the box thinking he has lost connection with the girl. He reviews all what happened back at the cemetery second by second, while being sad and exhausted at the same time. He analyzes word by word of the conversation he had with the girl. He is disoriented. Sammy doesn't know what his next move would be. The girl's voice echoes in his ears. He still has a thousand questions that he has no answer to. Who is that girl? Will he see her again? How to find her though? What if he meets her again? What would he tell her? And many other questions, which all circle around his mind. Even thinking about that girl makes Sammy smile.

It is a few minutes past noon already and he is beginning to feel hungry. So, he decides to go to a restaurant close to the round-about. Despite the fact he has followed the girl long way, he doesn't feel any pain in his leg. He isn't tired neither, and this surprises him. Many thoughts are getting Sammy's mind engaged. He takes a few steps towards the restaurant when he pauses for a moment, turns back, looks at the kindergarten building and begins realizing. He smiles. He seems he has found a way. Sammy thinks of calling his cousin Rana and giving her the girl's description, in hopes that maybe she knows her somehow.

Sammy reaches the restaurant, enters and takes a seat at a table. He orders food and calls Rana. But she isn't answering her phone. Sammy thinks she maybe on a shift at the hospital as she is a nurse. His call goes to her answering machine. So, he leaves her a message, asking her to call him back whenever she gets the message.

Waiters places Sammy's food on the table. Sammy decides to go to the steel shop after having his lunch. He needs a piece of special kind of steel, to start machining it and making the part required to finish modifying the rifle his father had asked him. He has to install the part on the rifle, assembles

and completes it. Sammy's phone starts ringing. Happy, thinking it's his cousin Rana calling him back, Sammy picks his phone quickly and answers. But it is not Rana. It is Robert calling him from Al Thawrah city. After saying hi and some small talk, Robert begins complaining about the situation he is in, talking behind Amer and his fiancé's back seriously and furiously without noticing how ridiculous he sounds. Sammy cannot stop laughing. Robert is complaining that he is sick and tired of following Sara and Amer wherever they go for shopping. He explains that Amer and Sara visited so many shops to purchase the most basic and the cheapest item. He tells Sammy that he can no longer bare walking and following them everywhere, as he already has blisters on his feet. According to Robert, the couple had entered every single shop in a huge shopping center to ask for a stupid item's price. But they wouldn't buy the item, go to the next shop and ask for the price of the same item again. Robert claims they had asked every single shop for the price and at the end went back to the first shop they had visited in the beginning and bought the item there. Robert is serious and he's genuinely complaining. But Sammy cannot stop laughing at the phrases Robert uses to describe his situation.

Robert is not the patient type who doesn't mind spending so much time following their wives or girlfriends to do shopping. Sammy cannot interfere at all. Because laughter does not let him spit a word. According to Robert, the original plan was to head back home after having dinner in the city. Robert says he has not yet been able to buy an engagement present for Amer and Sara. He speaks with Sammy for a few more minutes. Sammy tries calming him, he asks Robert to be patient and tolerate the shopping torture for Amer's sake. Sammy changes the subject and tells Robert about his own plan for the rest of the day. Their telephone conversation ends. But Sammy does not mention anything about seeing the girl at the cemetery. After paying his bill, Sammy goes to the metal store directly.

Sammy's cell-phone rings and he looks at its screen, again, hoping it is Rana calling. But, this time, it is Sammy's mother. She needs to hear her son's voice. Sammy and his mom also speak for a few seconds. His mother wants to make sure everything is ok with him and if he needs anything. Sammy tells his mother about his visit to the cemetery. He explains everything he has done that day. Everything except meeting the girl. Sammy's mom is happy to hear he has finally decided to visit his father's grave. She wants to make sure if Sammy's

guests, Amer and Robert need anything so she can arrange it for them. She wishes Sammy and his best friends having a great time together and enjoy their temporary bachelor life. Sammy's mother is staying with her sister in order to help her prepare for her son's engagement ceremony. Sammy assures his mother everything is alright; they do not need anything and they are fine. His conversation with his mom ends after a few seconds. Sammy hangs up the phone and begins thinking about the girl again. He suspects he has probably fallen in love. He has no exact explanation for how he feels. He feels sad somehow. Something is not right inside him. The only thing he is absolutely certain about, is the fact that he has an urge to see the girl and be with her all the time. But since he has lost track of the girl after she was picked up by a pick-up truck, he feels sad. Sammy does not mention anything to his mother about the girl and the revolution she has started in him and his emotions. Because he thinks there is nothing good to tell his mother yet. What can he really tell his mother anyways? That he met a girl, fell in love, shadowed her and lost her after she was picked up by a truck? Sammy thinks there is really nothing to tell.

Sammy reaches the metal store and asks the salesman for a specific type of metal, cut in specific dimension. The salesman is curiously listening to the specifications Sammy is providing him with. He asks Sammy to give him a few minutes to cut the metal for him. The salesman goes to the back room, which is actually his workshop. Sammy hears the guy yelling it is going to take a while for his order to get ready. He knows it would take a few minutes cutting that kind of metal of course. The guy returns a few minutes later with a piece of metal he had ordered in his hand. Sammy checks the dimensions, pays the guy and keeps the piece in his backpack. He gets out of the metal store. His legs are tired, so he has to take a cab going back home. Sammy waits by the side of the street for a few minutes, until a taxi stops and picks him up.

The cab driver drops Sammy in front of his building and leaves. Sammy hangs the backpack over on his shoulder and enters the building. The building's elevator is out of order as usual. Sammy has to take the stairs and go up five stories to reach his apartment. This is not ideal considering his physical condition and now a heavier backpack on him. He has followed that girl a long way, his backpack is heavier and now he has to walk upstairs to the fifth floor. He knows he has to start walking up the stairs and has no other choice.

He starts taking the stairs up. His left leg begins aching after going few stairs up. Sammy is exhausted and his knee strap has gotten loose again. But thoughts of that girl redirect Sammy's focus to her and this helps him not to feel much pain or exhaustion.

Sammy thinks of the girl the entire time going upstairs, dreaming about seeing her and practicing what he'll tell her. Sammy has decided to try reaching Rana again after he gets home and relaxes for a bit. He finally makes it to the fifth floor, opens the door and enters his apartment. First, he removes his knee strap, which has made him wretched and puts on his pajamas. He takes the piece of metal out of his backpack and keeps it in his room on the machining table. He washes his hands and face, freshens up and goes to the living room. Sammy sits on the couch, turns the TV on and tries relaxing his muscles. He wishes his cousin Rana has the information he needs about that beautiful girl. He's thinking about her when his phone rings. Sammy looks at his cell-phone screen and gets so excited seeing Rana's name on the screen. He answers his phone immediately and starts talking to Rana. It's been a while since the two of them spoke. They saw each other before Sammy and Robert travelled to China for the tournament, when Rana and her family paid Sammy and his mom a visit. Rana was very happy seeing Sammy's missed call on her phone. After a few minutes of talking and joking with each other, Sammy tells Rana he wants to tell her something very important. He tells Rana exactly what happened at the cemetery and after that. He explains detailed accounts of what has happened between him and the girl, what he has done and how he has reacted. Sammy provides a very specific description of the girl to Rana and astonishingly discovers that Rana in fact knows the girl. Well Rana is a nurse. But she plays guitar as her hobby and she plays well too. She was quite interested in music since she was a kid. Her parents bought her a guitar for her tenth birthday and hired their neighbor's son to teach her how to play. Their neighbor's son who worked as a music teacher at Al Darrah's music institution, used to go to Rana's house every other day to teach her how to play privately. Rana started practicing and practicing since, until she became very good at it in a short period of time. She was very talented. Soon she became a skilled guitar player. But guitar and music were only considered as her hobby. She played every day and enjoyed playing. Until she got married and a year and a half later, she decided it was best to put her guitar playing expertise in use, in order to assist her husband financially and help

him pay back their mortgage. Her husband also worked two jobs. Rana placed an ad in classified section of a local paper and started teaching guitar to few selected students. Like this, Rana could continue playing guitar, having fun teaching that and be of financial support to her husband at the same time.

Rana is quite excited to finally see Sammy showing so much interest in a girl and is quite serious about her, too. She is so happy that Sammy too has gotten to experience falling in love. She is more than aware of Sammy's issues and his mentality when it comes to approaching girls. Rana starts teasing him a bit, telling him the heavy hard spell has been broken at last and he is in love for the first time in his life. But she is genuinely grateful to God deep inside for the way Sammy feels about the girl and his willpower to find her. Rana is aware that Sammy experienced so many unexpected painful occurrences in his life since he was just a teenager. Rana is married with two cute children. She prays for Sammy to settle down, have his own family one day and have a happy life. Sammy is still telling Rana about the girl's beauty, her manners and how kind hearted she was. Rana is quiet, just listening to Sammy bragging about the pretty girl, giving her the girl's descriptions and talking excitedly about her. Rana begins telling Sammy whatever she knows about the girl.

"You are talking about Nelly." Says Rana. "Nelly Rayan. I know her very well. Her name is Nelly. They are not Muslims. Nelly and her family are Christians. They live just few blocks from you. They live between dream intersection and flowers intersection, which is the intersection near your house. She has three brothers. John, Jacob and the little one, Liam. All the three brothers are younger than her. She is the first child. She has a very respectable family. Her father owns a transportation establishment. According to Nelly herself, her dad bought a few pickup trucks when he started and hired a few drivers to work on the trucks. If anyone needs to transport some cargo to a destination or somewhere, would know that Nelly's father is the person to go to. His father is a hard-working honest man. His name is Daniel. He actually drives one of the pickup trucks himself, despite being the boss. Her mother is a home maker, taking care of the children, her husband and her own mother. Nelly's grandma lives with them. It looks like they are financially okay. They are in a good shape financially I mean. I'm not saying they are like bill gates or something. But they have a comfortable life. Nelly was not in Al Darrah for around a year or a year and a half. I believe she came back just recently. She had and old

aunty who lived in the capital. Her aunty had never gotten married apparently. She had no husband, therefore and no children. She lived alone in a huge mansion. Alone by herself. Nelly's aunty was really rich. I mean, really. Basically, Nelly's parents sent her to the capital to take care of her aunty. At least this is what they told people who asked. Because Nelly's poor aunty was both old and ill. She had breast cancer poor woman. Nelly took a very good care of her during the period she lived with her at her house. She took care of her and studied at the same time. But she studied at home. She was home schooled I mean. Until thirty to forty days back, when her aunty died, Nelly's parents brought her back home with them after the funeral. I think she is still planning to study at home and go to school for finals and get her high-school diploma by the end of this school year. But I'm not sure about this one. I guess she will just attend school some days to ask questions she may have or if she has problem understanding a lesson. But I know for a fact that she is one or two years behind her other classmates. She will obtain her high-school diploma only this year. But of course, two years later than others her age. I will tell you why. At the beginning, she used to come to me, so I would teach her how to play guitar, before she was sent to the capital. She was honestly quite talented. Generally, in music, particularly playing guitar. But I couldn't teach her anymore after some time. After giving birth and kids. So, she went to my friend Mira, to continue her guitar lessons. Even now, she goes to Mira's house from five thirty every other afternoon. Mira's house is also close to your house and Nelly's. Her house is also near the dream intersection. Because you know? Unlike myself, Mira Continued practicing and getting better and better in playing guitar. But I could not continue after giving birth and having kids and my work at the hospital have to focus on raising my kids you know. I'm not sure if it is two or three days ago, Mira called me after not hearing of her for months. Her call made me very happy. We were speaking about music and guitar. Then she told me that my previous student goes to her now to learn guitar and when I asked which student was that, she said the Christian one. She meant Nelly. Because I've never had any other Christian girl learning guitar from me. It was only Nelly, who used to come to my house to learn guitar. But after she got ill, I went to her house instead, to practice with her. Because something horrible happened to the poor girl before she was sent to capital to stay with her aunty. Let me tell you what happened. Nelly was alone at home one day. She was naked, planning to go take a shower when someone rang the doorbell and Nelly



answered the intercom. She heard a man's voice saying he was the water and electricity agent. So, Nelly opened the door like always, thinking he was really the water and electricity agent wanting to check the meter. She only had a robe or towel on. She was completely naked underneath. She heard the door closing and obviously thought that it was the agent who had checked the meter and left. So, she went under the shower with peace of mind, thinking she is home alone. Imagine, she was naked, wet and alone taking a shower when she suddenly saw silhouette of a man behind her shower curtain. Here's when she begins panicking and screaming for help. Of course, she would be terrified. Who wouldn't? anyways, the guy attacked and tried to rape her. He started touching her, tried kissing her etc. Thanks god her mom arrived seconds before she got raped. Her mother who had gone shopping, arrived, picked a piece of metal pipe and attacked the intruder. Seconds later, neighbors too arrived and helped the mother. They run to help after hearing Nelly and her mother screaming on the top of their lungs. The guy had a big knife on him. He took it out of his sleeve and threatened people who had surrounded him threatening to stab them if they didn't let him run. Which they didn't naturally. They caught him and beat the shit out of him. People broke a few of his teeth, one of his left ribs, his jaw and something else. Anyways, police arrived and arrested the guy. The guy was so lucky police arrived on time and saved his life. Otherwise, neighbors would have killed the bastard. The guy is in jail now. Since the incident, Nelly suffered a lot. I mean emotionally and psychologically. She started hating men since that day. She is afraid of men now in general. She became depressed, sad and angry. I was very surprised when you said you saw her outside. She does not normally leave her house. I guess her therapy is working then. She has been under therapy since the incident. Having sessions with different known psychologists. She is getting back too normal now. The guy confessed he had been waiting for Nelly to be left alone at home, so he can go and rape her. When he saw Nelly's mom getting out of the house, he put his plan into action. That was actually the main reason Nelly's parents decided she could no longer come to my house for guitar lessons. They asked me if I could go to their house instead. They said Nelly felt safer and more comfortable being at home. I know her parents also felt more comfortable that way. I Told them it didn't really matter for me. So, I visited her at her house. They are super good people Sammy. Nelly is around nineteen or twenty now I'm guessing. I saw her at the same kindergarten you said she went a few days ago. She has become even more

beautiful. I mean to say, I give you the right to fall in love with her. Of course, you would fall in love with her. Show me a man who wouldn't? I'm telling you Sammy as a woman, when I see her, I cannot take my eyes off her and I'm a woman myself. Let alone the men who get to see her. Hmm. Let me see. If I've told you everything."

Rana pauses for a moment. Sammy is thinking about all what Rana told him. Nelly. What a pretty name Sammy thinks. But Sammy feels so angry at the guy who attacked Nelly. His face has turned red. He is sweating on his forehead. Sammy realizes why Nelly behaved like she was scared and alerted when he approached her at the cemetery. He remembered when some men showed interest in her while walking back towards the roundabout. Sammy asks Rana how he can meet Nelly again and how does she think he has to approach Nelly? How to begin talking to her in case he gets the chance to meet her again? Rana is quiet, thinking about Sammy's questions. Sammy thinks she has no answer to his question though. She has a good relation with Nelly. But they never spoke about topics related to opposite sex. They've never spoken about guys. Besides, girls with so much experience with guys can answer Sammy's questions, but not Rana. She has never been into boys and having a boyfriend. That isn't her really. The main problem of Sammy is that he has not had so many girlfriends to know how to talk to girls, including Nelly. Sammy lacks experience and self-confidence when it comes to girls. Besides, he doesn't know how Nelly would react considering what has happened to her. Another fact is that Sammy does not know how to meet her again to begin with. What to tell her and how to tell her would be another issue to focus on later.

Sammy's mind is wrapped around those facts when Rana finally breaks the silence and tells Sammy that with what she knows about Nelly and her issues, she says she thinks Nelly is not open to the idea of starting a relationship with any man at the moment. Rana says she knows as a woman, that unlike almost all other girls her age, Nelly is not the kind of a girl who thinks of getting married as soon as she finishes her college or high-school. Rana says according to Nelly herself; she is the type of girl who wants to have a role in the society. She is planning to continue studying and working at the same time. Rana earnestly wants to provide Sammy with as much information he needs, so he can make a good decision in regards to Nelly. A right decision to help him start a relationship with the girl of his dreams. She asks Sammy the reason he did not continue talking to Nelly, right there at the cemetery? Why

did he not ask her out? Rana says she believed Sammy could continue talking to Nelly when he first met her and establish grounds for a future date. She believes Sammy could even try giving her his number or ask for hers, so they would talk over the phone in a later time. Rana is right. Everything was ready for Sammy to make his move. She was there. No one else was around. Sammy got to like her a lot. Everything was there, ready for Sammy to make a move. Sammy is quiet, listening to what his cousin Rana is telling him.

"I was speechless Rana." Says Sammy with signs of remorse in his voice. "I don't know how to tell you. I cannot describe the feeling I had. I swear, my heartbeat was completely disrupted. I had no control over my actions what so ever. It took all I had to tell her those few words. I thought of continuing my conversation with her and even asking her out. But something told me it wasn't the right move. I mean, it was not appropriate. She was at a cemetery for heaven's sake. I mean, people normally visit a cemetery to mourn the dead. Not to be flirted with and asked out. Their mindset is not for things of this nature. She was praying for I don't know who? I would tell her what? You are extremely beautiful. I like you a lot and would you go out with me? It didn't feel right. Believe me Rana. It just didn't. Besides, what would you expect me to say? Like this is love at first sight? You are a lady yourself, Rana. Imagine you were not yet married. You went to the cemetery, a guy approached you and expressed his feelings for you seconds after seeing you. How would you respond? Wouldn't you think the guy is a low-class senseless idiot? Because he tells you he likes you at a cemetery? Am I wrong? You think I didn't want to ask her out?"

Sammy is right Rana thinks. Cemetery was not the right place to do that.

"Who is that little boy she picked from the kindergarten?" Asks Sammy. "Oh, her little brother. Now I get it. Does she go to the kindergarten every day?"

"Yeah. He's her little brother," replies Rana. "he's Liam. Sometimes she picks him up and takes him home. That's her brother. I don't know why she went to pick him up today? Its normally her parents who pick the little boy from the kindergarten. Maybe because her shrink suggested her she has to appear amongst people in the society. I know She likes walking though."

A thought suddenly hits Rana.

"I guess I get what you should do." Says Rana excitedly. "I figured a way you can get to see her again. Like I said, she visits her school every now and then to ask her questions related to what she studies at home. Why don't you wait outside her school until she gets out? Go to her, introduce yourself and remind her you met her at the cemetery. Just be honest and tell her how you feel about her."

Rana's tone changes from serious to teasing Sammy again.

"Tell her what happened to your heart after seeing her for the first time. Maybe you want to tell her you have been also stalking her for a while. Tell her you want to marry her today itself. Tell her you want to kiss her lips."

"Stop it Rana. This is serious shit damnit."

"Yeah yeah. Sorry. You are right. But no. Seriously. Be very frank and honest with her. I guess you should tell her you are not thinking of having a short-term relationship with her only. Make your intentions clear, Sammy. You should be very careful about what you tell her, cousin. Because if you mess up your first opportunity, that would be it. Remember, there are things that cannot be fixed easily. So, remember, you have one shot at this. Talk to her in an honest, friendly, polite and gentle manner. Tell her about yourself a little, your parents, your goals, principles etc. Make her understand you have good intentions. I guess it's very important you do this. Don't be shy, Sammy. Stop being super shy. Shyness is the virus of achievement when it comes to relationships. I believe shyness prevents you communicating with whom you love, and communication is the access key to people's hearts and minds."

Sammy is quiet. He is thinking about Rana's comments. It is time for Sammy to analyze whatever he has heard about Nelly. Thanks to Rana, Sammy knows a lot about Nelly now. He gets up the couch while still thinking about her. He goes to the window, pulls the net curtain and gazes at the skyline. He has a sort of feeling; he has no explanation for. He has never experienced the feeling that started in him, exactly a moment after seeing Nelly at the cemetery for the first time. He feels somewhat between sadness and restlessness, between hope and hesitation. Sammy is staring at the people walking in the street. He is deciding on what to do. All what he thinks about

is Nelly, or how he can see, talk and be with her again. Sammy knows he is in love with Nelly and he is determined to make it known to her.

All windows at Sammy's apartment face the dream intersection. Sammy can also see Nelly's school, where she occasionally visits. His apartment is situated on a hill, northwest of Al Darrah, over-looking almost all areas in the town. Sammy goes to his room and opens his closet. He looks for a binocular his parents have given him as his birthday present when he was a teenager. He finds the binocular, goes back to the window and begins scanning the street, looking at every corner hoping to see Nelly by accident. He knows what he is doing is stupid and he has a very narrow chance of seeing her. But still, he keeps on searching for her within people. Sammy loses hope and accepts the fact that Nelly is not in the crowd after a few minutes standing behind the window. He goes back to the living room and sits on the couch opposite the television. He lays down on the couch and reviews every moment he had with Nelly. He realizes he has gotten to find out what love is and how does falling in love feels like. Sammy is experiencing the sweet taste of love. For him the only bitter part is the wait to see the one he loved. Waiting to revisit his dream girl. Sammy has to plan his next move. He has fallen in love with a girl who has no idea what so ever about how Sammy feels about her and of course, Sammy has to do something about it. He has to make his feelings known to her somehow. He is drawing in his thoughts. Sammy comes up with a few different plans. Evaluates and analyzes pros. and cons. of them in his mind, changing his plans and thinking of a different one accordingly. He has decided to do as Rana has suggested. Sammy thinks of waiting for Nelly outside her school, go to her when she comes out, begin talking to her and express his feelings without hesitation and without being shy, afraid of rejection or even without thinking of his disability as a barrier. But maybe Nelly does not like to be approached in the presence of her other school mates, classmates or friends. Maybe she prefers to talk in private Sammy thinks. But where, when and how? Sammy decides it is best if he waits outside her little brother's kindergarten. But this doesn't sound right neither. It is like the school idea with the same risks. Besides, maybe Nelly would not go to kindergarten to pick her brother for days, weeks or even months. These are some frustrating thoughts Sammy has, making him realizes there is no way of achieving his goals in regards to communicating with Nelly. These thoughts prevent Sammy finalizing his approach. He is the type of guy who would get

negatively affected by his own baseless thoughts. He thinks his disability would definitely have something to do with Nelly or any other girl he may have a crush on to disliking him. This confuses Sammy and makes him doubt he even wants to approach Nelly to begin with. This is Sammy's weakness problem. But at the same time, he cannot simply forget about Nelly. Sammy is under lots of stress. He is asking himself whether Nelly would choose him over so many other men out there, who have a healthier body, are better looking and in a much better financial situation than him?

The more Sammy thinks of Nelly and ways by which he can communicate with her, the less he comes to a solution and conclusion. So, he decides to get his mind busy with something else for a while and think about how to communicate with Nelly in a later time when he has a clearer head. He closes his eyes as he lays on the couch and as usual, begins relaxing his legs by swinging his ankles. A few minutes later, Sammy is still awake. He obviously cannot sleep. He opens his eyes and begins staring at the ceiling. His mind is busier than letting him sleep. He remembers the piece of metal he has bought. He gets up, goes to his workbench and the Machine. He puts his apron on and starts re-examining the drawing of the rifle, which is pinned to the wall above his workbench. The drawing contains all the technical specifications, including dimensions, parts requirements, parts replacements and many other information essential in modifying and developing the rifle. The drawing was in fact produced by Sammy's father and his best friend for the purpose of making changes to its initial design and increasing its performance, so it would become best sniper rifle, one of a kind in the world, with an unbelievable accuracy and extraordinary bullet range. Sammy sits down for a few seconds and studies the drawing to figure out where to begin, inserts his iPod earphones into his ears and plays his favorite classical music, like he always does when working on machinery. He has developed a habit of listening to classical music while working on noisy machinery. This makes him concentrate and pay a full attention to his work. Sammy picks the metal piece he has bought. He plays with it, giving it from one hand to another, while staring at the drawing. He realizes he does not have a lot to do in order to make the required part for the rifle. What he has to do is machining and making the part, which doesn't take longer than a few days. What would be left, is installing the parts on the rifle and finally taking it to a shooting field or the desert to test it. Sammy starts working. He installs the piece of metal on the machine and programs the

part's dimensions and angles on the machine. The machine starts shaping the piece slowly. Machining that particular piece of metal requires Sammy's undivided attention as even the tiniest mistake, in terms of angles and dimensions, results in miss-shaping the part and rifle not operating properly after the part is installed on it. Sammy has promised his father he would finish the unfinished work on the rifle. With Sammy's knowledge about rifles, articles he has read, related TV programs he has watched or related websites he has surfed, he is confident that without a doubt that rifle would become one of a kind in terms of accuracy and strength. It will be a revolutionary kind of sniper rifles. The drawing on a blue paper is in fact the outcome of years of planning, calculating, thinking, research and hard work of Mr. Khalfan, the best friend of Sammy's late father, who is known to Sammy as Uncle Khalfan. Sammy knows it will only take him a few days to finish making the part and he has to dedicate all his attention and focus to it. He is seated in front of his workbench and witnesses the piece of metal being shaped by the machine.

Sammy is trying to focus on the machining process and shaping the piece of metal. But still his mind begins getting redirected to Nelly. Being on the machine for around two to three hours, Sammy is already tired. He does not want to listen to classical music anymore and is tired of constantly looking at the machine shaping the piece of metal. It is getting dark and he is still alone at home. Sammy takes his earphones out of his ears and switches the machine off. He removes the piece from the machine, examines it and decides it is enough for the day. So, he thinks he would continue the rest of the work the following day. Sammy takes out his apron and goes to the kitchen. He fills the kettle with water and places it on the stove. He takes his cup, pours a teaspoon full of Nescafé plus two teaspoons of sugar in it. He glances at the clock. It is twenty minutes before seven p.m. Still long before Robert and Amer come back from the city. Sammy is already feeling very much bored. Thoughts of Nelly don't leave his mind for a second. The water comes to a boil. Sammy pours the boiling water on his Nescafé and steers. He has nothing to do. So, he goes back to the living room and sits in front of the television on the couch. He picks the cookie's box from the coffee table in front of him and opens it. He takes the last piece of cookie and eats it with his coffee. Sammy hears an email notification sound coming from his cell phone. It means he has new emails and he has to check them. So, he goes back to his room and switches his computer on. He sits

on his computer desk and enters the password. He notices he has lots of new emails. Some from Chinese target shooting federation, some from his friends, the bank, some advertisements, newsletters, etc. He checks his emails one by one and replies to those with a high priority. Sammy has received so many messages congratulating him for his achievements in Beijing tournament. If Sammy wants to reply each and every single one of his emails, he has to stay awake until the following morning. So, he just replies some. He enters his social media network and posts a nice thank you note, addressing anyone and everyone who has sent him a congratulation email message. He is surfing the net after that when he accidentally clicks and enters a website with numerous romantic literature and love letters in it. An idea clicks in his head. He thinks of using those useful literature and love letter samples to write Nelly a letter and tells her what he wants to. He decides to write an impressive letter, waits for her to come out of her school like Rana has suggested and hand over the letter to her as soon as he sees her. That's it, Sammy thinks. Like this, he would not have to worry about getting face to face with Nelly, telling her how he feels. Sammy thinks for a moment. Considering all the factors, Sammy concludes that writing a letter and giving it to Nelly is the best solution to communicate with her and letting her know how he feels. Sammy smiles. He seems more positive and hopeful. But he is anxious and worried deep in there. He isn't sure about Nelly's reaction though, especially after taking the letter and reading it. Sammy starts feeling quite hungry and he has not prepared anything for his dinner. He is not in the mood to cook at all, so he calls nearest fast-food restaurant and orders himself a burger and some fries, salad and a cola. He takes a notepad and a pen from the drawer of his computer desk. Sammy goes back to the living room and sits opposite the TV and begins changing the television channels to find something interesting to watch. He chooses the music channel after changing a few channels and starts writing the letter while listening to the music. Before he starts writing though, he feels a craving. To write a love letter he thinks he has to be absolutely relaxed and calm. So, he picks his steak and stands up again, goes to the kitchen and takes out a whiskey bottle from the fridge. Sammy takes two ice cubes from the freezer and throws them inside the glass. He fills the glass with whiskey and returns to the living room. Sammy begins writing after two or three sips. He knows he has to write the letter as if he does not know anything about Nelly's life.



Words begins forming in his mind after he has few more sips of alcohol. Sammy begins writing the letter.

"Hello. I'm sure you are quite surprised to see me again. Believe it or not, I'm surprised myself that for the very first time in my life I'm writing a letter to a beautiful respectable lady such as yourself. Believe me when I say I have never done this before in my life. Until now of course. Maybe because I have never had such a strong feeling for any girl ever since like the way I feel about you. Anyways, please don't be surprised and shocked. I want to request you to please read my letter from the beginning to the end.

After I had the pleasure of meeting you at the cemetery for the first time, I accidentally saw you later on, coming out of the school while I was going to a friend's house. Seeing you again gave me an idea. I decided to write you this letter, hang around the school and give it to you when I see you. Meeting you for the second time, made me realize the universe is giving me another chance to do what I failed doing when I met you the first time. That's the reason I decided to express myself in this letter instead, and have you read it.

When you left the cemetery that day, you left your foot prints all over my heart, soul and mind without even knowing it. I see you leaving the cemetery. However, you never left my mind since. Your thought never left me alone, even for a second, and I blame myself for not asking you if I could see you again when I saw you at the cemetery for the first time. I'm a beauty loving kind of a man. I want you to know that I understand everything about beauty. Maybe that's the reason I cannot stop thinking about you and the beauties within you.

What I really mean by saying your beauty, is both your internal and external beauty. You are extremely beautiful both physically and spiritually, both in your body and your soul. To get to my point directly and to say it as clear as possible with full confidence, I admit that you are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen in my entire life. I guess I have figured what a kind-hearted person you really are. You are the mere definition of beauty to me.

The reason I wrote you this letter instead of talking to you face to face is that I thinks you may not like to be approached outside your school, especially with your friends and classmate around. I thought you may prefer not to talk to me with people looking at us. This is beside the fact that I'm

super shy and would definitely begin stammering as soon as coming face to face with your gorgeousness.”

Sammy hears the doorbell when he reaches this part of his letter. He stands up with the help of his Cain and guest to the balcony. He looks down to see who is at the door. It is the fast-food restaurant delivery man standing by his motorbike waiting for the door to open. Sammy goes back inside, gets to the intercom and opens the door for him. The delivery man reaches up at the fifth floor a few seconds later. Sammy receives his order, pays the delivery man and returns to the living room. He glances at the clock. He notices how fast time is flying. It doesn't seem that long since he placed an order for his burger and his order has been delivered already. It normally takes the restaurant not less than forty-five minutes to deliver his order. So, he knows it is not the efficiency of the restaurant delivery personnel resulting in him receiving his order that fast, but it is the fast pace of time passing, making him feel his order has been delivered quickly.

While drinking whisky and thinking of what to write next, Sammy opens his burger box and begins eating. He still has many things in mind he wants to write. But he has to think more and more about what to say and how to say them. He thinks his letter is going to get him somewhere finally. He thinks his letter would be a great beginning to a relationship with his dream girl. He is in fact quite optimistic about it.

Sammy is trying to remember meaningful, big and chunky words to beautify his letter. Minutes later, after Sammy finishes eating his dinner and drinking a full glass of whisky, words and emotional sentences begin to fade out of his mind. He thinks of using love letter samples he saw in the literature and poetry website he visited earlier and steal some of its romantic quotes. But he gives it a second thought. Regardless of how nice contents of that website may be, they still cannot express his emotions and relay the message he intends to send like he wants. Sammy stops writing. He places the pen down on the notepad in front of him, so if something comes to his mind spontaneously, he has the pen and paper ready to register it. Sammy is convinced that he is no longer able to come up with beautiful words as he is under the influence of alcohol.

Sammy feels good. Just not good enough to write serious love letters and poetry. He picks his Cain, stands up and goes to the kitchen again. He gets some ice and drops them inside his

glass, adds whiskey and returns back to the living room. An idea hits him. He feels he needs some fresh air. So, he goes to the living room's balcony, sits down on one of dusty metal chairs, which have been particularly purchased to be used in the balcony. He leans his Cain against the wall, takes a big sip of his whiskey, lays back his head, stares at the moon and the stars. Sammy is thinking about Nelly and doesn't realize how much alcohol he had consumed. But he seems he's going to continue drinking until Amer and Robert are back. Sammy hears a very nice soft love song he likes, coming from the neighbor's house. It sounds as if the lyrics are describing Sammy's love for Nelly. He keeps on drinking and singing the song along with the singer, imagining Nelly is listening and is seated next to him.

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Sammy opens his eyes feeling very thirsty. He has a severe headache. He knows he is dehydrated because of alcohol. He glances at the clock. It is thirty-two minutes past 10 A.M. He does not remember anything from the night before. Not even seeing Amer or Robert coming back home. Sammy turns his head and looks around. He sees Amer asleep below his bed without a mattress under or a blanket on him. Amer only has a pillow under his head. There is no sign of Robert though. Sammy wants to get out of his bed. But he notices he is completely naked. He tries hard to focus on last night's events, hoping he would remember something. But the last thing he does remember is, he limped into the kitchen, left his whiskey glass in the sink and took the whole bottle out of the fridge. He also remembers he went back to the balcony, drinking and mumbling a song and looking at the stars. Sammy cannot recall anything else. He changes his mind and decides to remain in bed. He needs to go back to sleep. But he finds it difficult to sleep with the headache he is suffering from.

A few minutes pass and he is still awake. Sammy is feeling very thirsty. He's extremely dehydrated because of excessive alcohol intake. He sees his bottle of water and a glass on his nightstand. He rolls over on his bed so he can reach the bottle. He quietly slides one of the drawers open. He's very careful not to wake Amer. Sammy takes out a box of Alka-Seltzer out First. He pours some water in the glass, takes a tablet out of its container and drops it in the glass. The tablet starts boiling and dissolving in the water. Sammy drinks it and rolls back to face up position, closes his eyes

shut, hoping he will be able to go back to sleep and that is that. He doesn't remember anything else after that.

Sammy opens his eyes again. This time he's awakened by the clinking and rattling sound of utensils being handled on plates. He glances at the clock again. It is twenty minutes before 1 P.M. Fortunately, his headache is gone and he feels much better. He looks for Amer. This time he doesn't see Amer below his bed. Sammy pushes the blanket off him and gets up. He sits on his bed and sees a clean pair of trousers and a clean T-shirt hanged by the side of the wall next to his bed. Amer and Robert left the clothes for him without a doubt.

He stands up, wears those clean clothes and goes towards the bathroom. He can sense the tempting smell of famous Arabic kebab. He peeps into the kitchen before he enters the bathroom. Amer and Robert are joking, laughing and talking. Robert is taking disposable packs of food from a plastic case and Amer is placing the plates and utensils on the table. They both see Sammy. They look at each other, laugh and greet him sarcastically.

"Why are you frozen there?" Asks Robert. "Move. Go to the toilet if you want, wash your hands and face, freshen up and get your ass back here so we can eat already. This food is no good when it is cold. I've bought the best kebab ever man."

"Thanks." Replies Sammy. "I'll be with you in a bit. I'll be right back."

"Yeah." Says Amer smiling. "You do that. So, we can talk afterwards."

Amer and Robert look at each other in a mysterious way. It is clear that they are hiding something funny from Sammy and this raises Sammy's suspicion. Sammy asks them the reason they are so mysterious that afternoon. They initially deny being mysterious. But when they see him insistent of knowing what's going on, they laugh it off and say there is nothing important. They say they will tell him everything over lunch.

Sammy goes to the washroom. He tries remembering the night before, hoping he would find out the reason behind his best friend's ambiguous and secretive behavior. Sammy hopes he has not done something embarrassing the night before in his very drunk state or said anything he didn't have to. He is praying

he has not mentioned anything about Nelly to Amer and Robert. Damn alcohol Sammy thinks.

Sammy joins Amer and Robert at the kitchen. Robert places a disposable pack of food in front of everyone at the table. The three of them start eating. But curiosity is not letting go of Sammy. He is still thinking about the reason behind Amer and Robert's mysterious smiles. Sammy has run out of patience,

"So," says Sammy calmly in a kind voice. "What did I do last night? Because I'm not as dumb as you assholes think I am. What did I do I asked you? You idiots smile at each other like evil. Just tell me what the fuck is wrong with you two? You've been mysterious fucks since I woke up you shit heads. You are making me suspicious and nervous. Tell you dickheads before I lose it."

Robert and Amer burst into laughter when they see Sammy's reaction and eagerness to find out what he had done. They actually have to stop eating. Amer is trying not to offend Sammy. He begins talking while still laughing.

"Dude," replies Amer. "I swear to God we're not laughing at you. I mean of course we did laugh at you, but not at yourself. We're laughing at like something you did. Because last night,"

Amer and Robert look at each other as soon as Amer says: "last night". Amer cannot complete his sentence because of laughter. Robert's tears roll down his cheek. He has covered his mouth so he would not spit out the food he is. Sammy is already convinced he has done something stupid the night before. He stops eating and his face gets serious.

"Listen very carefully you two shitheads," growls Sammy "I swear to God I will not eat a spoon more if you do not tell me what the fuck is wrong with you idiots. Enough is enough. What is it? Because I remember shit about last night. When you came, what did we do, when did we sleet? Nothing. Who got my clothes off and why, or any other shit. I remember nothing. Now talk."

Like he warned Amer and Robert, Sammy puts down his fork and spoon, meaning he has started his hunger strike. He folds his arms and waits for their explanation about what happened the night before.

"I'll tell you." nods Robert smiling. "Finish your food, man. "Because really, it's not a big deal. Let's finish eating first. I'll tell you myself. I promise."

Robert looks at Amer frowning, giving him a signal to stop laughing already. He notices Sammy is getting seriously annoyed and angry. Sammy too has a serious face. He continues eating. Amer and Robert tell Sammy about their visit to Al Thawrah city the day before. Robert is quite impressed with Sara's exquisite personality and Amer says how proud he is having a knowledgeable, well-educated and well-informed friend such as Robert. Amer thanks Robert for making him proud in front of his fiancé. They both tell Sammy they wished he was with them, how much they missed him and his absence could be felt. Sammy has a smile on his face, nodding. He seems happy with what he is hearing. He asks Robert and Amer what did they do in the city? It is Amer who explains the rest,

"Nothing special actually." Explains Amer. "First, Robert and I went and picked Sara from her house. That's after we dropped you on the roundabout. We got a bit delayed waiting for Sara to get ready and come out. Women. I mean women take a very long time to dress-up, put make-up and tens of different steps they'll have to take before they can announce themselves ready to go. While waiting for her to get ready and come out, Robert and I discussed the engagement ceremony again. Its where and when and how. Robert came up with some great ideas about how to make our wedding party unique though. Sara came out and we headed towards Al Namar base, so Robert can follow up his brother's whereabouts. Sara and I remained in the car. But Robert went inside and came back like fifteen twenty minutes later. He will have to whether call or go back there tomorrow again. So, they'll tell him how, where and when he can find his brother, Robin. When Robert came back, we went to Al Thawrah city. I shared Robert's ideas about our wedding party with Sara on the way. She loved it and wanted to hear more."

"What ideas are they?" asks Sammy curiously.

"I'll tell you." Responds Robert. "Let Amer finish first."

"Anyways," continues Amer. "We continued on the road until a few miles before reaching the city, I saw a pickup truck loaded with delicious-looking watermelons. The guy had cut one into half and had it displayed on the top of his truck to tempt people to buy. Those watermelons were really red and juicy. We go interested of course. Sara even more. Because

she's pregnant and has those pregnancy cravings. She craved for it badly. So, we stopped and bought one. The three of us got off the car and cut one right there and then. We all wished you were there with us while eating the watermelon. It was a red, sweet and fresh one. Anyways, after enjoying our watermelon, we moved again and reached the city at last. Robert wanted us to drop him somewhere near the downtown. I disagreed and told him we could go together, wherever he wanted to go. The three of us went to some shopping malls, shops and department stores. I'm sure Robert does not enjoy walking around, looking at the shops and their items or any things he may want to buy in general. He wants to buy what he needs from the very first store he comes across. Let me tell you. I mean let me put it this way, he is simply not a good shopping companion. Not good at all. He gets tired of it quickly. He's not a shopping kind of guy at all.

"I'm not the shopping kind of a guy you bitch?" Asks Robert interrupting Amer. "I get tired quickly? Seriously? Dude, what type of shopping was that? Look Sammy, I swear to holy father they made me miserable. They looked everywhere to buy a simple underwear. Every single shop and store in a four-story building shopping mall, going up and coming back down, up again and down again. I mean several God damn times for God's sake. The shitty part was they did not buy the underwear from the same shopping mall they had checked all its stores. They got the underwear from some other store outside the mall somewhere. I was so tired that I could not feel my legs anymore. Now remember, I was talking only about one shopping mall and one single underwear they wanted to buy up until now. Let alone other items they needed to get and other shopping malls we had to visit. I had no choice but to make an alibi to save myself. So, I asked them to go ahead without me. I had to say I needed to take care of some personal matters for them to let go of me. We separated before lunch. I was at last able to free myself from that unwanted exercise. I said to Amer, you do you and I do me. I said I'll go to the pharmacy and do my other chores after that. I asked Amer to call me, only after they were finished with the shopping mall hiking and we will meet up afterwards, will have dinner and go back to Al Darrah. Let me give you a friendly advice though Sammy, if one day Amer and Sara asked you to company them for shopping by any chance, do not, I repeat, do not agree to go with them. You will die shopping with them. So, I warned you already."

Amer is almost choking of laughter. His face is red and completely soaked in tears. Sammy is laughing too. Robert has an innocent oppressed looks on his face. He asks Amer to continue saying what he was saying before he interrupted him. Sammy remembers his phone conversation with Robert the day before. He remembers Robert's miserable and exhausted voice complaining and being desperate to go back home because he had become exhausted.

"Yes, we separated." Continues Amer laughing. "We didn't see Robert until later in the evening. We decided to meet at a restaurant. Robert, myself and Sara met at the restaurant, had dinner and headed back home. That's all what happened. Now we don't know where this drama queen went and what he did after separating from us. We don't know that part."

"I did nothing special." Claims Robert. "I went to place an order to the pharmacist to make my skin lotion. Because the lotion my dermatologist prescribed me, is nothing like these industrially packed creams you see in beauty shops. My skin treatment lotion should be hand made by an expert pharmacist. But the first, second and the third pharmacist I visited, did not make my lotion and only had ready-made ones. The fourth pharmacist told me; they could make my lotion but it was going to take them several days to get it made. So, I did not get anywhere as far as the pharmacists and making my lotion is concerned. I looked in the market for something I needed to get and shortly I figured I had to go to the southern market, which I did. That's it. I went to the restaurant and joined Amer and Sara."

Robert doesn't mention anything about buying or ordering an engagement present. Sammy doesn't want to ask him about it in the presence of Amer neither. Sammy, Robert and Amer finish eating their lunch. They are talking, joking and having fun with the empty plates on the table in front of them. Everyone is lazy to get up and clean up the table. Sammy is still curious though. He wants to know the reason Robert And Amer acted mysteriously, had fishy smiles and behaved suspiciously. Amer begins explaining about what happened the night before. But Robert stops him and says he wants to tell Sammy The Story himself,

"Ok. Nothing happened last night." Says Robert smiling mysteriously again. "I mean nothing extraordinary. This Amer is in the Habit of exaggerating things. You know it yourself. Now he's exaggerating to raise your sense of suspicion. First,



we dropped Mr. Amer's fiancé when we reached Al Darrah last night, then we came home right away. Because we were extremely tired and needed to sleep. We were exhausted really. We planned to enter the apartment quietly and covertly, so we would not wake you up. Only when we arrived at the 5th floor, we realized we didn't have the key. We figured we had no choice, but to wake you up, so you would open the door for us. But We knocked and knocked, rang the doorbell several times, but as if no one was home at all. We tried waking you up by calling you on your cell-phone, knocking constantly, followed by ringing the doorbell. Nothing worked. We came to the conclusion that we had no choice but to go to Amer's place and sleep there for the night. But we both got quite concerned at the same time. We got so worried. Because you were not answering the door. What happened to you? Did something happen to you inside the apartment or something? We kept on knocking, ringing and calling again worried. Until Amer decided to try the door knob. Surprisingly, as soon as Amer twisted the door knob, the door opened wide. We are laughing and asking ourselves why did we not think of trying the knob in the first place? Anyway, we came in and looked for you. First, we thought you were not home. We knew you had left the door unlocked for us so we can get in. But the question still remained. Why were you not answering the home phone, your cell phone, the doorbell and so many knocks on the door? I tell you the reason. Anyways, when we entered all lights are switched off. Except the light at the balcony. You had your earphones on your ears, holding your stick as if you were holding a guitar and you were pretending your stick was a guitar and you were performing. You were in your own world. You had entered into a trance. Amer and I just looked at you for a moment. We were enjoying seeing you enjoy. We were laughing and witnessing you and your guitar performance with your eyes shut. You suddenly opened your eyes and saw us. You had become very kind. You were way nicer than you usually are. With the help of your Cain, you were able to successfully walk towards us. You said hello to us, hugged and kissed us both welcome. That's when we noticed an empty bottle and less than half glass of whiskey on the balcony floor near where you were performing your act. Only then we realized what was going on in this house. We also noticed a notepad and a pen on the coffee table. Curiosity got the best of us. We opened the notepad and read a few lines. We immediately figured it was a love letter. I even asked you whom were you writing the love letter to? You asked us to take a seat. You wanted to tell us a great love story. A very good news. We were excited to hear what you were going to tell us. We told

you we wanted to change to our pajamas first, come sit next to you and listen to your love story. Amer and I went to the room and changed. But when we returned moments later and saw you had passed out on the floor. No matter how loud we yelled calling your name, you didn't wake up. You had become exactly like a dead body. Don't you really remember anything about last night? Anything at all?"

Amer interrupts Robert and asks him to tell Sammy about the funny part of last night's story. Amer and Robert start laughing, Again.

"Yeah," continues Robert laughing. "we're actually laughing because Amer and myself decided to take you to your room and put you in bed. I mean take your clothes off and put you in bed. Because we thought you may puke and get your clothes covered in shit. I was carrying you from one side and Amer from the other. Taking you from the living room to your bedroom, you farted like hell, man. Big noisy fart that came out in a funny order That's the reason we were laughing. That's all."

Sammy starts laughing himself. The way Robert describes occurrences of the previous night is so funny. It is hilarious. But Sammy is not sure if they are telling the truth or they are pulling his legs? Sammy gives a suspicious look at both of them:

"Are you serious?" Asks Sammy. "Did I really fart? I am so sorry guys and thanks for not letting me sleep on the floor. Really guys thank you."

Robert and Amer smile while having curious looks on their faces. They look at each other and both look at Sammy. Sammy is staring back at Robert and Amer too. Sammy asks them the reason they are both staring at him. Robert nods, smiles and tells Sammy that it's now his turn to tell them about the love letter. Amer and Robert cannot wait to hear Sammy's story. They are curiously waiting for him to begin telling them what happened to him. In fact, Sammy wants to tell them about Nelly himself and he figures it is already the right time to tell them about her. So, he begins telling them all about Nelly and what happened the previous day at the cemetery. Sammy sounds extremely excited telling them about Nelly and how he feels about her. He says he knows he has fallen in love and must do something to begin a relationship with her somehow. Amer and Robert are fully focused paying

attention to every details and what Sammy is telling them. They feel so happy for him deep inside. They have waited for years to hear such a thing from Sammy. They have been waiting for something like this to happen to Sammy at last. They have prayed for Sammy to experience love like any other young man in the world. They are also happy for the fact that he too is experiencing the sweetness of falling in love. They've been waiting for years to hear such an exciting news from Sammy. Sammy continues talking about the day before and how he met Nelly and what he did after that in details. He says he had come to a conclusion that he had to write Nelly a letter after discussing the matter with his cousin, Rana. Amer welcomes Sammy's decision. Robert just smiles and nods without saying anything. He seems not really on board with the idea of writing a letter to the girl. But still, he smiles and listens,

Amer says that if himself or his fiancé had a previous acquaintance with Nelly, even any one of her family members or relatives, he could invite her for their engagement ceremony.

But no one knows any member of Nelly's family. When Sammy says Nelly is the most beautiful girl in Al Darrah, Amer tells him he thinks he has crossed Nelly's path a few times by chance. Because he saw a very beautiful girl with the same descriptions two or three times already and he too believed she was very beautiful.

Sammy feels relieved that his best friends have gotten to know about him being in love now. He can ask second and third opinions about anything he decides to do in order to start a relationship with Nelly. Sammy, Robert and Amer speak quite a while about Nelly, Sammy's approach and other factors. This makes Sammy very happy that they speak about him and Nelly. Because it is about him and Nelly and it sounds like music to his ears. Sammy prepares three cups of coffee. They start drinking the coffee while mainly talking about Nelly. Amer drinks all his coffee in a single sip and looks at his wrist watch. He gets up hurriedly and says he has to go to his father's house, as he has to take his mother, sisters and his aunt to the market. He says goodbye to Sammy and Robert and says he will pay a quick visit to Sara as usual after taking his sister, mom and Aunt to the market before coming back home. Amer leaves the apartment. Sammy begins cleaning the table and placing dirty plates in the sink. He still has a hangover from the night before. So, he decides to go and take

a cold shower. Robert begins washing the dishes. His mind is directing towards his brother recently, when he gets busy with solo activities such as washing dishes. It doesn't matter where he is and with what he gets himself busy with. His mind automatically starts thinking about his brother.

Robert starts washing the dishes and begins thinking how much he misses his brother. His mind is busy with thoughts about his brother when his phone starts ringing. He places the foamy plates in the sink, rinses his hands which are also foamy, and dries them with his shirt quickly. He answers his phone and begins talking. He knows very well; his mother is in desperate need these days to hear him tell her everything is going to be alright and share some comforting and promising news with her. She needs to be comforted and she needs it desperately. But regardless, Robert knows it is without a doubt his absolute duty to calm her down and comfort her the best he can. This time though, after talking for a few seconds, Robert notices his mother does not mention a word about Robin at all and he does not honestly expect that.

Against all odds, his mother does not speak a single word about Robin. She says she has just called to specially and specifically speak to Robert, ask how he is and tell him how much everyone miss him back home. Robert is happy to understand his mother's phone call particularly means for him and him only. His mother tells him about a dream she had the night before. She tells him his brother Robin was in her dream busy writing a letter while an ugly ogre-looking man with thick mustache and beard standing over him, like some kind of a guard or something. Robin tells the ogre in a hateful attitude that he will take the ogre with him.

Robert's mom says, in her dream, she asked Robin who was he writing the letter to, and Robin replied serenely that the letter was to his family. Robin told his mom she could ask Robert about the latter. Because Robert was going to know about it soon. But the interesting part of her dream was when Robin stood up after he finished writing. Robin hugged the ogre, glanced at his mother and yelled at the ogre telling him to say goodbye to life. Robert's mom had woken up as soon as Robin said that.

Robert begins teasing his mother a little bit, joking with her about meaningless dream she had and tells her she has probably eaten a heavy meal before going to bed. Robert cheers his mother up and makes her laugh while she is already

laughing at her own crazy dream. Robert checks his watch and tells his mother he has to contact the major in a bit. He says he will call her back as soon as he finishes speaking with the major to keep her posted. But she says she has particularly called to hear Robert's voice and not to follow up Robin's case this time. She wants Robert to know despite the fact Robin has gone missing and she is extremely concerned about his well-being, she still wants to know how Robert is. She says because Robert too is her child and she wants to check on him as well. Because she loves all her children equally. But they both know their concern is Robin's whereabouts. Before Robert's mother hangs up the phone, she asks Robert to take care of himself and not to hesitate asking, in case he needs money or anything else she can help him with. Robert tells her he loves her and would keep her informed and updates her after his telephone conversation is over with the major. Their telephone conversation ends and Robert continues washing the dishes.

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Amer's vehicle stops in front of his parent's house. He is surprised to see wide black linen sheets, condolence banners and black color flags hanging from the wall of his parents neighbor, indicating the house is mourning loss of a member. This is not a good sign. It was, and still is the tradition in many Muslim countries; when a member of a family dies, regardless of what caused the death, age and gender of the deceased, the mourning members of the house cover the exterior walls of their home, with wide, lengthy and black color linen sheets, for neighbors, passersby and relatives to know they have lost a loved one and are mourning. They install a big picture of the deceased, date of his or her death, name and family name and the time and place where obligatory Islamic ceremonies such as funeral, wake, etc. would take place, on the black linen sheet, for people to know where to go and when to go, in case they decide to attend any of the ceremonies. Relatives, friends, colleagues and neighbors, also install condolence messages and statements, which includes the picture and some general information about the deceased on the black linen sheet.

By seeing the black sheets hanging from the walls, Amer gets out of his vehicle. He crosses the alley and starts reading the announcement written on the black linen sheet. He sees the picture of the neighbor's son. He cannot believe his eyes. The deceased is Khalid, Amer's childhood friend and playmate.

They went to the elementary school. Khalid was a very kind person. He was a true animal lover. Amer remembers Khalid always had a pet or some animal in his basement he was taking care of or curing. Amer is standing outside Khalid's house, trying to digest what he has just found out when he sees his mother coming out of Khalid's house. She looks like she has been crying. Amer says hello to his mother and tells her he wants to visit the neighbor for a moment and offer his condolences. But his mother asks him not to. She tells him it is not a good time as Khalid's parents and siblings are still in shock and denial. She tells Amer that none of Khalid's family members are in fact in a good shape and it is not the best time to sympathize and offer condolences to them. She dissuades Amer and asks him to wait for her, his sisters and aunt Zahra to come out as they have a lot they need to get done.

Amer gets back to his vehicle and sits inside in disbelief. Moments later, all four ladies exit the house and go to Amer's vehicle. He drives the car heading towards the market. When Amer asks his mother about Khalid and because of his death, she explains that according to Khalid's mother, he had become quite interested in journalism, photography and documentary film making lately. According to his mother, Khalid began working with a famous newspaper recently and had volunteered to go to the war zone a few weeks ago to make a documentary report about Isis crimes and brutality. Khalid had joined a unit stationed on the front line and was shooting and preparing the report about devastations and destructions of war. But he also dedicates some time to photography and documentary film making aside from preparing his reportage.

He wanted to edit shots he had taken and make a documentary film about the war against Isis using them. But, one evening, when Isis launches an attack on government forces, in order to take real scary shots of Isis, Khalid and two other reporters took a huge risk and crossed the permissible limits their unit's commander has assigned everyone. Unfortunately, they fell into a trap set by Isis members who had come to check and identify the surroundings. The other two reporters were terrified. But not Khalid according to one of them. One of the reporters suddenly took off and was immediately shot. He died on spot. But Khalid believed the other reporter and himself, had nothing to fear or worry about, as according to Khalid, they had press ID cards and journalists had to be left alone according to the regulations and rules. Therefore, Khalid thought they had to be safe. Also, because they were

in civilian outfits, they were simply preparing their reports.

Khalid and the other reporter were kept captive by Isis a few days, trying to convince Isis members to let them go. But one of their members had suspected Khalid's true identity, thinking he was in fact a spy. So, they began torturing Khalid and filming it to get a confession and extract information from him. Khalid died shortly after getting captured. He died under brutal beating and torturing. Isis gave the other reporter a box containing Khalid's torture footage and all his other work, like photographs, shots he had taken and notes he had written and sent him back to the unit he had come from. They instructed him not to open the box unless he reaches his unit. So, the reporter ran back to his unit. The commander took the box from him and opened it. That's when he saw Khalid's head inside the box along with his other belongings.

According to the surviving reporter, Isis had burnt Khalid's corpse. The news of Khalid's death reached his parents. When they asked for his body so they could hold a proper funeral though, they were told the only thing they had of Khalid was his head. When Khalid's family were told Isis had beheaded their son, they went into a shock. They could not speak a word. They were left with a sad silence and disbelief.

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Amer and his entourage arrive at the market. Simultaneously, Amer's mother finishes telling what happened to Khalid. Amer is deeply affected by Khalid's disturbing density. He is gulping, trying hard not to cry with four women present. It takes him all he has to stop his tears to roll down in front of his aunt, sisters and mother. Amer parks his vehicle and requests his mom and other ladies to finish their business in the market, as he has not parked his vehicle in a dedicated parking area. He says, if he is caught parked there, he will surely be fined by the traffic police. All the ladies get out of the car and walk toward the tailor shop across the street. They have actually visited the same tailor shop few days earlier to order dresses they want to wear for Amer and Sara's engagement ceremony. They have gone to the same tailor shop for fitting and adjustments and also need to visit a few other stores after they are done with the tailor. Amer is seated in his car, sad and sorry for what happened to Khalid. He remembers days him and Khalid went to school together, had sleep overs, played and studied together. One thing that

really bothers Amer, is that him and Khalid had stopped talking to each other a few years ago, after an argument they had over a pointless stupid subject. They didn't even greet one another, saying hi when seeing each other. Amer feels very remorseful. He wishes they had never argued. Amer realizes how short life is. But people still fight, argue and has misunderstandings and stop loving one another for the simplest and idiotic reasons. Khalid is now dead and it is too late for reconciliation and appeasement. Alas, says Amer. He picks his phone and calls Sara and tells her about Khalid, his childhood friend. Sara comforts him a little and tries to calm him as much as she can. They speak about how Amer feels. At the end of his conversation, Amer tells Sara he is going to see her after dropping his four lady relatives back home, which is approximately going to be around two to three hours later.

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Sammy comes out of the shower and notices Robert is standing in front of a calendar at the kitchen. He has uncovered the calendar, which was hidden under some towels and cleaning clothes hanging from the kitchen wall. Robert is calculating days to figure something out. Sammy asks him what he is doing and he says he is finding out how many more days left to the beginning of their classes at the college. Sammy dresses up and stands next to Robert. He stares at the calendar too. A sign suddenly catches his attention. He realizes something too. He keeps on staring at the calendar thinking. Robert notices he has frozen, staring at the calendar.

"What is it?" Asks Robert. "What are you staring at?"

"It's nothing." Replies Sammy. "I forgot my dad's anniversary completely. You see? I'm losing my mind dude. I just noticed it. What a son I am. It's exactly the day after Amer's engagement ceremony."

"So What? It's the day after Amer's engagement. So, what? Why is this so important?"

"The thing is. The thing is I went and visited my dad's grave and promised I was going to finish the work on the rifle before his anniversary."

"Rifle? What rifle? Oh. The same rifle you were supposed to tell me about a decade ago!"

"Oh my God. There we go again. Yes. The same rifle. Will you leave me alone if I tell you right now?"

Sammy leans on his Cain and walks to his room. Robert follows. Sammy stands below the cabinet, where the rifle is on. He



leans his Cain against the wall, takes the rifle down and sits on his bed while holding the rifle. Robert notices Sammy's facial expression changes as soon as he holds the rifle in his hands. Robert can bet that rifle is of a high sentimental value to Sammy. He pulls the computer chair opposite Sammy and sits. Robert keeps quiet, meaning he wants Sammy to finally begin talking whenever he is ready. Sammy takes a deep breath:

"As you know, my dad owned an industrial workshop in the town. His workshop was by the main street of Al Darrah entrance. He was really good at what he did. That's why, he always had so many clients who had many jobs for him and needed industrial parts they wanted him to make for them. His clients mainly wanted him to make them the most delicate, sensitive and special industrial parts, which making them required certain specialty, accuracy, talent and real dedication. It was enough to show him any drawing once, gave him the correct dimensions and specifications. No matter how difficult making it was, he made the part. His clients were rest assured their required industrial part would be made using quickest methods and most professional technics and based on given dimensions and specifications. My dad had a very close friend. God bless his soul. His name was Ahmad Khalfan. He was dad's best friend. I used to call him uncle Khalfan. My dad was the only child, like me. The only child in his family. He had no siblings. So, uncle Khalfan was in fact like a brother to my dad. He loved uncle Khalfan like his brother and vice versa. They were together most of the time. They had been friends for years. God bless his soul, late uncle Khalfan was a kind man. He was also very quiet I remember. Uncle Khalfan was waiting for an accession to buy me a present. He used to buy me newest toys in the market and other things like books, pen, color pencils, rulers, erasers and stationery. He loved me like his son but had a daughter himself of course. I know he loved me. Probably because he always wanted to have a son. Uncle Khalfan was a well-read kind of a man. He had a huge library at his place, so many books, which he had read them all. Wherever we went, my dad spoke about him and his understanding of almost every subject. He knew the answer to almost any question you asked. Uncle Khalfan used to work at the arms and ammunition company near Al Darrah, at research and development department and of course he loved designing sniper rifles. Not for the organization he worked for of course. It was just a hobby of his. I was a kid back then, but I clearly remember he used to come to our house after his office hours, smoked hookah with my dad, drank Arabic tea

with him and one day I heard him telling my dad about a rifle concept he had in mind. He was telling my dad all about it excitedly and happily, using technical terms and hard industrial words, which normal people barely understood. But my dad understood what he was telling him, because he was an industry man himself and familiar with the terms uncle Khalfan used to describe his concept. But I know for a fact, what uncle Khalfan said to my dad about his concept, bored my mom to death. Because she didn't understand those industrial terms uncle Khalfan and my dad were using when discussing uncle Khalfan's rifle concept. She just nodded so that uncle Khalfan would not be offended and come to conclusion he was boring my mom. As if my mom understood anything about rifles and industrial work. Uncle Khalfan had become obsessed with his rifle idea lately. He spoke about a special kind of a sniper rifle, which had not been yet designed and developed. At some point he spoke about it day and night. Anyway, uncle Khalfan had a rifle which had some problems and didn't operate properly. Well, it used to work in the beginning when uncle Khalfan and my dad took it for hunting. Until one day, the rifle jammed and stopped working completely. So, as usual, uncle Khalfan sat and thought about how he could repair it. But he figured he could make certain changes in some of its parts, make certain modifications, developed the rifle, turn it into a high range accurate and deadly sniper rifle. The fantasy of creating a highly advanced sniper rifle had been circulating in his mind for years, and now, he had a chance to execute his idea about designing the sniper rifle, which had not gotten out of his thoughts for a long time and presented it to the organization he worked for accordingly.

He sat down and started drawing and designing. When he made sure there was no crack in his design, he took it to his office and showed it to his boss. He asked his boss to provide him with a budget to execute his plan and create the rifle he had in mind. But unfortunately, his boss was an embezzler. He used to steal from the organization and everyone working in it. I mean all his staff knew it also. But they had to keep their mouth shut because they might have lost their jobs if they said anything about it. Apparently, no one had the balls to say something. Anyways, uncle Khalfan's boss who didn't want to release a budget for him, asked him to leave the design with him in his office, so he would evaluate or let's say study it on the right mind set and he said he was going to inform uncle Khalfan about his decision later. Uncle Khalfan, being a simple man, left the design and drawing at his boss's desk and left his office. A few days went by and

Uncle Khalfan heard no updates from his boss. So, he went back to him to follow up. But his boss, who didn't want to help him in fact and wanted to get rid of him completely, told him he had studied the design and figured there are issues with rifle's design, hence he could not release any budget for a problematic design. He also told uncle Khalfan that he was not hired in that organization as a designer and no one asked him to design a rifle in the first place. His boss disappointed him by saying that uncle Khalfan had some other duties in that organization rather than designing rifles and he better do his own duty and completed his own work-related tasks instead of wasting his time on childish looking rifle designs. Uncle Khalfan's ego was crushed and he was humiliated in the presence of all his colleagues. He left his boss's office burning in flames of anger. Of course, he would be furious. He had been working on that design a lot and was absolutely certain about his design. He was truly confident there was no problem with the rifle design. The engineers working for the same arms and ammunition organization knew uncle Khalfan as a good weapon / rifle designer and all believed he was quite talented in it. Even if it was not his real job. That particular design was very dear to uncle Khalfan. Imagine, it was so important that he used to say that design of his was like his child. He said he had given birth to it and now he had to raise it and develop it. Anyhow, his boss refused to give him development budget. When my dad found out his best friend was so disappointed and sad for the fact that he had no means to develop his design, he told his best friend he would help developing his rifle. Because my dad had almost all the necessary equipment and machineries to do so. My father told uncle Khalfan he would help him create the rifle in their free time. Knowing everything about his best friend's life, my dad gave him his word, promised him he would help him bring his design to life, no matter how long it took. My father sincerely wanted uncle Khalfan to achieve his dream. My dad knew very well that uncle Khalfan's objective to make that rifle was not only to prove there is nothing wrong with his design. But as a matter of fact, he wanted to sell his design to the organization and buy a kidney for his diabetic daughter with the money he would receive. Or at least took his daughter to a European country or America for treatment. You know how expensive buying a kidney or medical traveling is. Poor uncle, could not wait any longer for a kidney to be donated even if he wanted to. I knew he had to wait for a long time to get his daughter a kidney transplant and she was in a critical situation, in need of an immediate kidney transplant. Uncle Khalfan wanted

to build his family a house also with the money he thought he would get selling his design to the organization. Of course, like I said he was just a government clerk and he could not afford all those medical expenses with a clerk's salary. So, his only hope was to sell his design to the organization. Uncle Khalfan and my dad went to the city and bought these machineries."

Sammy now points his finger on the machining equipment that are installed in his room. Robert takes a long look at the machinery in Sammy's room, eager to hear the rest of the story. Sammy continues:

"Yes sir. That's what happened. Now you may want to ask why did they have to buy new machinery and other tools, while my dad already had an industrial workshop? Why didn't they do it there at my dad's workshop? Why they had to do it in the house? The answer is confidentiality and secrecy of the matter. You should know, in this country, in whole Syria I mean, possessing and carrying a weapon is a crime for a civilian, and the government is extremely strict about it too, let alone executing idea of modifying and developing one. They could not do it at my dad's workshop, with so many walk-in clients, neighbors, people around, etc. That was their top-secret project. If you heard me saying that uncle Khalfan took his design to organization he worked for, it's because that organization, I mean arms and ammunition organization is the organization working with weapons as its title says. Besides, yes, uncle Khalfan worked there. But outside that organization, no one was allowed to do such thing in a private workshop. Anyways, they bought the machinery and required tools. They delivered the machinery and installed them in the basement. They both worked for something like two years, until they finally made the changes they wanted to the rifle and converted it into this one"

Sammy lifts the rifle he has in his hand, holds it up and shows it to Robert. Robert nods. He has just found out about the history of that rifle. So, he is quiet and thinking. What a journey that rifle had until it reached Sammy's hand, Robert thinks. He asks Sammy to hand the rifle over to him and Sammy does that. Robert examines the rifle, pats on it and asks for the rest of the story eagerly. Sammy continues talking:

"After they finished working on the rifle, uncle Khalfan who had a good relation with the managing director assistant of their organization, asked him to convince the managing

director to attend a test shooting with the rifle he had designed. So, everyone at the organization, including uncle Khalfan's immediate boss would witness the accuracy, power and range of the rifle. Uncle Khalfan wanted to prove to everyone that there were no issues with his design what so ever, as his boss claimed. He also wanted to prove that they could change an old and useless rifle, to a useful sniper rifle as there were thousands of them laying useless at one of the warehouses of the organization. If uncle Khalfan could prove his design worked, the organization could start modifying and developing all those useless rifles they had stored. This would have been the best thing that happened to the organization. With the cooperation of managing director's assistant, they fixed a date to see how the rifle works. But, my dad and uncle Khalfan decided to take the rifle for a test shoot one day prior, so they would not have any surprises. They also got permission to receive a number of bullets from the storage I forgot to tell you about. They received a box of hundred bullets and got to the shooting range to test the rifle. They put bullet's inside the magazine and loaded the rifle and as soon as they pulled the trigger, a strange sound came out of the rifle. The weapon got jammed somehow and no matter what they did, they could not fix it. I mean even the first bullet would not get shot. They took the rifle home, because they didn't have their tools with them. They unassembled the rifle and figured they have made a mistake, a less than a millimeter dimensions mistake in machining a crucial part. The part got locked in the rifle, it jammed and prevented it shooting the bullet. The bad news was they could only fix the rifle by machining and making a new part with correct dimensions. Their concern was that machining a new part would take days, and they had to show off their rifle the next day. I'm sure you could imagine how desperate they were. They didn't really know what to do? The rifle didn't work. Under lots of pressure and stress, they saw no other option but to cancel their presentation and postpone it for the near future. The presentation uncle Khalfan had to pull so many strings to fix. Being a reputable and respectable man, uncle Khalfan went into depression when that happened, thinking he had lost his reputation and honor. My dad too. But my dad was sad for his friend more. As he knew how important that presentation was to him. They didn't touch this rifle for around a week. Even my dad did not show up at his own workshop for a few days. He stayed close to uncle Khalfan. During those days, uncle Khalfan was one day asked to meet the HR manager. He wanted to give him a two-week notice telling him he was going to be transferred to a

different branch in a different city, which I don't remember the name of. The HR manager told him to prepare for moving as he would have to continue his work in one other office managed by the same arms and ammunition organization in a different city, which I forgot where it was. His transfer had of course nothing to do with the rifle and presentation. It was strictly a company-related decision. It was in fact somewhat better for uncle Khalfan. Because he would get a higher position and better salary and benefits. Those were saddest and most confusing days for both my dad and uncle Khalfan. Anyhow, uncle Khalfan got reassigned and relocated. Life got my dad busy and the rifle project stopped just like that. But I remember hearing my dad saying he wanted to finish the work on the rifle and finish that project. But every time something came up. Life became more and more challenging afterwards, delaying him to finish the work on the rifle. Months passed and suddenly one day, I saw my dad crying quietly in their bedroom and my mom was preparing a little luggage for him. It looked like my dad was travelling somewhere. So, I asked my mom what was happening? She said uncle Khalfan had a brain stroke and was dead. My dad was really sad. I had never seen my dad cry for anything in his life. Actually, I was quite sad myself losing uncle Khalfan. My mom said my dad was taking a bus to uncle Khalfan's home town to attend his funeral. A few days after my dad came back, he started examining the dimensions on the rifle. He had decided to keep on working on it until he finished it. He always said that rifle was his best friend's memento and he had made a promise to him, that he wouldn't stop until the rifle was complete and ready. My dad in fact wanted to make his best friend's wishes come true whether he is dead or alive. But life got my father busy and completing the rifle got delayed every time. Until my dad got shot wounded in that terrorist attack, which I'm sure you know the whole story about and sadly died unexpectedly. Now the most important part of the story I've just told you is that my dad asked me to complete the work on the rifle and finish it and I made a promise to him that I surely will. I'll have to make a part, machine it with precise dimensions and install it on this rifle, so I can call it done. I have decided to finish the work on the rifle before his fifth anniversary, which is the day after Amer's engagement ceremony. I mean I've bought the piece of special metal required, I'll have to machine it and install it on the rifle. This rifle used to be a memento from my dad's best friend to him and now, it's my dad's memento to me. So, I must finish it. The legend of this rifle will have an ending for sure. To be very honest with you buddy, I would love to know what

purpose is this rifle destined for. When will it be used? By whom? Where? Against whom? Who will use it and why? I'm serious. I would love to know the answer to these questions.

Sammy points at his industrial mini machinery and other power tools with his finger, shows them to Robert and says he has already begun making the rifle's required part. He tells Robert he has decided to dedicate few hours every day to machining the part, so he can finish the work on completing the rifle before his father's fourth anniversary. Robert is deeply impressed by the story Sammy told him. He is shaking his head thinking, is affected emotionally by what he has heard. There is a long silence between Sammy and Robert.

Robert still has the rifle in his hands. He is staring at the rifle. Sammy is sitting on his bed. He lays down slowly. He is planning to get up and begin machining the metal piece. He gets up and his phone rings as soon as he wants to go to his machine. He glances at his phone screen and sees his mom is calling. He answers the phone and begins talking to his mother. Sammy's mom informs him that Amer has brought her and others to the town market's tailor shop to do the fitting. She explains to Sammy, that she and her sister have contacted Mr. Al Anwar, a relative of her brother-in-law who is a resident of a south western city called Al Latakia. She says they had informed him about the date they had decided to flee Al Darrah. She also says that Mr. Al Anwar has signed a contract with a building owner and rented a four-story building for them to reside in when they reach Al Latakia. Mr. Al Anwar has also said he will be waiting for them to arrive. So, all of them can be residing in the same building as neighbors. According to Sammy's mom, everyone is to finish packing and getting ready before Amer and Sara's engagement day, as they will not waste any more time and would leave Al Darrah exactly the day after the engagement ceremony. Like any other Al Darrah residents who are fleeing the town, travelling to a safe place in order to prevent being captured by Isis blood sucking members. She tells Sammy that she is going to share the same information with Amer a few minutes later as they are all at the tailor shop and Amer is sitting in his vehicle outside waiting for them. Sammy's mom asks him to take their luggage out of the storage and have them ready for packing. She also wants Sammy to look for some strong cardboard boxes and bring them home with him when he goes out. They need to pack some of their necessary things and can use some cardboard boxes. Also, she asks Sammy to start choosing the stuff he thinks he would need the most. So, his

things would be ready for packing. Sammy has to select and pack all necessary items he would use every day. He knows that Robert would most definitely return back to Damascus, where his parents are, where he was born and raised. But Amer and Sara have to do the same thing Sammy is told to do. They would also stay at the same building which was rented by Mr. Al Anwar in Al Latakia city. They too have to start preparing to run from Al Darrah and take refuge to Al Latakia, which is known as the safest city in the whole country. When Sammy's telephone conversation with his mother ends, he is still standing by his machining equipment. He notices he has forgotten to wear his apron. So, he puts his apron on, inserts his earphones to his ears and glances at Robert before playing his iPod. Sammy pauses for a moment and tells Robert about the escape plan he discussed with his mom. He turns the machine on, plays the music and studies the drawing which is attached to the wall above the machining table. The machine starts shaping the metal part millimeter by millimeter.

Robert places the rifle on Sammy's bed and starts thinking about the story Sammy has just finished telling him about and the history of that rifle in general. He figures he as well wants to know what would the ending of that rifle's story be? What would happen to the rifle after working on is done and is ready to shoot? Who would use that and for what purpose? He takes a long look at his best friend Sammy, who has his back to him now machining the part. Robert admires Sammy's determination and will-power. He is thinking that Sammy has always been a man of his words ever since he got to know him. And since he has made a promise to his father to finish developing the rifle, he is doing it despite the fact he has problem with his left leg and cannot be standing for long. Robert applauds for Sammy in his mind.

Robert gets up, goes and takes his document folder. He searches for major's card in it. He is looking for the card major Al Ameer has given him the day before, so he would contact his direct line. He is hoping he would contact the major and he would probably get some good and promising news for him about his brother, Robin. The machining sound is loud and Robert cannot hear major's voice when he calls him. So, he goes to the balcony to call the major. But before he enters the balcony, his phone ringing. Robert looks at the screen of his cellphone. It is an unknown number. He normally does not pick the phone up and answer it if he doesn't not recognize the number displayed on his cellphone. But this time he thinks it may be someone who has some news about his brother. Someone



he doesn't know. So, he answers his phone. It is one of his college friends and classmates. Robert starts talking to him.

While Robert talks to his class-mate, major is standing and facing one of his office walls. The wall is completely covered by a huge map of the country. There are tens of pins inserted into the Syrian map. Certain areas are marked with red pins and some other areas with yellow and green. Major is holding a small tin box filled with red pins in his left hand and at his right hand, he is holding a list of areas which are entirely occupied and controlled by Isil forces. Major looks at the list, finds places recently occupied by Isis on the map and inserts a red pin on it to indicate the area is already conquered by Isis. The aggregation of red pins on the map is much more in the north and northeast and it becomes less towards south and southwest. Because Isis forces are advancing rapidly, capturing provinces, towns and villages. Especially in Raqqa province, which is situated on the northeast of the country.

Inserting each pin, major shakes his head with a gesture of worry and alas. He takes one or two steps back and stares deep into the map. There are almost no unpinned spots left on north and northeast of the country map. Major looks defeated. He sighs. He looks very worried staring at the map. He drops the list he has in his hand, on top of other pile of papers he has on his desk. His desk phone at the same time starts ringing. Looking discouraged and depressed, major goes and opens his office entrance door. He sees Karim, his secretary, seated behind his desk and holding the phone on his ear. All telephone calls to major have to pass through Karim first.

Karim is waiting for the major to pick up his office phone as usual so he can transfer the call to him after making sure he wants to speak with the caller. Karim who has not noticed major opening the door separating their two offices, suddenly realizes major is standing by the door looking at him. He immediately puts the caller on hold and informs major that brigadier general Ma'amoun, commander in chief of operations wants to speak with him. Major who is really not in the mood and is actually too exhausted to talk to the commander in chief, makes an annoyed gesture. He is looking for an excuse to avoid talking to general Ma'amoun. But after thinking for a moment, he decides he would talk to the man. Considering country's critical situation, which is a very sensitive and unstable situation, Major thinks it is not patriotic to avoid

discussing war related matters with a colleague, which may result into a solution to help certain number of comrades.

Major instructs Karim to connect general Ma'amoun's call to his office. he enters his own office and closes the door behind him. He picks the phone up and begins talking to the general. General Ma'amoun is contacting the major to ask him to deploy more forces for him as usual. Since major is the commander of support staff and in charge of deploying soldiers and forces to different bases, garrisons and divisions from the boot camp, general Ma'amoun and many other commanders constantly contact him to ask for support in terms of number of fighters to strengthen their divisions. But there are only a limited number of soldiers who are available. There are also volunteers who are fighting like soldiers. But they do not want to be obligated by any contract that makes them a part of an organized military placement. That's why no one can actually count on them as fighters who are there, for example, because they have to complete their compulsory military services.

In terms of deploying fresh soldiers, Major gives priority to general Ma'amoun all the time. Because he knows that general Ma'amoun and his brigade are in direct fight with Isis in the war zone and really truly fight. General explains to the major that he is planning a wide range of military operations and needs support in terms of troops and recruits to execute his plan of defending people, by resisting Isis and making them retreat from certain occupied areas of the country.

Influenced by density and number of red pins he can see on the map on his office wall, major promises the general to deploy him a good number of new troops he is supposed to recruit soon. Major is seated behind his desk. He has his head between his hands and has his eyes closed for a while. Minutes later, Karim knocks on his door and enters. He sees major's eyes closed. So, he thinks Major is napping. Karim apologizes quietly and makes a U-turn to go back to his own desk, so the major can take a quick nap, even for five minutes. But major who has already opened his eyes after hearing a knock on the door, calls Karim back in his office. Karim has a piece of paper in his hand. He sits across from major after getting permission and tells him he wants to discuss a soldier, called Robin Shaffi with him. Hearing the name Robin Shaffi, major gives all his attention to Karim. As if he recollects a matter that he has forgotten.

Major is ready to hear if Karim has found anything, any news in regards to soldier Robin Shaffi. But Karim has a hopeless and disappointed looks on his face that worries major a bit. Major knows significance of finding Robert's brother, both for himself and Robert's family. Because he remembers his father had strictly instructed him to help Robert find his brother. Major is all ears. Karim begins explaining;

"Sir. After you ordered me to find soldier Robin Shaffi yesterday and told me I had to find him under any circumstances, I thought it was best if I could first find people closest to him. I've been looking into his relation with his fellow comrades. I found out that he has two very close friends whom he met after joining the military to undergo his military service. Those two close friends are a twin brother named Hassan and Hussein Soury. They are both hospitalized at Al Shafa hospital currently."

Major interrupts Karim and asks him to get to the point and tell him what happened to Robin Shaffi. But Karim insists major to hear what he wants to say as according to him, every single detail is related to the other and major has to know all the details. Major nods and Karim continue:

"I was saying, apparently Hassan and Hussein Soury, the twin brothers are Robin Shaffi's best friends. Those two are the two individuals who saw him last. I've been on the phone with Al Shafa hospital's staff since early this morning, trying to talk to one of the twin brothers, so I would ask them about Robin Shaffi's whereabouts. But unfortunately, no matter how many times I called and politely requested them to allow me to talk to one of the brothers, no one cooperated. As if no one cared how important talking to one of the twin brothers was for me. Sir major, I swear to God sir I've called them over fifteen times. But the hospital staff didn't want to cooperate. Until two hours ago. I had no choice but to use your name to get what I wanted sir. I'm sorry I did it. But I've done it and it's done and over with. Believe me sir, it was the only way. I called them and said I was calling from major Al Ameen's office, Al Namar base in Al Darrah and I need to speak to hospital's director. As soon as I said I was calling from your office sir, they began cooperating. Assholes. Sorry for the language sir. They connected me to the office of hospital director, but his assistant picked up the phone. When he heard I was calling on your behalf, he immediately instructed the operator to direct me to the ward in which the twin brothers were at. I thanked him and said I

was going to inform my commander about his cooperation. A lady who was apparently in charge of the ward, picked the phone and told me none of the two brothers were able to speak to me as they were both unconscious. She got my number and promised she would call me as soon as any of the two brothers regained consciousness sir. She got both the office and my cell-phone numbers, so she'll contact me as soon as any of them are awake. That's all sir. Now, I understand if you are pissed at me and want to repent me or kick my ass sir. But like I said, I had no other choice but to use your name. To be honest sir, I knew from the get go that I had to use your reputation to get a response from those jack asses at the hospital. Again sir, major, sorry for the language sir. What I did got me the resulted I expected. If I did not use your name sir, I would have not found out the twin brothers are unconscious. Yeah sir. And that's all I have to say."

The major has a mild smile on his face looking at Karim. He seems not only he is not disappointed and angry with Karim, but he is actually pleased with the method he has implemented to obtain information he has been instructed to obtain. Major is happy for the fact that Karim hadn't given up until he got the info he was supposed to get. The only thing that bothers him is the fact that despite all Karim's efforts, the information he has obtained, still did not result in finding soldier Robin Safi's location. Of course, he knows now that there are people who can be of help in order to find out Robin Shaffi's whereabouts. But still, they have to wait, again.

Major smiles at Karim and assures him he is not mad at him for using his name to extract the info he needed. He asks Karim to relax as everything is okay between them. Major instructs Karim to keep him informed with any progress in regards to Mr. Robin Shaffi's location and dismisses him.

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Robert is still standing at the balcony. He ends the conversation he has with his former classmate. Robert is getting back inside when he remembers he had initially stepped on the balcony to call major Al Ameen. He pauses for a moment looking up, praying from depth of his heart to hear some good news before contacting major. Extremely anxious, Robert dials major's number.

The phone at major's office rings. Karim is standing between major's office and his own. But major acts ahead since he is closer to the phone and answers it. He hears Robert's voice.

Robert says hello and gets to the point immediately without much of introduction. Robert reminds the major that he was supposed to contact him between 11 A.M. to 3 P.M. But major has no answer for Robert yet. He does not know what to tell him. He spontaneously thinks of telling Robert he is in a meeting and has guests around, so he would buy more time to figure out what to tell Robert later on. Major assures Robert he will call him back as soon as his guests are gone. He hangs up the phone and notices Karim are standing on the door frame between their neighboring offices and listening to the conversation he had with Robert.

Karim tries making his presence known by clearing his throat. Major's mind is quite busy thinking what to tell Robert about Robin. He knows Karim is an expert in coming up with convincing alibies. So, he asks Karim to sit. Major explains to him that it was soldier Robin Shaffi's older brother who called a few minutes back to follow up his brother's case. He explains that he was in fact the one who asked Robert to call him back and follow up the case today. He also tells Karim that since he has no satisfying news for Robert so far, he had to lie and tell Robert he was at a meeting, has guests and would call him. Major says he is distressed, disordered and doesn't really know what to tell Robert when he calls him back. He thinks it is too difficult for him to figure what to tell Robert, specially at that difficult point of time. Major says since he himself has no news about Robin's whereabouts, he does neither want to give Robert false hope, nor make him give up hope, lose the spirit and completely refuse looking for his brother any further.

Aside from the fact that his father has precisely instructed him to help Robert find his brother, major himself has gotten to like Robert as well. Moreover, he knows it is his duty as a human to do all what he can, to help Robert find his brother. But what can he really tell Robert now? He has no news for him yet. When he and Robert met the day before, he told Robert he would receive a report, indicating casualties, imprisonments, leaves and statistics of all other soldier's related reports twice a week. Major has already received the report the very same morning, but there was nothing in the report indicating any sign related to Robin Shaffi. He is very confused and does not know what to tell Robert. He does not want to make Robert happy by being insincere to him and giving him a nonexistent thing to hope for, nor make him sad and disappointed. Karim who was just listening till now, starts talking after major finishes explaining and suggests

the best approach is for major to be absolutely truthful. Karim sincerely assumes telling the truth is the only way major can achieve what he wants to in regards to Robert's case. Karim pauses for a bit thinking,

"Sir," says Karim. "just tell him you received the damn statistics report and against all odds, his brother's name is not in it. Tell him he will also have to wait, like us. Just tell him sir, that we have no other means to locate his brother, but we think we may find out what happened to him from his closest friends in service, who saw him last, who unluckily happen to be unconscious, sir. Sir, this way, he will also have to wait for one of the twin brothers to come to and tell us what happened to soldier Robin. This is the only way he will not falsely hope to find his brother any time sooner than any of the twins wake up. He will not lose hope completely either. Of course, sir, you yourself are an expert in handling such situations. But frankly saying, in my honest opinion, if you explain to Mr. Robert exactly what is going on, without editing or deleting any of the facts, I'm absolutely certain you would achieve what you want sir. If Mr. Robert reaches the conclusion that finding his brother, or at least getting any news from him, depends entirely upon speaking with one of the twins, who are in coma currently, he would neither give himself baseless hope, thinking his brother is alive and kicking, nor would lose hope, again entirely, thinking his brother is dead and he would never be able to see him again. But of course, this is my opinion sir. We both know that waiting sucks. Especially for such an important matter, which concerns a family member directly. But sometimes, this very same patience, is the only way to get an answer sir. This also applies to Mr. Robert Shaffi. It's better he knows he has to be patient and simply wait. This I believe is much better than him getting a positive, yet false news or even get the good news, but a fake one. Don't you think so, Sir?"

Major is staring at Karim. He is not even blinking. Major is greatly impressed by Karim's logic and the way he handles matters of this nature. He is mesmerized by Karim's way of thinking. He begins questioning himself. Why does he even have to think of an alibi and why does he even have to lie, no matter how small and harmless? To make Robert wait longer? While telling the truth would take the real burden off his shoulders, without leaving any trace of guilt and guilty conscience. Besides, there is no reason at all for him to lie to Robert about anything. Major thanks and dismisses

Karim. But he tells Karim that he thinks he is right and sharing the truth with Robert was the decision he had to make from the get go. Before Karim exits major's office, he's quite proud of the fact that his boss gives him so much value to asks his opinion. Karim and the major are almost the same age. Karim starts his military service some few years later than the normal time he had to for some reasons. Because he is older than other soldiers and weaker than them according to the army standards, high ranking officers decided he would serve behind the frontline at al Namar base and as major's secretary. Karim exits major's room and closes the door behind him. Major picks the phone to call Robert. He is not sure if he is ready to call Robert yet. He places the phone back down. He decides to drink his tea, relax for a moment and pick the phone and contacts Robert again.

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Sammy is still on the machine. His eyes accidentally see the clock on the wall above the machining table. Clock's needles look like arrows of a crossbow. Sammy takes out his earphones and goes to the closet in his room immediately, scatters the contents looking for his binoculars. He remembers that according to his cousin Rana, Nelly's guitar lesson would finish somewhere between five thirty and six P.M. and she would walk home, crossing dream intersection, which Sammy has a view of from windows of his apartment. Sammy is under the impression that Nelly would walk back home instead of taking a cab. Using his binocular, Sammy thinks he can see her crossing the intersection. He has to find his binocular first. He looks for it everywhere and any spot he thinks he may find it. But he cannot find it. He is quite stressed as Nelly may cross the intersection any moment and he may not be able to see her through his binocular.

Robert has come back inside from the balcony after having a short conversation with the major. He is waiting for the major to call him back when he notices Sammy is stressed and agitated and looking for something. He gets curious and asks Sammy what he is doing. Sammy says in reply that he is searching for his binocular, but it looks like it has disappeared into thin air. Sammy is telling angrily that he does not remember where he has placed it last time, he used it. Robert sighs of release after finding out nothing bad and serious has happened. He tells Sammy it has been in the living room and saw his binocular there. Sammy goes and picks it quickly. He brings it up to his eye level and like a hunter,

quietly waiting for his game, looks around the intersection between moving people and vehicles to find Nelly, even if it is for a single second. Sammy turns his eyes to different directions looking for Nelly. She has gotten Sammy's mind busy since he met her. Sammy suddenly notices Robert is standing next to him, imitating his movements in a ridiculous way. Robert has his two hands up in front of his eyes, making two circles using his fingers, creating shape of a binocular and is imitating any move Sammy makes. Sammy is curiously looking at the intersection, the street and sidewalks. Robert's stupid hand gestures finally catches Sammy's attention and obviously makes him laugh. He looks at Robert with some dubious looks and asks him what the hell he is doing. Sammy is trying hard not to laugh. Robert answers Sammy with a very serious face and tells him he is looking for the same thing Sammy is looking for. After hearing what Robert says, Sammy can no longer control himself and they both burst into laughter.

Robert's idiotic response is told in a very funny and stupid way that not many people can ignore and control themselves laugh. Of course, Robert knows already that Sammy is hoping to find Nelly in the street at that particular hour of the day. Robert's cell-phone starts ringing. He runs towards the balcony to answer his phone. Robert gets very happy to see major Al Ameen's name on his smartphone screen calling him. Sammy takes his binocular against his eyes after he sees Robert leaving him in the room. He looks everywhere but to no avail. He has decided to give it one last shot hoping he would see Nelly and he is right. Sammy's patience pays off.

Carrying a guitar case over her shoulder, Nelly is walking towards her house. She has a blue jean on, a dark blue t-shirt and snickers. Younger men, even women cannot take their eyes off her beautiful face. Sammy's hands and binocular are literally shaking. He is extremely excited. He sees Nelly crossing the intersection. There is an old man seated near the wall on the side walk begging. Nelly stops by the old beggar, pulls something out of her jean's pocket and hands it over to the man. she continues walking. She is gone out of Sammy's sight in a second. At least, it feels like it is only a second to Sammy. He is thinking that Nelly is so beautiful that even from that far distance, he is still feeling she is the girl of his dreams and of course appreciates her beauty.

Sammy has a smile on his face. He can see Nelly from the window of his apartment and this makes him childishly happy.



Sammy thinks he would do this every single day, until he gets to have her for himself. He would confess that he has stalked her one day.

While Sammy is cheerful and happy for the fact that he has seen Nelly from more than hundreds of yards, Robert goes back to the balcony to take major's call. He answers happy and excited for he thinks he is finally going to hear some great news in regards to his brother. So, he answers his phone and a moment later, after saying hello to the major, again he goes to the point directly, asking major about his brother. Major is doing his best for Robert not to notice his disappointed and sorry accent. He first apologizes for not being able to talk to Robert earlier. Major goes directly to the point too. He knows Robert is counting seconds, waiting for his phone-call, in hope of hearing some promising news about his brother.

Major knows well that Robert has suffered a lot, putting so much efforts to finding his brother. So, he doesn't want to keep him waiting any longer, as he does not sound like he is in the mood for small talk anymore. He knows the only thing that matters to Robert is finding his brother and making sure he would come back in one piece. Robert is all ears, waiting to hear positive and promising comments. According to what major and Karim decided, major has to tell Robert the whole truth. So, he clears his throat and starts talking, explaining to Robert about the statistics and the report he was supposed to receive, which he in fact did and against all odds, he could not find Robin's name in the list at all. He tells Robert that unfortunately there was even not a hint of where Robin might be in the statistic report he received. Major also tells Robert his brother's case is considered as one of the most complex military cases in Army. Major can hear Robert sigh. He tells Robert that after thinking of different ways by which they might be able to locate his brother, Karim and himself have come to conclusion that it is better to implement other methods to find his brother. He explains that after discussing the issue further with Karim, he has figured the best way to find Robin's whereabouts is in fact following up his footsteps, his last seen location from his fellow comrades, his best friends, his military service pals, etc. In order to find out what happened to Robin, the best solution is first to find out whom Robin hung out with the most after he was deployed and with whom was, he spending most of his free time.

Major reveals that according to their investigation, it turns out Robin had established a close bond with two brothers, twin brothers called: Hassan and Hussein Soury, who served with him at the same base. But unfortunately, both brothers, who are from Al Thawrah city originally, have been hospitalized at Al Shafa hospital Aleppo city, under care of doctors and nurses, they're in coma laying at critical care unit. So, they would all have to wait for at least one of the brothers to come to, so they would accordingly ask him about what happened to Robin, since they were last seen together.

Robin has been seen with them few hours before Isis attacked that fateful day, which resulted into his disappearance and the twins getting injured. Robert takes a deep breath after hearing major's explanations. He and major Al Ameen both pause for a short moment after major finishes talking. Robert who is becoming frantic more and more, takes another deep breath, sighs and thanks major for all what he has done so far. But major apologizes for still not having a satisfying news for Robert and his family. He expresses getting information of this nature is a very difficult, time and effort consuming process, considering country's current situation. He wants Robert to know that while every single personnel of the military are heavily occupied fighting with Isis or other factions, he can rarely find someone who has time and is willing to cooperate helping to find Mr. Robin Shaffi. But major promises Robert he would do all he has in his power to obtain any news about his brother's fate. Robert thanks major and their conversation ends.

Robert hangs up the phone, feeling disappointed, depressed and desperate. Robert realizes that he has to call home as soon as he hangs up the phone and keep his parents informed about what he has been told by the major. But what does he have to tell his mom and dad this time for them not to feel miserable, frustrated and disappointed like himself did? How does he have to tell his parents that getting to find out their younger son's fate depends on one of the twins, who are both happened to be unconscious, laying on a hospital bed in a critical condition?

Robert always feels he can play an important role in controlling his parent's feeling, moods and emotions when it comes to Robin's disappearance. He has to keep his parents informed and update them with any progress he makes, if any, using words and certain method of informing them, by which they would not lose hope and become even sadder than they

are. Robert emphasizes on the positive points of what he has found out, edits unhappy disappointing news and sugarcoats them before sharing them with his parents. So, they'll not lose their spirit and stay positive for the time being. He is thinking for how long is he going to keep this method up? His main goal is to keep his parents in a good mood, until he finds out what exactly happened to his brother, because he cannot see any of his family members depressed and sad any longer. He is standing at the balcony lingering to contact home before he goes back inside from the balcony. Robert wants to keep his family from worrying as much as possible. Even for a shortest he can't see sadness of his parents. He decides to discuss the matter with them and get that over with. So, he dials home and surprisingly, it is his father who answers the phone. Robert is surprised because normally his mom would answer the phone at home. Robert makes a joke with his father and says he thinks he has dialed a wrong number. He makes his father laugh. His father tells Robert his mother is taking a shower, that's why he picked the phone instead. So, Robert begins talking. He tells his father about his conversation with major Al Ameer. But Robert's dad interrupts him.

"Look," says Robert's father, "Your mom is in the shower and she surely cannot hear us. If you have bad news, just tell me son. I will tell your mother my way, slowly and the way she would not get into a shock. Just bear in mind that I want you to tell me exactly what happened. I don't want you to play with words in order to keep your mother and I hopeful and happy. I know you have been doing that, Robert. I know you do not want to see us sad and hurt. I get it. But we have already prepared ourselves for anything and everything, specially me. We both know you well son, your mother and I. We have raised you. Sometimes I think you feel you can fool us. When giving us updates, you talk quickly, pass the negative part of what you must tell us and would explain positive parts in details, in a longer version, making it sound like there's still hope. I want you to know I appreciate it son. We know you don't want us to worry. We do. But your mom is not here right now, son. Tell your old man, what happened to your brother? Honestly."

Robert is speechless. He can't spit a word. All this time, his parents know he was trying to make his brother's disappearance looks like something resolvable and pretends and makes it sounds like everything is going to be just fine at the end. That he has been trying to feed them with bitter reality, sweetened by white lies. Robert makes his father

promise him he would not tell anything to his mother, as she is a mother, already getting older and has no stomach to hear certain truth about what may have happened to her son.

Robert tells his father whatever he has discussed with major Al Ameer in detail. Robert's father promises him he would keep some of the information confidential and would not say a word to his wife about them. Until one of the twin brothers wakes up and reveals what happened to Robin. He promises he would keep his wife calm using any strategy he implements. Robert's father tells him he appreciates the fact that he has been trying to keep his parents calm and chill. Robert sits on a chair in the balcony. He wants to cry. But he is gulping his saliva and keeping his tears from pouring out of his eyes. He holds his head between his hands and gazes at the horizon, thinking about his brother.

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Amer is still inside his car, waiting for his mother, sister and aunt to get out of the tailor shop. He is nervous, checking the time and monitoring his surroundings to see if he can spot any traffic police vehicles. He is worried he'll be fined for parking in a no parking area. He keeps on checking his vehicle's left and right and rearview mirrors. He is not sure for how long he has been waiting. One or two hours maybe. He doesn't know for how long he has been seated inside his vehicle. Like any other man, or at least some other men, Amer hates shopping with ladies. He is much more patient in comparison to other men. But still, it has been a very long time since ladies left his car. He has experienced going out shopping with ladies and knows how long shopping a simple item would actually take them. But now, he is out shopping with four ladies.

What scares him is not only they want to do fitting at a tailor shop, but still want to visit other shopping malls to buy some particular items. Amer has accepted the fact that he has brought his lady relatives for shopping and his day is just going to be wasted, waiting for them in the car. So, he picks his smart-phone and begins playing games. He thinks playing candy crush, Tetris or some other games would help him pass his time faster while waiting for the ladies.

Another hour goes by. An hour that each single second of it seems like an hour itself. He sees one of his sisters approaching from the end of an alley at last. He is so happy thinking that the wait is finally over. He puts his key into

the ignition, ready to switch his vehicle on and gets ready to move. Moments later all four ladies entered the vehicle while talking about their dresses, the collar, bottoms, threads and any other thing that is related to fitting their night gowns. Amer is so mad at all of them for keeping him waiting for that long. What makes him even angrier is that no one, none-of them cared how long he has been waiting inside his car. Amer adjusts the middle mirror of his vehicle, looks at the three ladies sitting at the back seat and asks them in a very sarcastic attitude that where is their next destination, trying to imply that he is nothing to those ladies, but a chauffeur. But ladies are so much busy talking to one another that no one notice Amer's sarcastic comment. So, his sister who is sitting at the middle tells him their next stop would be a street in which most of lady's shoe shops are situated. Amer's mother completes her daughter's sentence by saying that the street she is talking about is in fact three blocks to the north, parallel to the streets they are in.

Amer can no longer contain himself and responds in an impatient and slightly angry tone that he wished he has hired them a cab instead of bringing them to the market himself and waiting for them for hours and hours. Because in that case, they could make the cab driver waiting for them for no matter how long they needed, and they could attend to their window shopping as long as they wanted to. Amer's aunt Zahra sees Amer's angry and annoyed face from the front mirror. She pats him on the head to calm him down and tells him in a kind tone:

"Oh, my poor nephew. Are you tired sweetheart? Now, stop nagging. You want us to attend your engagement ceremony looking like Sudanese villagers? So, you'll be ashamed of having such family and relatives in front of your future wife's relatives and friends? So, they'll laugh at us in general and you in particular later? You want us to wear shitty dresses so you'll be ashamed? Is that what you want?"

Amer shakes his head, saying "No".

"So, shut up and drive. We still have many things to do."

Amer is quiet. His aunt's words convince him a little bit. So, he gives an artificial smile to his aunt and begins driving. He has not driven the car more than few yards when one of his sisters tells him she is thirsty and has to take her pill.

"Of course, my lady," says Amer sarcastically.

He stops by a small newspaper kiosk, orders a few bottles of juice, a daily newspaper and a few bottles of water. He pays the guy and continues driving. A moment later, his aunt Zahra tells him what she called and told Sammy about their plan to moving to Al Latakia, which is a safer city to live in. She explains also that Mr. Al Anwar has rented a four-story building for them all to live in at Al Latakia city port. Amer is confused. He reduces his car speed and asks his aunt for further explanation. His mother and aunt tell him everything again and inform him that Mr. Al Anwar, who is actually a relative from his father's side, has called and informed them that he has rented a four-story building for them at Al Latakia, while they were at the tailor shop for fitting.

They tell Amer the building his father's relative has arranged has four floors and capacity to accommodate all of them. Mr. Al Anwar has signed a tenancy contract on their behalf and confirmed date of their arrival with the landlord too. So, according to their plan, all of them should be ready to travel to Al Latakia the day after his engagement ceremony.

Amer's aunt continues explaining him that she has called Sammy and informed him as soon as she heard that great news, asking him to start selecting the things he needs most on a daily basis. So, they'll be ready for packing and moving. Amer's mother also asks him to look for cardboard boxes and start packing his most required possessions, so they're ready to move. She asks Amer about the apartment him and Sara have rented. Hearing the news about them moving to Al Latakia, has made Amer's mind busy with certain facts. He tells his mother they'll talk about the apartment in a later time.

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Amer's car enters a street, three blocks away from the street they were in a few minutes back. Amer drives his vehicle inside a parking lot. Ladies get out of the car immediately and head towards the shoe shops. They are so many ladies shoe shops, located at both sides of the whole street, from the beginning to the end of it. Amer waits inside the car as usual while ladies look for shoes. Amer remembers the rental apartment he has reserved and paid a down payment. He has been looking to rent an apartment for some time. Through a real estate agency, he finally found a one-bedroom apartment

in a decent neighborhood. Luckily, he could afford the down payment amount landlord was asking. He called Sara immediately and asked her to go check the apartment with him and see whether she liked it too. Fortunately, Sara liked the neighborhood, bedroom sizes, the kitchen and shower. The only problem was that Amer could only move in after three months. Because by then him and Sara would be legally married and can officially live together. The landlord was smart, knew he had to run from Al Darrah and take refuge elsewhere. Like some other Al Darrah residents. Apparently, he was just waiting to rent out his one-bedroom apartment and leave town after that. Maybe he was one of the first people who figured he had to leave everything and escape Raqqa province. Amer paid landlord's representative the down payment and reserved the apartment. He had promised the landlord's representative, he would visit the real estate agency two or three days before his engagement ceremony, to sign the rental contract and complete the documentation. Amer and Sara had decided to work on the place, fix anything that needs fixing, change anything they wanted and get it completely ready to move in. They wanted to beautify the apartment and even furnish it in advance. So, when they move in, everything would be ready. But everything has changed now.

According to Islamic law, Sara and Amer can only live together under one roof after certain Islamic traditions and ceremonies performed by a Sheikh. Amer thought he would marry Sara two months after they got engaged and they would move in the apartment they have rented and live under one roof together. But their plans have changed.

Amer and others are going to leave Al Darrah for Al Latakia city, the day after his engagement ceremony. So, he doesn't need the apartment anymore. He thinks it is best to contact the real estate agency and cancel the apartment reservation. He figures he has to fix an appointment with them to collect the down payment he has paid. He is still inside his vehicle waiting for ladies to return. Fortunately, he has real estate's phone number saved in his smart-phone's contact list. So, he picks up his cell-phone and calls the real estate agents. The phone is ringing but Amer doubts cancelling an apartment reservation over the phone is a professional and polite way of doing it. At the same time, someone picks up the phone on the other side of the line. Amer spontaneously comes up with an idea to only ask their working hour and hangs up the phone. Luckily the real-estate works till nine P.M.

Amer decides to pick his fiancé and visit the real estate agency together with her, after ladies finish shopping.

It is going to get dark soon and there is still no sign of the ladies. Amer cannot wait a moment longer. He picks his cell-phone from the top of dashboard and dials his mother's number. Her phone is switched off. He calls his sister's phone. Her phone is switched off too. Exasperated and angry, Amer reaches the point he wants to send all ladies a text message and tell them to take a cab home, of course, if they ever decide it is enough circling around in the shopping malls. Because he can no longer waste his time, by simply sitting in his car waiting for them. But when he thinks about what he has decided to do, he figures it is not what a real gentleman would do. Besides, ladies would definitely become quite angry with him. He looks around if he can see any of the ladies. They're nowhere to be found. He notices a juice bar near the spot he has parked his car. He decides to refresh himself by drinking a delicious glass of fresh juice. Amer gets out of his vehicle and presses his car remote bottom. All four doors get locked automatically at the same time. He begins walking towards the juice bar. But he suddenly sees all the ladies coming towards him, each holding a number of shopping bags. He starts laughing at his own luck. He forgets about the juice. Instead, he walks towards his sister, mother and aunt, helps them take the shopping bags to the car. He opens the trunk and puts all their shopping bags inside. Amer makes an announcement as soon as everybody sits inside the car. He says he is not going to take them to any other place for shopping or any other location for any other reason anymore. He says he is busy and has to go somewhere right after dropping them home. Ladies thank him all and tell him they are tired themselves and do not need to buy anything or go anywhere else. They say they just want to reach home and take a rest. Besides, it is getting dark and none of them like shopping when it gets dark. Amer nods and starts the car.

There is a heavy traffic in the main street. So many vehicles have installed roof racks and loaded all what they can on them, heading towards God knows where. Some other vehicles also are just going home after completing a working day. It takes Amer more than an hour, but he finally reaches home and drops the ladies. They ask him in for dinner. But he says he has plans for dinner with Robert and Sammy and they are waiting for him at home. Plus, he has to pay his fiancé a visit too before heading back home. Amer gets off his car,



kisses his mother's forehead, says goodbye and drives towards Sara's house. He gives a quick buzz to Sara as soon as he drops ladies and informs her, he is on his way, but he is stuck between so many cars in yet another traffic jam. He has no other choice but to wait for the cars to move, until the road is opened. The street Amer is in, is Al Darrah's only main street and the only road to Sara's house.

Amer switches his car radio on to listen to some music while waiting in the traffic. But instead, he hears a news commentator asking questions from an important government official about country's current situation and what is happening in certain provinces. Amer decides to switch his car radio off and play a music disk instead. But he hears the government official talking about people leaving their homes, trying to get their families to safer cities or countries. So, he changes his mind since him and his family too are leaving Al Darrah in a few days. He keeps the radio going. He thinks it is not a bad way to pass time, while waiting for the road to open. The subject commentator talks about is the huge number of vehicles lining up at petrol pumps, trying to fill up their tanks as every driver's objective is to simply drive out of danger zones. The commentator suggests people to be prepared and have their vehicles ready too, fill up the tank, check the tires and breaks. in case they need to leave their homes on an urgent basis. He says, people should not wait for the last moment or hope they would fill up their tanks at an intercity petrol pump. He actually has a point Amer thinks. He is teaching people to be prepared to save their family's lives in case of an emergency. Amer decides to do as the official suggests. He wants to hear the rest of his preparation's instructions, points and tips. But the road opens and vehicles in front begins moving. It looks like the traffic jam is at last opened. Amer is near Sara's house and has to give her a missed call so she would come out.

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Robert's mind is still engaged. He is still at the balcony. He gets up and returns to the apartment. Sammy is no longer standing by the window looking for Nelly with his binocular. He has gone back to his workbench, machining the metal part. Sammy sees Robert and asks him about his telephone conversation with the major. Robert explains all what he and major has discussed. He looks sad. Sammy comforts him a bit. He can see comforting Robert is obviously not working anymore. So, he keeps quiet and continues his work. Robert knows

Sammy's mind is busy with thoughts of Nelly. So, he does not talk anymore neither. He leaves Sammy alone with his thoughts and worries. Robert and Amer are both so eager to meet Nelly. They are happy and excited that Sammy has at last established a feeling for a girl. But they want to really know who has he fallen in love with? Robert has seen Sammy drunk the night before and can guess why. He has read parts of Sammy's letter and is determined to convince him writing a letter is not the best idea to begin communicating with a girl in the first place, let alone beginning a relationship with her this way. Robert wants to convince him to device a better and a classier approach. He knows Sammy damn too well. He also knows Sammy's limp has accordingly causes him lack of his self-confidence, affecting his thinking, decision-making, reasoning and logic.

As Sammy's best friend, Robert and Amer allow themselves to interfere in some of Sammy's affairs for his own good. They both know well that Sammy has faced so many challenges in his life. They also know the fact that Nelly is the first girl, or the only girl who had such a strong effect on Sammy's emotions. Robert is under the impression that Nelly can play an important role in Sammy's life. But he also knows he has to help Sammy begin his relationship with Nelly in a proper way first and doing so requires Sammy listening to some of the instructions he would be giving him.

Robert is more experienced than Sammy when it comes to relationships and women. He knows how to approach women in a right way. He had many relationships in his life and is way more skilled than his best friend Sammy. Robert has seen how Sammy loses his self-confidence as he begins to even speak to a female. He also knows Sammy is very stubborn and making him change his mind about handing a letter to Nelly is a difficult task in itself. But Sammy has decided to do it and Robert knows the letter would not take him anywhere or at least Sammy's chances are very low. He knows Sammy has probably thought of some other ways of telling Nelly how he feels about her and has come to a conclusion at the end that writing her a letter is the best way, considering his weaknesses and the way he underestimates himself. But what if like many other girls, Nelly does not approve of this kind of approach. What if she doesn't even accept taking the letter? What if she likes a confident kind of a guy who has the courage to tell her how he feels about her face to face? Robert knows he has to do something about the whole concept of communication by letter. But he is only waiting for the right moment to bring it up with Sammy. To convince him to man up, face his fears

of rejection, talk to Nelly and express how he feels about her. These thoughts consume Robert. He considers Sammy like a brother. So, he has to share his thoughts with him. He has to share his thoughts with Amer and ask him for his support to change Sammy's mind about the whole letter subject. Robert notices Sammy switches the machine off and glance at the clock. Sammy can't believe how fast time flies. He gets his earphones out and removes his apron. Robert asks him to contact Amer and decide on what to eat for dinner.

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Amer's vehicle stops in front of Sara's house. She comes out of the house and sits inside the car next to Amer. Amer starts driving. He holds Sara's hand and kisses it when the car goes thirty yards further. The first thing Sara notices is Amer's tired and pale face. She asks him the reason. Amer takes her through all what he has been doing before coming to see her. Every second he was waiting for his sisters, mother and aunt at down town market, expecting Sara to show him sympathy and say she pities him. But against Amer's expectations, Sara makes a strange gesture and begins supporting the ladies by saying that ladies have the right to look for what they need to buy, even if it takes hours. She tells Amer he should feel as his unquestionable and absolute duty to be at his lady family members service, who are his mother, sisters and aunt.

Sara asks Amer to stop complaining, pay attention to his driving and prepare himself for so many similar days of shopping, as he has to do the same for her as well. Exactly like what happened that day with him and his sisters, mother and aunt. Because she herself has so many things to buy after their engagement ceremony and doesn't need to hear him complain. She asks Amer to be ready and willing, not only for waiting for her all day long to do her shopping, but also for him to keep her company until she would finish shopping no matter how many hours it takes. Hearing what Sara just said, Amer hits himself at the forehead and starts murmuring, praying not to lose his mind. What is going to happen to him? What is waiting for him though? Amer's reaction makes Sara laugh. She takes Amer's hand and tells him patience is the answer to his problems with women's shopping. While driving, Amer tells Sara about their plan on moving to Al Latakia city and mentions they have to cancel their reservation with real estate agency and take back the down payment fee they had paid. Amer does not know what his fiancé's reaction would be? Because she would be separated from her parents and friends. She has no one in Al Latakia city. Sara is quiet for a moment,

thinking. Amer glances at her to see what her facial expressions tell. Sara breaks her silence and tells Amer she is going to be his wife soon and she believes as a wife she has to travel with her husband, wherever and whenever he decides. Amer gives Sara a deep and philosophical look, which has a profound expression of love and lust in it. He kisses her hand.

Sara and Amer reach the office of the real estate agent. Luckily, everyone who has to be there for cancellation of their reservation is already present at the office. Amer parks his car and goes inside with Sara. They sit for a moment and have some small talk. Amer begins talking and landlord's representative listens very carefully to what Amer says about them travelling to Al Latakia city and nods every now and then while Amer explains his situation. When Amer finishes explaining the reason he wants to cancel his reservation for the one bed room apartment, the representative says he thinks they have the right to cancel and escape. He says even himself is preparing to move his family out of town and to a safer city. He contacts the landlord and tells him all about Amer's decision when he picks up the phone. The landlord says he was expecting Amer to cancel and instructs his representative to return Amer's down payment back to him. But Amer asks landlord's representative to hand the phone over to him, so he would talk to the landlord for a moment. Amer says he needs to have a quick word with him. Amer takes the phone and apologizes to the landlord for having to cancel their reservation. He explains that there are no issues what so ever with his property and the only reason he wants to cancel is that they no longer feel safe and secure in Al Darrah and have decided to flee. Amer assures the landlord that it is the only reason for them changing their mind about the apartment. The landlord says he understands Amer's situation and assures him there is no hard feeling. He wishes Amer and his future wife a happy and prosperous married life and their conversation ends.

The landlord's representative gets his check book ready while Amer speaks to the man. He writes a check, gives it to Amer and gets a receipt from him after he finishes talking with the landlord. Amer and Sara go out of the real state agency. While walking towards his car, Amer asks Sara to start packing what she wants to take with her to Al Latakia.

Sara is quiet on the way. Amer notices her mood has changed. He is also thinking about the plans he had about growing his

young family beginning with that one-bedroom apartment. He can no longer tolerate seeing his fiancé's sadness. So, he asks why is she sad? Sara looks at Amer. She asks Amer if he himself is not sad? While having a bitter smile on her face, she asks Amer if that is what he has imagined the beginning of their married life would look like?

Sara is not mad at Amer at all. But she is mad at life's games and surprises. She always asks God. Why them? Why do all these unfortunate things have to happen to their country when they decided to make a family? Amer knows Sara is right. He was in fact thinking about the same thing all the time. But still, he tries to calm her. Sara and Amer don't know that so many of the guests they have invited for their engagement ceremony cannot attend as they have already left town or would be leaving before their ceremony. Some other invitees who live in other cities and towns would not be attending because they are scared to travel to Al Darrah, which is situated on Raqqa province in north eastern part of the country and northeast is becoming a very dangerous place. Amer and Sara have imagined a big number of guests attending their ceremony and this is getting farther from the reality every day goes by. To change the subject, Amer tells Sara he needs to buy one or two DVD movie so he would watch it along with Sammy and Robert Back home. Amer asks her to company him. Sara directs him to a video shop near her house.

Amer parks his vehicle. They both get off the car. Sara is going ahead and Amer follows her. She stops in front of a store. Amer looks inside the store. It is a store selling and repairing mobile phones. He thinks probably Sara has not understood what he wants to buy. So, he holds Sara's hand softly and repeats that he needs to buy some DVD movies, not a cellphone. Sara starts laughing and tells Amer to shut up and follow her. She opens the entrance door to the cell-phone store. There are several stairs going to a basement underneath the store, exactly after entering. There are tens of movie posters on the sidewall of the staircase. There is a tape light on each stair, so visitors would see each stair and not fall down. Because the staircase is only lit by a dim light, probably to create an artistic atmosphere. Sara walks downstairs and Amer follows her. She opens a small door and they both enter. Amer cannot believe his eyes. He sees a huge space, filled with shelves and shelves of DVDs. There are probably more than five thousand DVD boxes there. Shelved are classified by movie genre, all with movie posters on each DVD box. The DVD store resembles virgin megastores. Much smaller

of course, but still, it is a well-organized, nicely decorated pirated DVD store. Apparently, the DVD store has its own regular movies and music lover customers. Sara asks Amer the movie genre he is interested in. He craves watching a classic gangster movie. As if she has been working in the DVD store for years, Sara knows where each movie genre is. She goes to classic movies section directly and chooses Amer a classic gangster movie. Amer also chooses another DVD and they exit the store after paying the storekeeper. They are in Amer's vehicle when his phone rings. Sara curiously glances at Amer's cell-phone, seeing Sammy's name on the screen, Amer lifts his phone and holds it in front of Sara's face, so she would see better. But, as though she doesn't like what Amer did, Sara frowns and asks him why is he holding the phone to her face instead of answering it? Amer smiles and looks at Sara as if he has made his point. Amer and Sammy speak a little about what to eat for dinner? Amer agrees to take charge of arranging for dinner. He also tells Sammy he has bought two DVD movies, so they would have something to watch while having dinner. When his telephone conversation with Sammy ends, Amer begins to sarcastically explaining to Sara what he and Sammy were speaking about. But she frowns and says she has heard everything and there is no need for him to explain. Amer stops his car near Sara's house moments later. Still upset by Amer's sarcasm and behavior, Sara who is actually looking away from Amer, thinks her fiancé has intentionally parked his car away from her house, so she would be forced to walk a few yards to reach home. So, she turns her head towards her fiancé to give him a serious look and asks him the reason he has stopped the car that far from her house. But as soon as she turns her head toward him, Amer suddenly surprises her by kissing her lips. Only Sara realizes the reason Amer has stopped the vehicle before reaching her house. Amer is afraid Sara's parents would see him kissing their daughter in public. So, to be in a safe zone, he has stopped his car a safe distance from her house.

In Islamic countries, this can just not happen, whether in public or even in privacy of a home. Older people specifically, with a more traditional mentality, are totally against body contact between a man and woman if they are still not married and have not yet become halal to each other by a Sheikh. Amer kisses Sara a few more times, caresses her hair and holds her hand. He stops his car in front of her house and drops her off.

Amer reaches Al Darrah's only round-about a few minutes later. He remembers he had agreed to take charge of the dinner.

Fortunately, he is at a location where he has access to many fast food and traditional restaurants. So, he drives to his favorite pizza parlor and stops in front of it. He feels so lazy and tried to get off his car. So, he calls the pizza shop and places an order. An extra-large pizza, a family size coca cola, some salad and garlic bread. He describes his vehicle to the person taking his order and tells him he is waiting inside his vehicle outside the restaurant. While waiting for his order to get ready, Amer begins to imagine himself and Sara living in Al Latakia. He is actually excited about it. But at the same time, he considers its pros and cons as well. Deep down he is genuinely sad because some of his plans have not turned out the way he had imagined. Like the house in which he starts his married life and raises a family. Like having independency and privacy, visiting his parents and his wife's parents on a weekly basis. Amer is thinking about the fact that he and his wife would still be living close to his family and relatives. He does not know whether he would like that or not. He is amazed by life's surprises and what it can do to people. Amer hears someone knocking on his car window. It is the pizza delivery guy handing his pizza over to him at his car. He opens the back door for the guy and requests him to place the pizza at the back seat. He pays the bill, gives the guy a generous tip and drives away towards Sammy's apartment.

+ + +

The sun has already set. It is getting darker and Robert is starving. He suggests contacting a restaurant and ordering some food. But Sammy reminds him that Amer is going to buy pizza and bring it with him. He tells Robert he has already called Amer while he was in the toilet and he said he was on the way home. Sammy also says, Amer sounded pretty exhausted, but he said he has bought some classic movies so we would watch while having dinner.

Robert goes to the living room and sits in front of the TV set. He switches the television on and puts his feet on the coffee table. Sammy joins him after a while and they both start watching television. Moments later, they hear the doorbell. Sammy is looking for his Cain to stand up and go answer the door. But Robert jumps and opens the door quickly. A guy hands Robert an envelope and leaves. Sammy keeps on asking Robert who is it? Robert comes back to the living room and gives Sammy the envelop.

"It was some guy." Says Robert, "He asked for your name and family name. After he made sure he was at the right address, he handed this envelope over to me and left. That's it."

Curious about the contents, Sammy opens the envelope immediately and reads the letter consequently.

**Dear Mr. Sammy Samaha**

***The honor of your presence is requested at a dinner and cocktail banquet, held tomorrow evening at municipality banquet hall No. 1 with the aim to introduce and thank you and some other elite members of Al Darrah society for your recent achievements.***

***To be informed and accordingly prepared, our banquet guests who are in fact our beautiful town's society members, may expect to hear an inspiring speech from you about your achievements.***

***Expecting to see you tomorrow***

***Many Regards***

***Note: Each invitation letter would allow up to five guests inside banquet hall.***

"There we go." Says Robert after hearing what Sammy reads. "At least we now know what we'll have for dinner tomorrow night."

Robert and Sammy burst into laughter after what Robert says. Amer enters the house exactly at the same time and begins questioning the reason they are laughing so loudly. Robert stops laughing for a moment and tells Amer about the invitation letter they have received seconds before he arrived. The very first thing Amer says is he would bring Sara along after hearing about the dinner party. He places the pizza box, DVD movies and other things he has bought on the coffee table. Amer goes into Sammy's room and changes to his pajamas. He then enters the wash room for a moment, freshens up and comes back. The three of them eat. They watch one of the movies while having dinner. They then talk about what they have done during the day after the movie finishes. It's not long before everyone feels sleepy and goes to bed.

Thoughts of Nelly begin tickling Sammy's thoughts yet again. He can't sleep. He changes his position on the bed a few times. But thinking about Nelly would not let him sleep. Sammy has learnt a method from his father to use whenever he cannot



sleep. So, he uses his father's sleeping method. He takes a few deep breaths, tries not to think about anything except falling asleep. He moves his ankles clockwise and relaxes them while breathing deeply. Sammy slide into sleep moments later.

Sammy finds himself in a sandstorm, standing at the middle of a desert. He feels hot sands burning his feet. He can see a desert willow tree and a few sandhills nearby. He looks around to see whether he can find anything familiar. But because of the sandstorm, he cannot see farther than the willow tree and the two sandhills which are not that far away. The sun is at the middle of the sky. But the sandstorm has lowered sunlight's strength, creating a dusty mist on the desert's atmosphere. Sammy looks at the sky and notices an eagle is descending in a circular motion. He follows the bird's direction. The storm becomes even stronger when the eagle lands on a branch of a desert willow tree.

A dark grey mass begins covering the desert sky and he can now barely see anything. He cannot keep his eyes open any longer. He has to close his eyes. But before he does, he suddenly notices someone coming towards him from a far distance. He tries keeping his eyes open, so he would see how close the person has gotten to him. But keeping his eyes open has become too difficult already. Sammy lifts his right hand and shields his eyes. He is transfixed on seeing who is coming towards him. But he cannot keep his eyes open anymore. He can only say the guy is getting closer and closer. He just waits for the man to reach him. The man is his father. Extremely happy and excited seeing his dad, Sammy begins running to him with open arms to embrace and kiss him. But his feet are deep into the sand and he cannot even take a single step. His father tells him to stay where he is by a hand gesture. But Sammy is tremendously eager to reach and hold his dad.

Sammy's father is smiling at him. But Sammy gets mad why doesn't his father come closer? His father is pointing at a direction. When Sammy turns his head, he sees Euphrates river. When he turns his head back towards his father though, he sees his mom, Amer, Sara, Robert, his aunt and many more people gathering behind his dad. It seems as though they have all decided to go together and do not want to take Sammy with them. Sammy sees his dad leaving. He begins yelling at him, begging his dad to take him with him. Sammy keeps on crying and begging his dad and others to take him with them.

"Dad. Take me with you." begs Sammy.

"No son." Replies his father, "Not now bubba. Not for a long time yet."

Sammy's father turns his head and glances back at him the farther he gets. Sammy keeps on pleading, crying and yelling. The dark grey cloud becomes darker and darker until the entire desert gets dark as night. The sandstorm too becomes stronger and stronger by minute, until Sammy has difficulty breathing.

Sammy can open his eyes only for less than a second and sees the whole crowd following his father. He is very disappointed. He feels abandoned. Sammy is crying, begging Amer, Robert, his mom and others to help him go with them. But everyone is getting farther, ignoring him, smiling and turning their heads and glancing at him when they get farther. Sammy notices Nelly. She's is crying too. She wants to join the crowd like he does. She appears from nowhere and begins begging everyone to take her. The crowd disappears along with Sammy's dad. Nelly looks at Sammy. She is calling Sammy to go to her. But she is screaming, crying and asking Sammy to please go to her. The storm is suffocating Sammy and Nelly. He can't breathe. Nelly keeps on calling Sammy's name. Her voice becomes vaguer and vaguer.

Sammy opens his eyes. He sees Amer sitting next to him and shaking his shoulder to wake up. Robert is standing between the living room and Sammy's room. It is still dark, but Sammy has no idea what time it is. He is soaked in his sweat and is shaking a little bit. Sammy gets up and sits on his bed. He notices Amer and Robert's worried faces. He keeps quiet for a second, trying to remember the dream he had. It takes him a while to regain complete consciousness. Sammy apologizes to Amer and Robert first, for waking them up. He tells them he had a nightmare and asks them to go back to bed.

"Let's go dude." Says Amer to Robert, while ambling out of Sammy's room. "I guess he just had a nightmare. Let's go back to sleep."

"Yup, I guess so." Replies Robert, "Yeah. let's go."

Amer and Robert leave Sammy alone. Sammy sits on his bed motionless for a while. He picks his bottle of water from atop his nightstand and drinks a few sips. He can't stop thinking about his weird dream though. Sammy glances at his phone' clock. It is ten past three a.m. He lays down on the bed again and begins staring at the ceiling. What a crazy

dream he thinks. Sand-storm, his dad, the crowd, Nelly. He closes his eyes and begins breathing deeply, so he would go back to sleep. He feels sleepy again after taking a few deep breaths. He yawns and stretches his ankle a few times.

When Sammy opens his eyes this time, the sun is up already. He can hear his neighbor trying to ignite his car engine, like every other morning. But that old classic Volkswagen never runs. It is old and beyond repair. Sammy glances at the clock. It is twelve minutes past six a.m. this time. He knows he can't go back to sleep anymore. He gets up and goes to the shower directly. He turns the hot water running. He massages his face with hot water for a few seconds, squeezes his shaving foam on the palm of his hand and covers his beard and moustache with it. He changes the blade of his shaving machine and begins shaving his face. Sammy takes a quick shower and gets out of bathroom while drying his hair with his towel.

Robert and Amer are still asleep. Sammy dresses up quietly and begins cleaning the house, starting by emptying each room's garbage to kitchen's main garbage bin. He cannot believe it. There is so much garbage that he has to use two big trash bags to accommodate everything. He opens the entrance door and takes the two trash bags to the end of the corridor, where the garbage shoot is and throws them in. He goes back in his apartment and begins washing previous night's dirty dishes.

Sammy remembers the dream he had the night before again while doing the dishes. He fills the kettle with water and places it over the stove. Sammy prepares the table for the breakfast. He takes out three clean cups from the cabinet for tea or coffee for the three of them. He picks his phone and calls his mother. He knows his mom would wake up early every day. Zahra is in the habit of waking up before six a.m. every morning. Sammy speaks with her quietly, so he would not wake his friends up. He informs his mom about the invitation letter they received the night before. She knows all about it as they have also received the same letter the night before. But apparently, Amer's mother says she is not in the mood for dinner parties and that's why they are not certain if they would be attending at all. Besides, she has a feeling she has caught colds and feels pain on her joints. So, she may prefer to rest at home keeping her sister company.

Sammy notices the water is boiling. So, he says goodbye to his mom and goes to the stove.

Sammy makes Arabic tea for the breakfast. He takes out honey, cheese, jam and cream. He puts them all on the kitchen table. He has to wait for Amer and Robert, which he expects them to wake up any moment. So, he decides to remeasure the dimensions written in the drawing and re-examine everything before they do. He goes back to his room, takes the drawing off the wall and brings it to the kitchen with him. He opens his smart phone's calculator app and begins recalculating everything carefully.

Sammy is calculating and recalculating for around an hour when he remembers all of them were invited to a banquet in the evening. So, he has to figure out what to wear? He decides to wear a shirt he likes most. He remembers he has washed the shirt recently, but it needs ironing for sure. Sammy checks Amer and Robert. They are both still asleep.

Sammy takes the iron and ironing table out of his mom's room and takes out his shirt from his own closet. He transfers everything to the kitchen and begins ironing. Minutes later, he hears the washroom door open and close. He figures someone has woken up. He hears Amer's voice saying 'good morning' quietly behind him. Sammy turns his head and sees Amer's wet face, smiles and responds "; good morning to you too" and continues ironing. Amer sits at the breakfast table while drying his hands and face with his towel. He looks still sleepy and inexpressive, watching Sammy ironing his favorite shirt.

"I woke you up last night huh?" Asks Sammy noticing Amer's sleepy face and red eyes. "Sorry. Had no control over it. I had a nightmare."

"Oh, forget it," replies Amer, "It's fine man. I was not even thinking about last night. You just reminded me. I actually woke you up because I thought you were having a nightmare. There were strange sounds coming out of your throat. So, we decided to wake you up and save you if someone was trying to choke you in your dream."

Sammy tells Amer he can already start having his breakfast if he is hungry. He finishes ironing. He hangs his shirt on its hanger and takes it to his room to hang it in his closet. When Sammy retunes to the kitchen though, he and Amer begins having breakfast. Sammy asks Amer to also tell him about Robert ideas for his wedding party he was telling him about.

When Robert accompanied Amer and Sara to Al Thawrah city, he had proposed some wedding planning ideas to Amer and Sara, mainly in terms of decoration, the theme, flower arrangement and things of this nature.

" Oh, yeah," says Amer, "I remember. He actually has some great classy ideas. He suggests some pre-wedding ideas to be planned in advance since we have no wedding planner. You know that. Sara and I do everything ourselves. For example, Robert suggests to create a different kind of an invitation letter for our wedding, like those ancient roll-up letters messengers took to other countries containing a king's message for instance. I'm sure you have seen them in movies. Because nowadays, most of couples choose their invitation letter from a range of pre-designed cardboard invitation templates and they are beautiful. I mean most of them. But what Robert proposes, is to have our invitation letters like those roll-up messages on leather. I don't know how much it's going to cost me. But I actually love the idea. Robert suggests a seventeenth century theme for our wedding. like me and Sara arriving to the ceremony with a chariot. I mean I love his ideas. He also suggests a group dance. All couples only would go to the dance floor and perform a fantastic group dance. It would be epic dude. Don't you think? I mean he thinks of stuff I would have never thought of to be totally honest with you. He tells me about how he thinks the wedding hall interior decoration should be, how it should look like from outside, how we should welcome the arriving guests, etc. etc. etc. He gave me so many high-class ideas man. I frankly didn't know how talented Robert was, until we speak of his ideas about how the wedding party should be. I bet he would have been recognized in national level if he chooses to be a wedding planner as his main profession. He would have been a famous one without a doubt. Sara was surprised with Robert's talents in these things too. She was amazed hearing the way he describes his ideas. Oh, my Sara, my love, I miss her already."

Amer bumps his fist to his chest, acting as if his heart is going to stop because of so much love he has for his fiancé and Sammy is laughing at his crazy moves. Sammy begins imagining it is his engagement ceremony in a few days instead of Amer's. He imagines he is getting engaged to Nelly after a few days. He asks himself if he had started a relation with Nelly already, wouldn't he be behaving the same way like Amer is behaving? Wouldn't he be as proud and in love as Amer, happy to get legally and traditionally engaged to the girl of his

dreams? Sammy is imagining he is Amer and Sara is Nelly. Of course, he doesn't mean to, but he has a nice smile on his face just thinking about it. Amer and Sammy finish their breakfasts. Suddenly they both hear a bang. It is toilet's door getting shut. Robert comes out of the toilet after a minute or two, joins them at the table.

" good morning." Says Robert. So, you bitches started talking behind your beats friend's back already?" asks Robert in a joking way. "What a bunch of shitheads."

"Just shut the fuck up and eat." Replies Amer.

"You get the fuck up and pour me some tea." Replies Roberts.

Amer points at Sammy while holding his eyebrows up. "Sorry bitch! It's Sammy's day today."

Robert starts laughing at his conversation with Amer. He starts eating his breakfast. The three of them speak about Robert's great ideas. Sammy and Amer tell him they are so proud of him because of his rare talent. Sammy cheers and claps for Robert. Amer does the same. Being a funny guy, Robert stands up while chewing the food in his mouth, places his hands on his waists and bows before Sammy and Amer, thanking them for cheering for him. He pretends there are thousands of people clapping and cheering for him.

Robert, Sammy and Amer start their day by joy, laughter and good mood. A few minutes pass and Amer gets ready to go to Sara as he has an appointment with her. The plan is for Amer and Sara to pick Sammy and Robert and go to the dinner banquet they are invited all together. Before Amer leaves the house though, Robert tells him and Sammy that according to what's written in the invitation letter, he knows that first of all Sammy has to think of what he would say in his speech. Because he will have to speak for the guests and secondly, they better arrive at the banquet earlier than others. Because Sammy has won a championship in china's tournament and that as a matter of fact, he is one of the reasons officials are holding the banquet in the first place. So, Amer and Sara should pick the two of them much earlier for Sammy to arrive ahead of others to welcome his guests. But Sammy immediately refuses to go to the banquet early and says they would arrive like other invitees, exactly at the time mentioned in the invitation letter. Because the banquet is not held particularly for him. Robert, Sammy and Amer argue over this for a few seconds until Amer puts an end to their argument, simply by saying goodbye

and leaving the apartment at the middle of Sammy and Robert's argument, totally ignoring them. But Sammy picks his Cain and goes to the door limping. He calls Amer and stops him on the staircase. He tells Amer so Robert would hear too. He reminds them both about the conversation he had with his mother about preparing, packing and getting ready to travel. Sammy reminds Amer and Robert once again about the four-story building a relative has rented for them in Al Latakia on their behalf. Amer who is obviously in a hurry, promises they will talk and discuss it further in a better time and runs downstairs.

Amer is close to Sara's home. He knows he has a very hectic day ahead of him. Amer who hates shopping, like most men do, tries getting himself mentally prepared for what is waiting for him. A busy shopping day with a girl. What Sara has in mind sounds simple and easy in theory. But in practice, it involves hours of waiting, walking and standing in shopping centers, the old market, tailor shop and beauty salon.

Amer has to pick his fiancé, take her to her beauty salon, wait for her for God knows how long and take her to several shopping centers, so she would buy lingerie's and some other beauty products, has to take her to a good restaurant depending on what time would that be. Take her for manicure and pedicure after launch, go home, take a shower, dress up, pick her up, go pick Sammy and Robert and go to the banquet. Plus, the fact that he himself has to purchase a pair of formal shoes. Only thinking of all what awaits him that particular day, makes him shake to his core.

Amer has almost reached Sara's house. He gives her a missed call as always, so she would get out. Amer is waiting outside Sara's home for few minutes already. But still no sign of her. He picks up his phone from the dashboard to call her again. But she exits her home exactly before he dials her back. She is talking to someone over the phone while coming towards Amer's vehicle. She nods when she gets closer and enters the car. From what Amer can figure, she is talking to a girl called "Haniah". They are talking about the same evening's banquet they are going to attend, what they'll wear, their hairdos, make-ups, how they expect the dinner to be, etc. She is talking to a friend called Haniah and Amer is staring at her like idiots, waiting for her to tell him where to go? He doesn't know the address of the beauty salon. Amer has not yet moved his vehicle since Sara has entered. He is expecting her to give him the direction to the beauty salon she has an appointment at.

Sara notices her fiancé is staring at her, frowning. She suddenly realizes he does not know the address of beauty salon and she has to tell it to him. So, she starts laughing, apologizes to Haniah and asks her to hold on for a second as she has forgotten to tell her fiancé the address of her beauty salon and he is staring at her in a scary way. While laughing out loud, she tells Amer he has to take her to "Fountain Alley, exactly after dream intersection, number 17."

Sara stops laughing, apologizes to Haniah again and continues palavering. Amer begins driving towards the address Sara gave him. Sara is still on the phone gabbling when they arrive at the beauty salon a few minutes later. What pisses Amer off the most is hearing his fiancé and her friend speaking about a baby rabbit Haniah's uncle has brought her, apparently from a farm he has visited. Amer is angry because of the fact that his fiancé uses a few minutes they have in the car before reaching the beauty salon to talk about a baby rabbit rather than speaking to him. He is quite disappointed that Sara seems to prefer to talk to another babbler like herself instead of talking to her own fiancé. Amer's blood is coming to a boil. He stops the car next to the beauty salon. Sara apologizes to Haniah and asks her to hold on again.

"I'm not going to take less than two hours here," says Sara frowning at Amer angrily, "So, you go do you. I do me. I don't know what you want to do. Just be here when I'm done. I'll call you before I'm done and don't be late."

She closes the door and disappears. Amer is speechless. He freezes disappointed on his car seat when he hears Sara apologizes to Haniah again while checking if she has left anything in the car.

"Aloo. Yea," says Sara in an excited tone. "I'm here already. I'm coming in. See you inside in a bit."

Amer just stares at her without saying a word.

"What the fuck?" Yells Amer shaking angrily. Was Sara really on the phone the whole time with a friend she was going to meet in a few minutes? Amer cannot believe what he heard. He is thinking to himself, "Is that what he has to put up with for the rest of his life?"



"Oh, my fucking God." Says Amer. He is so angry he calls to confront her. She has not spoken a word with him in the car because she is talking to a friend she would meet in a few minutes? Amer is ready to yell at her, waiting for her phone to begin ringing. But there is no signal inside the beauty salon apparently and Amer cannot get into women's beauty salon as it is against the law. Like many other Islamic countries, laws forbid Amer to enter any place where women are gathered. Amer is very much offended by his fiancé's behavior. Few minutes pass. He calms down little by little and decides not to pursue the matter any further and changes Sara's mood. He doesn't want to spoil her day too. Specially that particular day. Because they have to go shopping, have launch, attend the banquet in the evening and are supposed to be having fun.

Amer stays next to the salon thinking what to do while waiting for his fiancé to finish. He does not have any plan or pre-arranged activity. But two hours is not a short time and he has to pass the time somehow. So, he decides to use the two hours Sara said he has, to find himself a formal pair of shoes he needs to buy. But he remembers Sara telling him she has to approve whatever he wants to wear. So, she obviously has to be there and approve his shoe as well. According to Sara, it's her who should enjoy how good her fiancé looks, not others. She should be the one to like what he wears. Amer starts laughing at himself and at the situation he has put himself into. He begins talking to himself, questioning his sanity.

"Mr. Amer the idiot," murmurs Amer laughing at his own misery and blaming himself for all that's happening to him. "Look at what you've done to your easy happy life. Yeah. Getting married. You fuck head. Good for you. Good move getting married you idiot. Asshole."

What Amer says sounds like he has become extremely remorseful getting engaged to be married to a girl. But in reality, he is happy deep inside for being able to have his dream girl. Regardless, he is fed-up sometimes with some difficulties Sara gives him and the way she behaves every now and then. He remembers he has to change his vehicle's engine oil and brake shoes. So, he begins driving towards a car workshop he knows from a long time ago. When he joins the main road from the service road a few hundred yards further, he notices a family of five by the side of the road hitchhiking. There is a man, a woman and three kids. The man has his right hand up waving, trying to stop passing vehicles to hitchhike. The five of

them look beat and exhausted. It looks like they have been travelling for a long time to reach where they are.

Being a kind-hearted person, Amer's slows down after seeing the woman and the children by the roadside. He can't help it. He has to help when it comes to women and children. He decides to give them a ride. Amer thinks he is going to the same direction the man and his family seem to be going anyway. He pulls over. The car stops around ten meters further than where the family is standing. They run towards Amer's car after they notice he has stopped for them. The man takes the front seat and the other four sits at the back. The man says hello and thanks Amer for stopping. He has an accent. From what the man and his family's outfits and their accents show, Amer can say they are not from anywhere near Al Darrah. Amer says hello too and begins driving.

The woman and her three daughters are talking quietly. The kids seem they have one- or two-years age difference. Amer starts talking. He asks the man where they are coming from and where they are headed? The poor man is pretty stressed. There is a certain vibration and fear in his voice, as though he is suffering some post-traumatic stress. He introduces himself as "Salman". He talks in a sad shaky voice.

"I was a teacher in al Raqqa city of Raqqa province. We lived in a beautiful little green town called "Al Jaberia", near Raqqa city. When Isis attacked, everybody took off obviously. We took off too. Just like others."

Salman stops talking. He turns his head back towards his family.

"Did you put the tent inside the trunk Atifah?" Asks Salman softly, "Because if you did not, we should go back. We should go to the other side of the road and hitchhike back towards the park again." Atifah, who is obviously the name of Salman's wife, shakes her head and responds "No." It's evident that she's feeling guilty. She hits her forehead with her fist and bites her lower lip. Salman's facial expressions change. He becomes agitated and worried. He thanks Amer and asks him to stop the car immediately. Confused and curious, Amer asks him the reason he became so anxious and why does he want him to drop them at the middle of nowhere? Amer knows finding another ride is almost impossible, especially for a family of five.

"Look," replies Amer calmly. "I'll take you. Where do you want to go? First of all, there are fences at the middle of the road and you cannot just jump over them with a wife and three kids. Secondly, the opposite side of the road you say you want to hitchhike, goes towards north and north-east. Not many people go to that particular direction these days. Unless they live somewhere nearby. Just tell me what is going on? Where do you want to go?"

"I just hate to be a burden now that you've done us a favor and picked us up, man. It looks like we have no other choice. Can you kindly make a U-turn please? I need to do something in my car. It takes two minutes only. If it's not too late of course. I'll tell you all about us on the way. You are such a gentleman. God bless you my friend."

Salman pauses for a moment.

"So, humanity still exists within people huh?" Asks Salman gazing at the road ahead, "The humanity and kindness has not vanished completely."

Amer's vehicle reaches a U-turn point. He makes a U-turn while Salman and his wife Atifah direct him towards where they want to go.

"Yes sir," continues Salman. "Yeah. It was three days ago around four in the afternoon. Atifah and I were watching TV in our living room. Kids were in their room playing. Suddenly all hell broke loose. We heard a gruesome blast. The sound was so loud that shook the whole neighborhood. We thought the building was going to collapse on us. I went to the window and saw the sky covered in a black cloud of smoke, dust and debris. I could immediately guess what had happened to our lives. Isis had defeated armed forces who protected us till then. I mean the government forces. Godless evil caliphate followers, the Isis shit had hit us at the middle of our town with some kind of bomb or something. Anyways, I figured right there and then that we had to run for our lives. We packed whatever we could in a matter of few seconds, got into the car and took off. Thanks God I have a car. It's an old one. But it is still a car and could get us away from that hell. Ironically, I had filled the tank the very same morning. A short while after hearing the blast, we ran downstairs with my wife and children. We live on the third floor you know and We have no lifts back at the building. My car was parked downstairs in my parking spot. I opened my car doors and trunk

and loaded whatever we could into the car. All these happened in a matter of seconds mind you. I was driving outside my parking when I suddenly heard one of our neighbor's wife yelled to her husband asking him to get their tent too. I thought this was like a sign, a message or a reminder for me by God. Because we also had our own little tent. But being in panic and hurry, I forgot loading it in the car. I mean I forgot we even had a Goddamn tent. Anyhow, I got off my car immediately and run towards the storage room, which is next to my parking spot. I got the tent and some of its accessories. I took them all to my car. You should know everyone was doing nothing else but trying to get away from the town. Everyone was only thinking of taking off, as fast as humanly possible. Anyways, I took the tent and its related accessories. I noticed there is no more space in the car. The car was full of all other things we had carried within that four to five minutes time span. I had no choice but to place the tent and whatever came with it on my kid's laps. I pressed the gas and took off. we faced the next challenge. Roads were blocked. All people wanted to get away at the same time. I'm sure you can imagine the traffic, stress and panic. To cut the story short, after surviving four other blasts near and around us, so many bullets hitting people and their cars, which were next to and behind us, we finally reached the main road. From the moment we began running, I was trying not to forget withdrawing some cash somewhere from any ATM machine. I had no cash on me what so ever. I drove around an hour and half, until we reached a town. The first thing came to my mind was to look for an ATM machine. I finally found one after searching everywhere. But when I went to it while holding my bank card, I was totally disappointed seeing that damned message on the ATM's screen 'Due to technical issues, we are unable to serve you at this moment. Thank you for understanding.' Oh my God I was frustrated. We drove around for a few short minutes, until we found another machine. The same shit. All had technical problems. I didn't know what to do? We finally decided to move on and check ATMs at petrol pumps. For God's sake. How difficult withdrawing some cash could possibly be? Kids were feeling hungry already. It was their dinner time. Their daily routine. They are used to having dinner every night at the same time. Let me tell you, the first day I couldn't withdraw any cash no matter how hard I tried. At the end of the day though, Atifah had some change in her purse and my oldest daughter who had taken her pocket money the previous day, had the money on her. My poor daughter wanted to save her pocket money and buy herself a tablet. I took my daughter and wife's money, bought two pieces of bread,

some cheese and some jam when we reached a village. That's how we satisfied our stomach the first night of our big escape. We moved again and drove until we reached a spot all cars had stopped. Some people were setting up camps, standing their tents and settling down. Some others had spread pieces of carpet, a rug or mats by the side of their cars so they would rest on them. That's why, we also decided to camp there and be near others. Until we decided what to do or where to go next in the morning. We set up tent and camped at the same area like others. I heard a car's sound approaching early next morning. I could hear the car getting closer. But the sound of car engine approaching was not approaching from the same direction we had come the night before from. The sound of the car's engine was getting closer from the side we were supposed to go to. So, I got curious. I got out of our tent and went to that car's driver. I found out he had woken up earlier than everyone else, he had gone and looked for grocery shops, supermarkets or any other stores he could find. So, he would get some breakfast for his children. He said he had come across a petrol pump a few miles ahead, which had no foodstuff to sell at all. But the only good thing with it was that it had petrol and a working ATM machine. I woke my wife and children immediately and asked them to get ready to move. I said I was going to get us something to eat and asked them to wait for me to come back, as we were going to move shortly after I arrived. I immediately jumped behind the wheel and drove to the petrol pump that guy had told me about. There were already six other guys waiting on the line to withdraw cash when I arrived. I was praying for those six people not to withdraw all the cash in the machine and leave some for me. Because everyone else was in a similar situation as myself. We had all left our homes and everything else we had worked so hard for. We were all caught off guard and had to move urgently and save our family's lives. Now, we were in desperate need for cash so we could spend it for our most basic needs, food, shelter, etc. I'm sure you have also experienced it yourself, when you desperately need to withdraw cash and its written on the damn machine's screen that there's no more cash. I mean I guess I lost something around five pounds until it was already my turn to withdraw some cash at last. All because of stress. I actually wanted to withdraw more. But I noticed so many people had already lined up behind me, all hoping to be able to withdraw some cash and manage their most basic expenses. The line was in fact getting longer by second. So, I withdrew enough for two days and filled the tank. I drove back to our camping site and picked my wife and children. I made some re-arrangements

in putting everything back inside the car, loaded everything from the scratch, so the tent would not be placed on my kid's laps anymore. I began driving until we reached a restaurant. We had a heavy lunch and moved again. My objective was set already. To get as far from war zone as possible. Again, we came across a heavy traffic jam further on the road. There was an ugly accident. We got so sad crossing by some dead victims. I asked Atifah to cover children's eye and prevent them witnessing that horrific scene and that much blood, etc. After passing the accident, I just drove and stopped for nothing. I drove until we reached Al Massah, I guess. It's close by, around seven to eight miles north of this Al Darrah town.

Atifah reminds Salman at this point that the name of the town he wanted to say is in fact Al Yaas and not Al Massah. Atifah now continues what her husband Salman was explaining:

"We came across a beautiful park before reaching Al Yaas town. It's at the left side of the road when you come from the northeast. We saw three families camping in the park near the main road when we arrived there yesterday. They too had kids and we thought of also camping in the park, somewhere close to them, so our kids could play together. This was the least we could do to keep our children have a high spirit and have a little fun. Anyways, we set up camp. God bless those nice park keepers. Before we got there, park keepers had given the toilet keys to those families who had reached and camped before us. Because there was a small facility building, which had toilets and a little kitchen they called tea room. It's particularly for use of park keepers. It was where they heated their lunch, made tea, rested. The little kitchen also had a small stove, few dishes, two pots and a frying pan. Park keepers gave me the key to their tea room, so I could cook if I wanted too. The other two families were much more organized than us. I admit. They had brought their complete camping gear, including their cooking equipment with them. So, they didn't need to use the tea room at all. My husband set up the tent immediately, went to Al Yaas market and bought some food so I could start cooking. This morning we made up our minds about our final destination and decided to drive and drive until we reached the sea. The sea was the farthest point from war and Isis. We got up to leave, but the car didn't start. Because Salman,

Salman again begins talking, telling the rest of their adventure:

"No. no. I didn't tell you everything Atifah my dear. I went to the tea room early this morning to transfer our food leftovers and everything else to the car. So, when everyone woke up, we could just sit in the car and took off. I mean I woke up way earlier than all you guys. I got out of the tent, washed my face in the washroom next to tea room first and went to the kitchen, tea room or whatever you call it. I took our things and carried them to the car so I would load them inside. But I was surprised when I suddenly noticed the tank cover was open. I couldn't believe it. It looked impossible. I filled the tank the previous day and I remembered it as clear as day, that I closed the cover perfectly. I thought kids had probably been playing with it or something. I was not talking about our kids. I meant those naughty kids from the other two families. Anyways, I entered the car, put the key in the ignition and tried to switch the car on. Oh wait. I almost forgot. This was when Atifah woke up. She got out of the tent and saw me inside the car, behind the steering wheel. She came to me and asked what I was doing. I told her I was trying to switch the car on. But no matter how much I tried, I was not able to get the car running. I initially thought I had a problem with car's battery. Because I had experienced the same issue with the car a few days earlier and I was told by a mechanic that I had to replace my battery. He suggested I get a new one when I took the car to him for diagnosis. Anyhow, my brain was wrapped around the battery when I noticed the petrol meter is on the letter E, means empty. Only I realized what had happened to the car. The other two neighboring families had left and I had no more petrol in my car. That meant someone had sucked the petrol out of my tank. Someone had stolen my petrol considering the problem with finding and putting petrol these days. I was sure it was them. They had completely sucked my tank dry. Probably because they whether had no money to buy their own petrol or didn't want to wait for a long queue on petrol pump. It was me, left with three kids, a wife and a car which had no petrol in it at all. Kids had gotten very hungry. It was of course their breakfast time. When you stopped and picked us up, I was taking them somewhere to get them something to eat. I was also planning to find a four-litter gallon and buy petrol for the car. God sent you to us like an angel. I'm sorry I forgot to even ask your name. What's your name by the way? Man, thank you again for stopping.

Amer introduces himself, smiles and tells Salman not to worry as what he did wasn't a big deal. Amer tells Salman and Atifah

that his fiancé is at the beauty parlor and he is in fact doing nothing, trying to pass the time aimlessly, waiting for her to finish. He tells them they are actually a good reason for him not to pass his time uselessly, only sitting in his car waiting. Amer parks his car next to Salman's. Everyone gets out. Amer goes back to the trunk and takes a short hose out. He transfers a few liters of petrol from his tank to Salman's car's tank.

Salman and Atifah thank Amer again for his kindness and generosity. Salman and Atifah tell Amer they wish there were no war, so they could invite him and his fiancé to their house for a lunch or dinner or at least treat them to a nice restaurant to show their gratitude. They say again how much they appreciate his sympathy, support and kindheartedness. Amer nods, he takes Salman's hand and pulls him aside to speak to him privately while Atifah makes their kids sit inside their car. Amer walks Salman as far as none of his family members can hear them. He tells Salman he can help him financially if he is in need of money. Of course, as much as he can afford. Amer also tells Salman he can ask his friends and family to help find them a temporary place, in case they want to stay in town for a few days, while trying to figure what his next move is. Tears accumulate in Salman's eyes. He is about to burst into tears. For Salman's wife not to see him crying and losing spirit because of it, Amer pulls him even further down the road. He knows Salman has to show himself as a strong man for his wife and a courageous father to his kids so that his family members would not lose their morale and would be able to confidently rely on him as a husband and a father. When Amer and Salman get farther from Salman's wife and children, Salman can no longer control his emotions in front of Amer and bursts into tears. Tears of a man. Tears that make the most stone hearted people on the face of the earth sympathize with. Amer pities Salman. He even begs Salman not to feel shy and ask if he needs anything or any help at all. Amer explains to Salman that there is no shame in asking for help as they are all in need of some kind of assistance. Because there is a war going on and people of the country needs to help one another until the war is over.

Salman is in tears, probably not because he needs some kind of help in particular, but because of all he has gone true mentally. Losing the home, he had bought to enjoy with his family, to raise his children with in and to live in when retired. Losing everything else, all that he has worked hard for to achieve. Amer's objective is to calm Salman and comfort



him as much as possible. But the fact is Salman is way more hurt to be comforted that easily. At least not that rapidly and definitely not by talking and exchanging few promising words. The post trauma stress has taken its toll on Salman. It has done many damages, leaving huge scares on his soul. He seems beyond repair. Curing him probably involves months or even years of therapy and medication. Salman and Amer both keep silence for a moment. Amer has his arm around Salman's shoulder, waiting for him to calm down slowly. But Salman sighs, wipes his tears off his face and begins talking:

"I had made a home for my wife and children. I had to borrow from relatives, colleagues, friends and the bank of course. You have no idea how difficult acquiring a loan was. This is Syria. I'm sure you are aware of the procedure to take a god damn loan. The number of guarantees you'll have to provide. I mean the collateral and how many other procedures. Anyways, I could at last put a roof over my family. God willing you'll soon get married and will have your own family. A wife and children and you would understand what I went through putting a roof over their heads. You would be willing to beg even those you hate, in order to provide comfort for your wife and children. I was just beginning to feel the taste of happiness and comfort, not only me though. Even my children were starting to understand what's like to be comfortable and secure. We did not have to change homes anymore, move from one place to another every year, change our address and neighborhood, because we used to rent apartments and leave after the tenancy contract ended. I had begun to live like a normal teacher, waking up in my own house every morning happy and hopeful to life, looking forward to seeing what life had in store for me next. I thought my classes positively, full of energy and came back home to my family, sat on my own dining table and ate my own food. No matter what we ate, we were happy. We had hobbies, game nights, we visited neighbors and they visited us. Everything was going nice and smooth. I paid my last loan instalment four days ago Amer. I swear to God I had just begun breathing, free of payments I had to cover. I was no longer under anyone's debt. Just before I could enjoy the fact that I owned a house, everything changed. We turned into wanderers after a big blast hit the middle of our little beautiful town. The explosion made us nomads. Like I said, you'll one day become a father and only you would understand what my worries were, what my concerns were. I'm now left with a wife and three kids, again no home, no comfort, no life, nothing. I feel I'm back to square one, Amer. What I am left with now is my old car and of course

some savings because I was wise enough to think of possible emergencies since we're at war. That's all. Nothing else. Not even a source of income. I'm worried you know. Worried and scared. I'm actually scared to death Amer. What should I do now? I don't really know. I feel I'll have to begin from scratch at the age of forty-six. Now you put yourself in my shoes for a moment. I hope all Isis bastard terrorists die a horrible death. I hope their families die in front of their devilish eyes. I want you Amer to take your bride and leave. Just sit in your car and start driving towards the south. Drive until the road ends, take a boat and change your direction to the west. Go to Europe. Where there's safety and security. Where comfort and safety are not a myth like here in Syria. Listen to me. My colleague told me Isis is sending someone called Abu Abdullah and his merciless soldiers to these parts of the country. Apparently, Abu Abdullah and his underlings are the wildest, most heartless mother fuckers have been ever known to humanity. They are rapists who do not care about age of their victims. They know only one fact, and that is women have pussy and pussy is for fucking. They kill people as if they are hunting sparrows. They are the definition of brutality and relentlessness. Just get yourself to any European country. Become a refugee. Forget you were ever a Syrian and there is a place called Syria, Raqqa or Al Darrah. For me, the safest city is port Al Latakia considering I'm with my wife and daughters. But mind you. Al latakia too will not remain safe for long neither. Isis forces would soon penetrate Al Latakia like did any other city in this country. There are around a hundred- and fifty-members joining Isis on a daily basis. It's not a joke Amer. They'll soon become a huge ruthless army of evil."

Amer has his head lowered and says nothing. He has nothing to say. He pats on Salman's shoulder, trying to be kind and comforting to him. He reminds Salman once again that he can tell him if he needs any kind of help. But Salman is too proud to throw his problems on others. Amer's phone starts ringing. It is his fiancé Sara. She wants to know where Amer is at. She tells Amer the process of her beautification is going to end in a few minutes. Amer says he is at a park outside al Yaas town. Surprised by where Amer tells her he was, Sara asks him the reason he has driven that far. But Amer says he is going to explain everything when he picks her up from the beauty salon. After talking to Sara for a few seconds, Amer suggests Salman to get his cell-phone number and save it in his phone's contacts list, so he can call him in case he needs help in the future. Amer and Salman begin walking back towards

Salman's car, while he dries his face to hide the evidence that he has been crying. They reach Salman's car. Salman and his wife thank Amer one last time before he leaves. Salman hugs him and promises to be in touch. Amer sits in his car, says goodbye and drives back to Al Darrah to pick his fiancé.

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Robert and Sammy are still at home discussing Sammy's speech. Sammy hates appearing before a crowd and speaking for them specially.

"First of all," says Sammy, "I'll not be talking and lecturing people, and secondly, even if I am forced to speak at the banquet, for sure I would not know what to say."

Sammy's cunning plan is to indirectly convince Robert to prepare his speech note for him as he knows well that Robert is much better than him in writing beautiful and meaningful sentences. Robert who has always supported Sammy, figures he has no choice but to prepare and submit his speech note and get willingly tricked by him. They agree for Robert to prepare Sammy's speech, so Sammy can attend to his other routines.

They speak about what they would wear for the banquet. They both go to Sammy's room. Robert goes to his document bag and takes out a notebook and a pen, getting ready to write the speech. Before Robert starts concentrating on what he has to write though, they decide what they are going to wear one last time. Robert begins thinking and writing. Sammy, who is on the rifle drawing before having his breakfast, goes back to rifle's drawing in the kitchen to check and examine it one last time. But he suddenly remembers the dream he had the night before and since Nelly too was part of his dream, his mind gets re-directed towards Nelly automatically. He also remembers he is writing Nelly a letter but he has not finished it yet. So, he decides to continue writing the rest of it. He takes his notepad and pen to the living room where he can be alone and concentrate on what to write. Robert gazes at the page thinking. He begins writing again after he decides what would his next sentence be. His plan is to write Sammy a professional speech, make him memorize the whole thing, practice it with him a number of times until he is confident, he can make a dazzling speech. An hour passes. Sammy is still writing Nelly the letter. He stops for a moment, goes to the kitchen, pours two glasses of grape juice and takes it to his room. He gives a glass to Robert and leaves another glass

next to him on the floor. He goes back to the living room, takes his notepad and goes walks to his room again, so Robert would not be alone.

Sammy sits next to Robert quietly not to distract him. He too begins thinking and writing. Just like Robert. Sammy has started his letter nicely, but he isn't sure if it is impressive enough.

"I'm sure you are surprised to see me again. Believe it or not, I don't know what I'm doing myself writing you a letter. I have never done this before. Not in my entire life. So, if my letter is not good, I'm giving you heads up already. I've not done this before, so I'm not probably good at it. Also because of the undeniable fact that I have never developed such a strong feeling for any girl in my life. So please do not be shocked and do me a favor read this letter to the end, please.

I saw you quite incidentally when you got out of your high school. You did not see and notice me of course. But I did see you and when I went home, I could not help thinking there was definitely a reason for me to see you randomly again. I hope you believe in kismet. Anyhow, after seeing you outside your school, I figured it was your daily routine and the direction you went after exiting the school is probably the route you take every day to get home. So, I figured I simply have to stand around the spot I saw you every time I want to see you. That's why I decided to write you this letter, stand on your way and give it to you when I see you. I have to admit, since I see you for the first time at the cemetery, you never left my thoughts even for a single second. Your beautiful image was carved on my heart and engraved into my soul. I have blamed and prosecuted myself times and time again, asking myself why didn't I ask to see you again when I met you the first time at the cemetery? I'm a beauty lover you know? I can see beauty from hundreds of yards away. I can detect all kinds of beauty too. I'm telling you this because I want you to know, I'm writing you this letter because I have detected your beauties as well. Thinking about your inner and outer beauty are what keeps me awake every night. I was just thinking about you. I mean the beauty you are blessed with in your face and the beauty that you possess at your soul. Believe me. You have them both. Trust me I know it. These two kinds of combined beauties would rarely be both in one's existence. People mostly have one, only if they do ever have any beauty. I guess this is where I admit that you are the most beautiful creature I've ever come across in my entire

life. I have discovered you. A person with all kinds of beauty. Seeing some kinds of beauties requires some sort of expertise and thanks God I am gifted by that particular kind of expertise to discover the fact, that you are a beauty package that people are not aware of. What they see is a super pretty face. Whereas, they're not aware of what lies beneath your angelic face. To me you are the most comprehensive definition of beauty. You may also ask yourself why I am writing you instead of telling you all what I need to tell you in person and face to face. Well, beside the fact that I'm shy and would not make it even saying a single word when coming face to face with you, I am not aware of your principles. I don't know if you would approve of that kind of approach. I have no idea what your social values and standards are. I think you may not entertain the idea of talking to a strange guy in public, knowing the mentality and traditional way people of Al Darrah think. Believe me. I think you may not like it and it may upset you. Upsetting you would actually be the last thing I want to do. My objective to write this letter, is to introduce myself first and to request you to make it possible for us both to get to know each other more.

By the way, my name is Sammy Samaha. I'm a student studying mechanical engineering at Damascus university, a professional target shooting athlete and a member of Damascus youth club. Yes. Target shooting is my kind of sport. I live with my mom and I have no experience how to attract beautiful girls like yourself. I lost my dad a few years ago. He was killed in a terrorist attempt. I'm the only child in my family. I'm Aquarius, an Aquarian. I saw you and it was love at first sight. I have no evil intentions and I'm sure you would realize when you get to know me. I want to request you to give me a chance to introduce myself further in person. If you feel like talking to someone, I'm a good listener. Here's my cell-phone number: 0092..... you can call me any time of day and night. Any time 24/7. I wish you a good day. Please do not tear down this letter."

Note: you were in my dream last night.

Sammy

Robert who is lying next to Sammy is checking Sammy's every move from the corner of his eyes, peeking to see what Sammy does. He has suspected Sammy is going to actually write her a letter and give it to her. It is very important that he can stop Sammy doing such thing as he do not approve of beginning a relationship by handing a letter over to a girl, like people did hundreds of years ago. Robert is determined to convince

Sammy otherwise. He is determined to change Sammy's mind and propose a better and a classier approach. He is certain Sammy is doing what he thinks is best. Robert sees Sammy's notepad laying close to him, he glances at the text on the notepad and is assured what Sammy is silently writing is in fact a letter to Nelly. So, his next plan is to talk to Sammy and convince him to forsake his plan and implement a better method of communication. He thinks it is his duty as Sammy's best friend to have a serious talk with him about what he plans on doing.

Robert knows Sammy would most probably achieve no results by writing and giving Nelly a letter. He is at least confident that Nelly would not even bother to read Sammy's letter. So, he has to find a good opportunity to seriously talk to Sammy. Robert thinks of doing so in presence of Amer. Because he knows Amer would agree with him about using a letter as a communication means. Robert is desperate to find a reason to bring up Sammy's letter and talk him out of it when Sammy gives Robert the perfect excuse by asking him to read the letter he has written to Nelly, edit it, correct his mistakes and use better words to say what he wants to express. Influenced by love and passion, Sammy explains to Robert that the letter is his only hope to communicate with Nelly and convince her to go out with him. But Robert who totally disagreed uses Sammy's speech as pretext, saying he is busy with his speech and would talk to him about it when preparing his speech is done.

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Amer is on his way to pick up Sara from the beauty parlor. His mind is still engaged with what Salman has told Amer happened to him and his family. He is thinking about challenges they still have ahead of them before they make another home, settle down and start a new life in a safe place. It is not the first time someone has warned Amer asking him to leave Al Darrah immediately and take refuge in a safer place along with his family. Amer has heard other people telling him that Al Darrah is no longer a safe place to live in. But it feels different this time. He knows Isis is advancing fast and he has to relocate to a safer city as quick as possible. Salman's story had a strong impact on Amer. It has made him take things more seriously now. Warnings he has received from other people he knows do not alarm Amer as much as Salman's destiny did. He begins rationalizing, thinking what if Isis reaches Al Darrah before his engagement ceremony takes place. Even imagining such a disaster happening, shocks

Amer to his core. His mind is busy with those thoughts when he finds himself near the beauty parlor.

Amer sends his fiancé a missed call to inform her that he has already arrived, so she would come out. He parks his vehicle in front of the beauty parlor a minute later and waits for Sara to get out of the beauty parlor. But minutes pass and she has still not come outside and Amer finds himself waiting for her in his car like he usually does when picking her up from anywhere. Amer feels sorry for himself. He believes he has been wasting so much of his precious time, simply by waiting for his fiancé, his mother, aunt, sisters and other ladies he has to drop or fetch, whether relative or friend. He tries getting himself busy by playing his favorite game, candy crush, on his smart-phone. He begins playing and soon he is absorbed in the game when he sees the car door opens and Sara gets in at last. She apologizes for making him wait for such long time. Immediately after she sits in the car, she begins doing her detective work by asking Amer question after question about the reason he has visited Al Yaas town. She is not even giving poor Amer a chance to respond. Amer knows he has to wait till his fiancé's interrogation is over first. So, he closes his eyes and listens to every single word comes out of her mouth, nodding.

"Sweetheart," replies Amer, "Let me begin by saying how gorgeous you look. I mean, you looked gorgeous before, but with all this nicely applied make-up and all, you have become even more attractive than you always were. The second thing I want you, my darling, to know is that I have nothing to hide from you. You are love of my life. I was the one who told you I was at Al Yaas town in the first place if you remember. I also told you that I was going to explain why I went there when I came back to pick you up my darling. But still, you began interrogating me as soon as you sat in the car. But first, tell me if you would prefer to have lunch first or go for shopping? Or the other way around. You want to go shopping first and then go have lunch?"

Amer drives and glances at Sara a few times to see if he can get any vibe or answer from her. Sara is frowning nonetheless. It is obvious she is thinking about Amer's explanation and questions about having lunch and shopping. She looks at her cell-phone to check what time it is. She asks Amer if he feels hungry already himself. Amer replies immediately and says he isn't hungry yet, but they can go grab a bite anyways if she is hungry. Sara seems hesitant. She says she is actually not

that hungry after giving it a thought. So, they better visit the market, do their shopping and choose a restaurant to get lunch. Amer is driving on the road to the market and begins telling Sara all about Salman, his family and how they met. Sara is so proud of Amer and happy for the fact he could help Salman somehow. She admits one of the main reasons she has said yes to him, is the fact he is a kindhearted man who loves helping others, has a tender heart towards poor and feels morally obligated towards fellow human in need. But Amer believes he hasn't really done much for Salman and his family. He believes whatever he did to help Salman was his duty as a human being. Sara and Amer speak about what is probably going to happen to Salman and his family after they arrive their destination, Al Latakia port city.

Sara is worried for the fate of Salman and his family. Because Salman knows no one in Al Latakia port city. She believes it is probably too late, therefore difficult for Salman to even find and rent a place for his family with so many people heading towards Al Latakia. She is right as the city cannot accommodate all people taking refuge there as its capacity is limited. Sara and Amer know Salman doesn't know anyone at destination city he is headed with his wife and very young children. Sara has a point and Amer knows she is unfortunately right. As a matter of fact, Amer's main concern is Salman's children. He tells Sara travelling that far away, without taking a good rest in between, is a quite difficult condition to tolerate by three little girls. Besides, so many people have become thieves and broken bad after war started. Amer believes Salman's family shouldn't worry about reaching Al Latakia but should be concerned on reaching there safe and sound.

Sara and Amer arrive at the market. They walk into a shopping mall after Amer parks his vehicle. They check a few shops to find and buy a nice pair of formal shoes for Amer. Luckily, they find a formal pair of black leather shoes after spending a few minutes on checking some shoe stores. Sara too needs to buy something and it takes her another few minutes to find and buy what she needs.

A little over an hour later, Sara and Amer have already bought what they needed. Amer is happy with his formal black pair of shoes and Sara is happy with the lingerie she has purchased. They exit the shopping mall and go to the parking lot directly. Sara's phone makes a text message beep as soon as they take their seats in the car. She looks at her messages



and immediately after reading it she says she needs to go back home.

Sara had apparently called one of her neighbors and asked if she had time to do her manicure and pedicure when she was still at the beauty parlor doing her hair. According to Sara, her neighbor is popular for her expertise in doing nail designs, manicure and pedicure. Sara has become very happy because her neighbor has just informed her by a text message she is going to her house in a short while to do her manicure, pedicure and nail design. Sara is okay with heading back home, also because she doesn't want to spoil her nice hairdo by staying outdoors, under the strong noon-time sunlight and hot desert's occasional breeze since she has to look nice in the evening for the banquet. She has also changed her mind about having lunch in a restaurant. She prefers to stay home, do her nail, wait for Amer to pick her up and go to the banquet while she still maintains her hairdo and make-up. Amer is nearly losing his mind hearing what Sara is saying. But he keeps his mouth shut and drives her back home. Sara picks what she has bought from the back seat and tells Amer she is going to wait for him in the evening to pick her up. She says goodbye, gets out of the vehicle and enters her house. Amer decides to visit his mom and dad, eat whatever his mother has cooked, takes a nap for a while, dress up and goes pick Sara up before heading towards Robert and Sammy's, fetch them and go to the banquet altogether.

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Eva is at the kitchen cooking and Ezra is helping her by washing the dishes. The music can be heard coming out of radio's speakers. Eva steers the stew boiling on the stove. she goes and stands behind kitchen's counter and begins cutting cucumbers to prepare salad. The music suddenly stops playing. The introduction music of news begins, indicated that a commentator is soon going to begin narrating the latest news. Eva, Ezra and Daniel normally listen to the same radio channel, which announces the news every thirty minutes and plays music in between. Eva looks at the clock. It is half past one p.m. Ezra finishes washing the dishes. She places the last plate on the dryer and dries her hands with the kitchen towel. She goes towards the radio and increases the volume. The reporter says hello and good afternoon to his audience and wishing them all a nice afternoon and begins reading the headlines of most important and the latest news: Isis forces advancing and capturing more cities, towns and villages, number of national guards and army soldiers who are killed fighting them, number of evil Isis members sent to

hell, military's next objective and some foreign news at the end.

The News announcer asks his audience to listen to an interview one of radio's top reporters had conducted with deputy defense minister after he read the normal repetitious news. A short music plays and voice of a lady reporter is heard beginning the interview with the deputy defense minister. She thanks him for participating in the interview first and goes directly to the point after the introduction. She begins by asking the deputy defense minister about defense strategies his office is going to conduct and measures they are going to be taking in order to prevent Isis advancing towards more strategic areas, stopping Isis, making them retreat from important provinces such as Raqqa.

The deputy defense minister, who is often forced to answer the same questions in his television, radio and press conferences, tries to change the subject using his usually repeated terminology, adding few technical military terms and vocabulary in order to avoid giving a compelling response to the reporter and the audience accordingly.

Like many previous occasions, he indicates the ministry is going to utilize any strategy needed in order to throw Isis out of Syrian territories and would not under any circumstances, hesitate employing whatever might take to dislodge Isis terrorists from the holy soil of Syria. His promises sound like a pie in the sky again. Even a child can understand, as any sensible audience would, that the he is simply trying to avoid responding to those comments, to end his interview and get rid of the journalist's devastating questions. But this journalist is different than others who has interviewed the man before. She is much more insistent and her questions are way harsher. She is not easily let go of deputy minister. Despite the fact she has noticed deputy's estate of mind and his potential to end their interview, she still continues the work and keeps on asking him questions. One question more serious than the previous one. But one of deputy minister's assistants comes to rescue by saying he is late for a quite important seminar. But the journalist is determined to finish her interview no matter what. So, as the last question, which is as a matter of fact a question so many people want to know the answer to, she asks the deputy to suggest ways by which people can keep themselves and of course their families safe. The deputy defense minister, who seems to be trying to masquerade the truth, sounds annoyed,

pauses in a suspicious way and in response to the reporter's question, suggests the residents of north and north east areas in general, and Raqqa towns and villages of the suburbs in particular, to temporarily take refuge at their relatives and friends in safer cities until further notice as he himself would not be able to guarantee anyone's safety. At the end, the deputy makes it crystal clear to the reporter and the audience that the defense ministry can do nothing more for them. He clearly asks people to whether stay, defend and protect their cities and provinces from falling into Isis hands, which is unquestionably a stupid suggestion, or run for their dear life and save themselves, as there is nothing more the ministry can do for the people. His words at the beginning of the interview sounds like a pie in the sky and at the end smells hopelessness, defeat, retreat and surrender.

Ezra is leaning against the sink. She and Eva listened to all what deputy minister said. Ezra ambles towards the radio and switches it off angrily this time. She apologizes to Eva and tells her she can no longer tolerate listening to stupid words and suggestions of the guy. She says they better wait for Daniel to come back, so they would sit, talk and decide on leaving Al Darrah as soon as possible. Because her grand children's safety is her number one priority. Eva nods. Her tears roll down her cheeks as she becomes extremely emotional hearing what the deputy defense minister said in radio. Ezra goes towards her daughter after noticing she is in tears. she hugs Eva as she is still seated behind the kitchen counter and has a piece of vegetable in her hand. Eva cannot say a word. She has a gulp in her throat. Ezra tries calming her down. She tells her crying is not going to change anything and she believes the best thing they can do is to discuss leaving Al Darrah as soon as her husband comes back. Ezra hugs Eva and she bursts into tears all the more. Ezra tries drying her daughter's face with her own sleeves. The door opens at the same time and Eva's boys enter. The three boys are arguing as usual, this time over a football match. Eva wipes her tears immediately as she doesn't want her kids to notice she was weeping. She never wants her kids to see her cry. She is afraid it would affect their mood negatively. Ezra asks her grandchildren to go change to their pajamas, wash up and join her and their mom back in the kitchen as their father and sister would arrive home any moment and they'll have to be ready to have lunch. Eva finishes preparing the salad. She stands up and goes to the sink, washes her hands and face. She begins putting the plates and cutlery on

the dining table. She is placing the spoon and forks when she hears the entrance door open again. She hears her husband and Nelly talking and laughing. Like most of the times, Daniel goes to his wife and kisses her as soon as he enters the house. Ezra, who is getting out of the toilet, comes face to face with Daniel. So, he says hello, kisses her on her forehead and goes into the toilet immediately. Ezra starts laughing at Daniel, because of him hurrying to enter the toilet. Eva yells Nelly's name. She is still at the entrance, trying to remove her shoes. She responds to her mother and says she has difficulty opening her shoelace's knots. Daniel who has heard Nelly from the toilet, asks her to wait for him to get out of the toilet and go to her rescue. Both Daniel and Eva are laughing at the situation Nelly is caught in. She has tightened her shoelaces all the more pulling them.

Daniel rushes to Nelly and helps her open her shoelace. They both enter the kitchen. She says hello to her mom and grandma before she goes to her room and change. Daniel has just sat on his favorite chair at the table. He has named his chair as farrow's special bench. But Eva asks him to go to their room, change to his pajamas and get ready to have lunch already.

Daniel has to go back to his office immediately after having lunch. He feels lazy changing to his pajamas and change back to his work clothes later. Eva serves the lunch. She places the food on the table. Everybody begins eating. Eva looks at her mother. She isn't sure whether it is the right time to mention leaving Al Darrah, running to a safer city. She glances at all her children,

"Darling," says Eva addressing her husband in a loving tone, "After lunch, I want us to sit and decide on where and when to leave Al Darrah. This province's overall situation is turning riskier and becoming more and more dangerous to stay. Officials keep on suggesting people to flee."

Daniel frowns pointing at their children, meaning he does not want to speak about war and matters of violence in the presence of their kids. Eva does not initially understand what her husband means to say using facial gestures. But she finally gets it when her mother kicks her from underneath the table, also hinting to her with her eyes movements. Daniel and Eva's three sons wouldn't stop talking and arguing about football. Not even while having lunch. Eva asks them nicely twice not to talk while having lunch. She has asked them even before, not to talk, not about anything while they are on

lunch or dinner table. She asks them twice in a kind voice to leave their arguments for the time they are in their own room and no one else is around. But they never listen. They continue arguing, even after their mom asks them not to. Until Daniel has to get himself involved. He gets serious and demands silence in a fatherly serious voice. Daniel gives them the final warning. But this time, afraid of their father, the three of them keep quiet. Jacob asks his father moments later if he and his brothers can have their lunch in their room as an important football match is about to start. They don't want to miss a minute of the game. Eva and Daniel look at each other and realize they are both okay with that. So, he allows them to take their plates into their room just this one time.

Ezra begins praising Nelly's beauty and manners as usual after her brothers leave the table and went to their own room. She asks Nelly her plan for the rest of the day. Nelly replies she has to go to her private guitar instructor first and go to the supermarket to buy something before coming back home. Nelly asks her dad if he can drop her to and also pick her up from her guitar instructor that afternoon. But Daniel says he is unfortunately neither able to drop nor to pick her up, as like he has mentioned to her mother earlier, he has to rush back to his office immediately after he finishes having his lunch. Nelly's face changes by hearing her father cannot take her to her guitar instructor's place. She jokes about it with her father, sounding like a child, making innocent faces and performing some tomfoolery for him and pretending she is about to cry. She asks her father how is she supposed to get back home? Nelly notices she has made her dad laugh.

Daniel stares at Nelly for a moment smiling. He seems ready to tell Nelly something she is probably not expecting to hear. Daniel looks at Eva and Ezra nodding. He looks at Nelly next and says he believes it is about time she began acting more independently and attends to her personal agenda individually and runs her own errands without depending on him, her mother, her grandma or anyone else in that house. He asks Nelly to try forgetting all about what happened to her, let the past go and think of a successful future she has ahead of her. Eva smiles after she hears her husband finally said what she knows he wished to say for some time now. She completely agrees with Daniel. Eva is thinking if Nelly listens to her father, begins acting independently without asking anyone's assistance in doing anything she needs to do, a heavy burden would be lifted from every single person in the household.

Every member of her family can focus on their lives. Because since what happened to Nelly, she has always been in the look-out for someone to keep her company, especially if she needs to go outside the house for some reason, simply because she does not want to stop bothering herself with what happened to her a long time ago. Even after so many therapy sessions she had with best psychologists around, she is still acting under the influence of what happened to her.

Daniel tells her how proud he is of her. He says he is so happy hearing she has regained her independency by seventy percent according to the last psychotherapist they visited. Daniel says he can't believe his ears when his wife told him about it. He says knowing Nelly's strong personality, flexibility and consistent character, he has no doubt it is only the matter of time before she recovers completely and stops being on high alert all the time, worrying of what may happen to her again. Daniel says he cannot even imagine Nelly is going to recover with that pace.

Nelly is quiet with her head down. She is only listening. She feels her confidence is coming back to her, transforming her sad, worried and disappointed face to a happy, positive and optimistic face. Daniel is the only one talking. Nobody else says anything. Eva and Ezra only nod every now and then, confirming and approving what Daniel says. Getting her strength from her dad's positive and heartwarming words though, Nelly says she knows better than anyone else that her dad is right and she has to stop acting like a scared little girl all the time. She says she wants to stop having someone watch over her, wherever she goes and whatever she does. Nelly promises to do her very best to become absolutely independent and strong. She knows as well as any of her family members that a huge percentage of the girls would not declare themselves absolutely independent, even after they get married and give birth to their children. They would at all time need their parent's guidance. Specially their mother's. But what Nelly means by independence, is attending to her own affairs and own related tasks alone, without someone being with her at all times.

What Nelly says make her parents and grandma very happy. They look forward to see those changes in Nelly. Proud of himself for convincing his daughter to become independent, Daniel smiles and looks at his wife. When Eva notices her husband is looking at her, she shows Daniel her thumbs up.

Almost all members of the family finish having lunch already. Ezra, who has finished eating earlier than everyone else, begins taking the dishes back to the kitchen as soon as Daniel finishes talking to Nelly. Eva is the next who stands up to help her mother in cleaning the table. Daniel looks at his watch and asks Eva to give him a cup of tea.

It is Daniel's habit to drink a cup of tea after he finishes his lunch and dinner. Sometimes, he takes a quick nap also before he leaves the house for his office again. He doesn't normally go back to the office after lunch. He prefers to stay home and spend time with his family mostly. John, Jacob and Liam bring their empty plates to the kitchen after finishing their lunch and say thank you to their mother for the delicious food. Ezra is helping Eva in the kitchen when Eva whispers something into her ears. Ezra nods and goes back to the table to wipe it clean and while doing so, she tells John, Jacob and Liam to go back to their room and let their parents rest for a while.

Nelly who sees her mom whispering something into her grandmother's ear, figures her mother asks her grandma to make the room empty of kids, so grownups can freely talk about something important. She can say from her grandmothers tone it is the case. Eva brings a plate to the living room with cups of tea, sugar and some dates in it to the table. Nelly is cleaning the carpet beneath where Liam sat. Liam always drops food beneath him when he eats at the table. Nelly notices her grandma is staring at her. She is giving Nelly the impression they want her to go to her room too, like her brothers. She is under the impression she is going to be considered as an adult and would-be part of whatever serious conversation her parents and grandma are going to have. She frowns at her grandma and asks her angrily why is she staring at her that way? Nelly asks if she wants her to leave them and go back to her room too? Ezra confirms Nelly's guess by nodding while having a serious look on her face. Angry and disappointed with her parents, Nelly looks at them to find out what their opinion is about it. But she faces her parent's serious faces too, gazing at her without blinking. That means they too believe she is not allowed to take part in their important family meeting. This means her parents still do not see her fit to get involved with discussions related to the war, fleeing, hearing Isis's plans and what they are going to do Daniel, Eva and Ezra want to leave the kids out of their decision about scary and violent matters until they make a decision and keep them informed of what they have finally

decided. Nelly takes small pieces of bread crumbs she has picked from the carpet to the kitchen and throws them in the garbage bin in a very angry manner, showing she isn't happy. Her parents and grandmother are shocked seeing Nelly's reaction. They do not expect her to be this much offended.

Nelly is going towards her room when Daniel asks her to stop, come back and takes a seat next to him for a second. Very much offended, Nelly frowns angrily and tries ignoring her dad first, but she changes her mind and replies she is going to be back. She goes to the washroom to wash her hands. Eva and Ezra take their seats at both sides of Daniel each. Daniel begins speaking very quietly so Nelly would not hear him. He tells Eva and Ezra he thinks it is time to involve Nelly in important family decisions as she is going to find out at the end anyways. They discuss Nelly's involvement and come up with a decision that they would at last let her take part in their meetings. They think they would be able to ask her help in preparing her brothers for what may be coming.

Nelly comes out of the washroom and joins her father, mother and grandma. Daniel takes a sip of his tea and begins talking. He tells Nelly they were all against getting her mind involved with war and such subjects initially, as they think she is under therapy herself having her own issues to deal with. But after they discussed the matter further, they figured she is already an adult. So, they can not only allow her to be present at their decision-making meetings, they would also be happy to hear her opinions about certain matters. Nelly's face transforms to a happy face. Face of a person who has self-confidence.

Daniel takes another sip of his tea. But Eva begins talking before he continues. She tells Nelly the reason they needed to have a family meeting is to decide when to go and where to go as country's situation is getting more and more dangerous, Isis is advancing towards their town and area. So, they need to figure where they should run to. Where would be the safest place for them, when should they go, as they need to act quickly. Eva looks at her mother and her husband to see if they have any safe place to move to in mind. She explains all what she and her mother heard from the radio before every one of them got home that day. Eva explains deputy defense minister's suggestions to people. All her family members are absolutely aware of the dangers and risks threatening them. They know the strategic geographical area Al Darrah is situated in, country's unstable security situation and what



puts them at risk and in danger most. They do not need to be reminded of what would be in store for them in case they delay fleeing. But still, Eva thinks it would be best to mention it again, so everyone would know they are there to decide on a date and a place to move and take refuge in.

Nelly is carefully listening to her mother. Daniel has Nelly's reactions under microscope. He wants to see if she gets scared, panicked or talking about war has a negative effect on her, so he would stop everyone from talking and postpone their meeting to another time. But Nelly's reactions are normal, concerns like any other adult and thinking to come up with a solution to the problem at hand. She neither gets scared and emotional, nor is showing others she doesn't care. Daniel feels relaxed after Nelly's emotional response to what she heard proved to be okay. Eva places a piece of paper and a pen in front of her on the table. Everyone is quiet and thinking. Ezra finds this as a good opportunity and requests Nelly not to mention anything to her brothers yet. She asks her not to get them involved, unless every single decision is finalized. Until they decide where should they go. And when and how? Because boy's are surely not going to study any more if their little brains get engaged with relocating. Nelly nods, assures everyone she would not do such a thing. Daniel is gazing at a point in front. He looks at Ezra.

"Mom," says Daniel. "What is the name of that relative of yours who is a vegetable farmer near that town, where is it? I'm talking about the guy we went to visit two years ago and were his guests for two or three days? The one who had planted watermelons."

Eva and Ezra are both thinking who is Daniel actually talking about. Eva suddenly remembers her husband is talking about her mom's youngest cousin. She looks at Daniel smiling sarcastically.

"My love," says Eva, "You're talking about mom's youngest cousin, Samuel. First of all, darling, it is not two three years ago. It is four or five years since we last paid him a visit. Secondly, they live somewhere, some town near Aleppo, which is known to be more than dangerous these days to everyone in the country. Isis's members sing songs about Aleppo being their next destination after Raqqa and other suburbs. We should go to a place we can stay for a long time and would not be forced to relocate after a few months. Even if we decide to go to Aleppo, we would be running from Aleppo

in a short while after Isis arrives. Because Isis will definitely advance, like they do now, and reach Aleppo soon. It's just a matter of time my love. I heard from other women in the street and shops talking, saying that most of them will be heading southwest. We too should think of finding ourselves a place somewhere south."

Nelly too is thinking. She is really pushing her mind to contribute and make everyone proud. Nelly is playing with her cell-phone, passing it from one hand to other.

"Wait a minute," says Nelly, "Why don't we go to the capital and stay at my late aunt's? It's a huge house. Left useless in Damascus. There's now no one to even water the trees and plants in the garden. I was very comfortable when I lived there and took care of my late aunty. It's in the capital, so I don't think Isis would be heading that direction. At least not very soon. I suggest we go there and stay there as long as we need to. We will take care of the house and most importantly, we don't need to pay any rent. It's safe, huge, comfortable and everyone can have his or her own room. Boys too would have enough space to play and run and do boys stuff."

Daniel, Eva and Ezra are all thinking. Eva and Ezra are having a special kind of look on their faces looking at Daniel. Daniel notices his wife and mother-in-law are gazing at him. He wants to say something, but he doesn't. Nelly has noticed her father, mother and grandma's strange silence.

"What is it?" Asks Nelly, "Why are you looking so suspicious? Is there something that I'm not aware of? Is it?"

Daniel smiles and finally says what he has stopped himself from saying.

"No no. you are right sweetheart," says Daniel in a kind tone, "When I think about it, your late aunt's house is our best and the most practical choice. But if you noticed I initially answered you with a bit of hesitation. It is because after your aunt died and you came back home to Al Darrah, I had an argument with my other brother and sister over our late sister's house, which at the end, we decided to put her house on auction. We decided to sell the house and divide the money we get out of selling it between us all brothers and sister. That means your other aunt and two uncles should be paid after selling the house too. They are actually waiting for me to

call them one of these days and tell them our late sister's house is sold and they can collect their shares. I'm now thinking though what would their reaction be if they find out I've taken my family and occupied the house instead of selling it? I'm thinking what my explanation would be.'"

Ezra wants to say something. But having a serious look on her face, Nelly apologizes for interrupting her.

"Excuse me dad," says Nelly in a serious tone, "They are your brothers and sister, also my uncles and aunt and I love them. But shouldn't they be worried for you and your family? Shouldn't they think that their brother must transfer his family to his late sister's house in order to keep them safe from getting captured by Isis rapists and terrorists? Shouldn't they be the one to force you to keep us safe by relocating us to your late sister's house immediately? Shouldn't they be at least this much thoughtful and considerate? Do you really think they would want an explanation from you as to why you occupied her house? Asking you why you've fled to the capital and took shelter at your late sister's unused mansion? Seriously dad? Now, aside from what your sympathetic brothers and sister may think, do you think buyers are so eagerly lining up, in a hurry to buy her house despite country's shitty situation? Sorry for the language by the way? It's been what? Forty-five or I don't know sixty days now since you've put her house on auction? Have you had a potential customer, a single client who has even shown a little interest in buying the house? Is this really a good time for your brothers and sister to think about their share out of selling their late sister's house?"

Eva gives Nelly a proud look. Daniel too is quite impressed by Nelly's logic. She is right and every single one of them know she is. In continuation to her previous comments, Nelly asks his father to call his two brothers and his only sister and tell them about their plan to move to their sister's house. Daniel pauses thinking for a moment. He is somehow hesitant to make the phone call in the beginning. But after he sees Eva and Ezra's positive reaction and support towards Nelly's suggestion, he becomes more and more convinced he has to call them. He has his cell-phone in his hand, ready to call. But he decides to share his thoughts with his older brother first, have him talk to their other siblings and inform them of his plans. Daniel goes to the balcony and closes the balcony door behind him. It is quite obvious he

doesn't want anyone to hear his conversation with his older brother.

Ezra who wanted to say something for a while now, starts talking at last. She begins by praising Nelly's ability to give her dad confidence, so he would call his siblings and tell them what they may not particularly like to hear. She asks Eva and Nelly's opinion about when do they think it would be a good time for them to move? Eva is quiet and thinking about the same thing already. Nelly is staring at her grandma after she asks their opinion. It has made her think too.

Ezra stands up. She takes the empty cups of tea, puts them all in a big platter and takes them back to the kitchen. Eva and Nelly begin talking about the probable date of their departure. Daniel looks positive when he opens the balcony door and returns back into the room again. Apparently, his conversation with his older brother has gone well. That's why Ezra and Nelly think he looks happy and positive. They cannot wait for Daniel to tell them how his conversation went with his older brother. Daniel is smiling. He nods a few times and begins talking. He explains that he spoke to his older brother and requested him to talk to their other siblings about what he has in mind. According to Daniel, his older brother immediately welcomed his decision without any deliberation and mentioned that he knows for sure their other siblings too are definitely on board with his decision on moving to their late sister's house. But still, he is going to call them and will call Daniel back accordingly to make absolutely sure every one of them knows about Daniel's decision and is okay with it. Ezra, who has brought tea for everyone, says she is thankful to lord as everything has gone according to their plans so far.

While drinking their tea Everybody talks about the date, they think is best to travel. Few minutes later, Daniel's phone starts ringing. He smiles after taking a quick look at his cell-phone's screen, seeing his older brother's name on it. He answers his phone. It does not take more than a few seconds when everyone sees Daniel having a big smile on his face, thanking his brother and telling him he is still going to call each one of his other siblings, just to ask how they are doing. Daniel hangs up the phone smiling at Eva, Ezra and Nelly, showing his thumbs up. Now he has the approval of all his siblings to live at their late sister's house. Daniel's family is well-loved by his brothers and sisters. No one of them wants to see them at any kind of risk. So, they have all

agreed it is a great idea to get Daniel and his family far from northeast. Nelly brings up their date of travelling to the capital again, so it would be finalized right there and then. Daniel says he only needs a few days to finish some tasks at hand and transfer the management of his establishment to someone who stays in Al Darrah. Eva too says she needs a few days to prepare, pack and get ready with peace of mind. Their final decision is to leave town five days later. They all keep silence thinking. They are excited to be leaving Al Darrah. It feels as if they are going for vacation. But deep in there, they all know it isn't anything like that. They know despite the fact they are moving to the capital and a huge house; they have a troubling reason behind leaving their town and their house behind. After everyone finishes drinking their tea, they disperse and everyone goes to attend to their own affairs.

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Robert is feeling really hungry. He looks at the clock. It is way past noon. He and Sammy were so busy they lost track of time. They had a late breakfast and of course they feel hungry later than usual. Robert suggests they go to Mr. Zahir's restaurant near the roundabout to have their lunch. He says they can work on Sammy's speech and check the letter he is determined to give Nelly after lunch. Sammy likes Robert's suggestion. They have stayed home most of the time since they came back to Al Darrah. It is not a bad idea to spend some time outside, to move their legs and take some fresh air. They are ready to get out of the house minutes later. Sammy says he wants to walk until the restaurant and Robert agrees.

Sammy and Robert exit the apartment and begin walking towards the restaurant. They speak about Mr. Zahir and his restaurant, Mr. Zahir's wife "Donya" being a very good cook, about what they will order when they are at the restaurant and some other interesting topics on the way. Sammy begins telling Robert about Mr. Zahir's restaurant, which has been one of Al Darrah's most popular restaurants since he the time remembers. Sammy tells Mr. Zahir's story.

"Mr. Zahir was a supervisor at the municipality. He was a healthy man with an athletic body. He was kind too. One day when he arrives at his office, he notices a few kittens were under his desk. There was apparently a hole under his desk like a tunnel or something that led to the alley outside the municipality building. Being an animal lover, Mr. Zahir takes a good care of the kittens. Because outside was damn cold. It was winter. Anyways, He takes care of those kittens without

telling anyone at the office about them. He makes them a bed with a cardboard box and a cushion, brings them food from home, feeds them and is careful nothing bad happens to them. He knew those kittens were not going to last outside in that weather, not even for an hour. A few days pass and some of Mr. Zahir's office mates begin getting sick. They initially think it is a simple flue or something because it was a cold winter. But they find out it is a sickness, I don't know the name of, which spread through animals and pets when doctors see them. One day, Mr. Zahir goes to his office in the morning. He has food for his lunch as well as something for the kittens to eat. But as soon as he enters his office, he sees a few of his colleagues gathered over and looking under his desk. They looked very angry and were talking behind his back. His colleagues had found the cardboard box he has made a bedding for the kittens with their left-over foods, three little cushions and stuff like that under his desk. So, everyone blamed Mr. Zahir for their illnesses. They tell him they got sick because he had hidden those stray kittens in the office. Anyways, their conversation turned into a quarrel in the office. Those guys, Mr. Zahir and his boss have an argument over what he had done and it eventually resulted in him losing his job in the municipality. But this is not where the story ends. Mr. Zahir had an old grand uncle who died exactly the day he got fired. The uncle was the only relative he had left in the world. The uncle's lawyer contacts Mr. Zahir and informs him he has inherited a handsome amount of money. Mr. Zahir who was already thinking of starting a new line of work, figures he can put his wife, Donya's very good cooking skills into use. He established a restaurant after discussing it with his wife and had her cook for the customers. Donya's expertise in cooking, soon resulted into the restaurant's fame and fortune. Soon enough, Mr. Zahir's restaurant became talk of the town. Years later, Mr. Zahir and Donya's children grew up and they too began working at their parent's restaurant. Mr. Zahir expanded his restaurant later on. His children grew up with the restaurant expanding bigger and better. That's why Mr. Zahir's restaurant is a well-known restaurant with the most reliable and best quality food in town now."

Sammy and Robert reach Mr. Zahir's restaurant as soon as Sammy finishes telling his tale. They enter the restaurant, choose a table by the window near the entrance and take their seats. The restaurant is almost empty. Only moments after Sammy and Robert arrive, four soldiers also enter and take a table near Sammy and Robert.

Everyone is waiting for the waiters or waitresses to come and get their orders. Soldiers are talking. It is apparent they had begun their conversation earlier and they continue even after entering the restaurant. They are talking about the most famous subject, Isis and people's fear of them. The way they speak about how scared people are of Isis, as if they are not scared themselves. They look terrified talking about Isis and their savagery. While waiting for the waiters, Sammy wants to say something to Robert. But Robert stops him and says he wants to hear soldier's conversation and see if they speak about army's latest strategies. As if Robert's curiosity is contagious. His curiosity has made Sammy curious as well. One of the soldiers whose manners, body structure and size clearly implies he is not a real fighter and has just joined the army to complete his compulsory military service, is asking the other three about ways he can escape being sent to the front line. His companions who are initially not taking him seriously, but when they realize he is in fact serious and is not joking, tell him he has to pull some strings if he can. They tell him he has to know some high-ranking officers who are willing to use their influences to keep him in a safe zone. They laugh at him and tell him there are other ways in a joking way. They say his next best solution is what many young new soldiers do. Shooting their own toes off. Because according to military eligibility law, a man with no toe, is not suited for serving in the military, legally exempting a soldier from service if he misses a toe. Every one of them begins laughing despite the fact they are not joking and what they say is actually true. Robert nods looking at Sammy and confirms the validity of what the soldiers are saying. Robert says he is certain what those soldiers say about someone missing a toe, is absolutely right. He says he has read that in an article somewhere and he has no doubt it is true.

One of the waiters who looks like Mr. Zahir, goes to the soldiers first to take their orders. Sammy and Robert who have the soldiers under observation, notice they ask each meal's price before placing an order. It is clear they are cannot afford what they really crave for. It is obvious they have a limited budget for their lunch and are only there to fill their stomachs with whatever they can afford. They seem uncomfortable, probably because they are worried their bill might exceed what they can pay. Sammy and Robert who have both noticed what is going on, pause for a moment while

staring at one another, nod, whisper to each other and agree they want to pay for the soldier's lunch.

A couple, their two kids and an old woman enter the restaurant as well. They take their seats and begin looking at the menu, which is already available on each table. Robert asks Sammy to instruct the waiter to get those soldiers a good portion of each meal and not to accept any payment from them. Because they are going to take care of those soldiers bill.

Sammy and Robert wait for the soldiers to place their orders first. They want the waiter to get closer to their table for taking their orders so they can tell him about soldier's bill. Because they do not want other customers in the restaurant to find out what is going on. They think it might embarrass the soldiers. This is definitely not Robert and Sammy's intention. Soldiers order the cheapest dishes available in the menu. The waiter goes to Robert and Sammy's table to take their orders next.

"Hello and welcome," says the waiter smiling, "May I take your order please?"

"Hi." Replies Sammy, "I'll place our order now. I need to ask you for a favor though?"

Curious of what does Sammy want to tell him, the waiter bends and gets his head closer to Sammy so he would hear him clearer.

"First of all, I need you to cancel whatever those soldiers ordered," whispers Sammy into the waiter's ear. "Actually, you know what? Get them a big plate with all kinds of kebab you have in it. Also, get them rice, salad, soft drinks and a bowl of your today's specialty stew you have. So, they can taste them all. At the end, bring us their bill and let them go. My friend here and I will take care of it. Just make sure no one gets to find out about this. It's better this way. Maybe tell them it's on the house because they're soldiers and serving their country. For us though, please get us stake kebab plus chicken barbeque with rice. Add some extra olive and pickles as a side dish please. Thank you very much my dear."

The waiter who seems to like what Sammy and Robert's intentions are, thanks and praises their kind gesture. He



heads towards the kitchen to have the chef get the orders ready.

A few minutes later, two other waiters carrying two big platters, go to the soldiers table. Soldiers initially think there has been a mistake and platters are wrongfully taken to their table. One of the soldiers who seems a bit older and more experienced than the other three, asks the waiter to stop placing those platters on their table as none of them has ordered such a heavy platter. He is saying he is sure there has been a mistake somewhere.

But the same waiter who had spoken to Sammy about this goes over to their table, bends and gets closer to the older looking soldier and whispers something into his ear. He points at Sammy and Robert accordingly. The noncommissioned officer looks at Sammy and Robert innocently, smiles and nods silently. He bows despite being seated on the chair and waves his hand at Sammy and Robert. Sammy just smiles at him and shows his thumb up while Robert lifts his right hand up to his temple and makes a military salute. The other three soldiers who have absolutely no idea what is going on, keep on whispering to one another, asking the officer what is happening and why do they have so much good food in front of them on the table that they know they would definitely not be able to afford? Until the older soldier tells them what's happening. The soldiers get so happy finding out what is going on. Sammy and Robert too are so happy, because of seeing those poor soldiers happy.

Another waiter serves Sammy and Robert's launch at the same time. But like those four soldiers, they too are so surprised after noticing what they are being served is much more than what they have ordered. Robert asks the waiter the reason and in reply the waiter says since he and Sammy were kind enough to accept paying for those soldier's launch, the restaurant's management and staffs have decided to treat them with some free extra side dishes, some stew and other dishes.

Sammy and Robert begin eating after asking the waiter to thank the management and other staff on their behalf. None of them speaks a word while eating. They are so hungry. They have no time to waste on talking. But each one is thinking about their important life matters while eating. A few minutes pass in absolute silence between Sammy and Robert. Robert's mind is engaged with thoughts of his missing brother Robin and Sammy is thinking about the one and only, Nelly. A few more minutes

pass. Sammy finishes eating. The four soldiers have finished their launch too. Robert is chewing the last piece of food when the soldiers stand up to leave the restaurant. While exiting the restaurant, just before they open the door and get out, they wave at Sammy and Robert, thanking them for one last time for their kind gesture. Robert and Sammy who also have finished eating, ask for the bill, pay it and leave the restaurant. But as soon as they step out of the restaurant, they see the same soldiers standing further down on the pavement smoking. It seems that those soldiers were waiting for Robert and Sammy to exit the restaurant.

The noncommissioned officer drops his half-smoked cigarette, steps on it and goes towards Sammy and Robert. He says hi and introduces himself as Sharif. Sharif says they waited for Sammy and Robert to come out of the restaurant so they can thank them properly for the launch. While Sharif speaks, the other three soldiers approach, say hello, shake Sammy and Robert's hands and they too thank them for paying for their launch. One of the soldiers says he can swear he has not had such a rich launch for more than a year and a half. Sharif continues talking and says he is an official military personnel and not a two year or two year and a half soldier like the other three. The other three are in the army to finish their compulsory military service. Sharif says he is in fact a contracted driver at the military and has been transferred to Al Namar base just a few days ago.

Sammy, Robert, sharif and the other three soldiers take a seat on one of the tables outside the restaurant. So, they can talk for a while. Sharif says he wants to thank Robert and Sammy by treating them for Arabic tea. He says it is good after having such a heavy rich launch. He orders the Arabic tea. The five of them speak about different subjects for a few minutes. They get to know each other better. Thinking he may be able to get a clue about his missing brother's whereabouts, Robert sees that as an opportunity to investigate and get as much info as possible. He also likes to find out about how close Isis has gotten. He asks sharif about current security statue of the country, what is going on and what he thinks would happen.

"We had an introductory session a few days ago at the base," explains sharif. "One of our commanders asked everyone to sit and listen to him after the morning flag raising ceremony. Flag raising ceremony happens every dawn at all bases, garrisons and boot camps. Something like thousands of

soldiers and officers present at bases, boot camps or garrisons gather around, raise and salute the flag. Plus, some other activities, such as the speech which would be made by commander in chief, reciting verses of the holy book of Quran. The commander then asked everyone to sit and listen. He is amongst well educated well-read kind of commanders whom I do have so much respect for. I have actually been his dedicated driver for the past two months already. Anyhow, he asked everyone to sit. Everybody was surprised as such a thing would rarely happen in a dawn flag raising ceremony. Soldiers and non-commissioned officers would normally go back to their units after flag raising. All would go back and attend to tasks they have been kept in charge of. We all sat in curiosity. No one said a word. Apparently, Isis had advanced and is still advancing in an unbelievable pace. He was saying Isis commanders had increased the number of their attacks on our provinces, cities and our military and security forces in general. He was surprised seeing Isis's rapid advances. They never predicted, never foresaw a regular disordered erratic militia would sweep them up that quickly and capture area after area of the country. According to the commander, Isis members increased every day. He was actually trying to get our minds ready for every possibility, especially for facing Isis. The thing is, so many of the soldiers who were there at the flag raising ceremony, were as a matter-of-fact new comers. New soldiers who are learning how to fight at the boot camp. Like this friend of mine who joined army recently, so he would finish his compulsory service and get it over with."

Sharif points at his finger at one of the soldiers and continues:

"The commander wanted them to hear what was in store for them when the time came. Who were Isis and what are they capable of doing? The other reason he was talking that early in the morning was to warn everyone and declare we had no more time to waste. Why was he doing that? I mean why was he saying those things was because every young man in the country has to complete his compulsory military service at some point. Right? And it takes around thirty months, regardless of which corner of the country he is sent. All new soldier candidates would be initially sent to a center. All of them. After the officers receive any number of new soldiers, they would see which area, which war zone lacks soldiers and they would dedicate a number of the new comers to that area or zone which requires the most man power. Recently, any number of soldiers register for beginning their military service, would be sent

for one single purpose only. To fight Isis. So, the commander wanted to open their eyes before they were deployed to any war zone to fight against Isis. Our army is not that strong and effective when it comes to fighting Isis. Let me give you an example. When Isis attacks an area, it forces our security and army to retreat and uses the arms and ammunition left behind by our own military. Isis uses the booties, like tanks, machine guns and whatever else our military left behind, against our own forces in their next attack. That means in reality, they use our guns and ammunitions to kill us. To kill us with our own guns. There's no humanity, honor, honesty and decency in Isis members. They kill or execute men on spot and women, Well, I'm sure you probably know better than I do what would they do to women. The most ominous and forbidding fate awaits girls and younger women. Now what would be or who would be left or them to deal with? Of course, the children. Those unconscionable bastards send children behind the front and train them how to use different weaponry, how to be a known executioner or they attach some explosives to their little bodies and send them to lay under our tanks, so we would not be able to march further. Making suicide attackers out of children who should as a matter of fact be at the school and learn how the world works. You guys look decent. Looks like you are kind people with big hearts. The four of us you see, are supposed to join our comrades soon. In fact, we will move to join them in an hour or two tops. We will move to join them in an hour or two maximums. We will go and fight until the last drop of blood remains in our veins, like all other patriots, but I tell you this because we are obliged to let you know now that you've paid for our meals. Just leave this town ASAP. I mean as soon as possible. Leave Al Darrah before it is too late. Take your wives, sisters, mothers, fiancés or any other dear person you love, and get as far as possible from this town. They're coming and they'll be here way sooner than you dear friends may think. Remember, you have an ammunition storage facility near Al Darrah and that is what any fighting side wants the most in a war. Think about it for a second."

Sharif pauses for a second, looks at Robert and tells him in the most honest and sincere way:

"And you, dear Robert, I've never heard your brother's name to be honest with you. If you were told to begin looking for him starting with Al Namar base, you do that so. But be prepared for any outcome. Be ready to hear anything, I mean any bad news about him. Please forgive me being so blunt and frank. But despite its bitterness, it's a possibility as we

are at war. Look wherever you think you may find him but, look into morgues, hospitals and where they keep corpses as well. I pray from depth of my heart you would not find your brother in places I just mentioned. But I'm a driver, working for the army and I know. Sometimes it takes weeks to identify the deceased. Some will never be found and would be considered missing. I pray to Allah you would find your brother in a healthy state. But like I said my dear Robert, be prepared."

Robert and Sammy are frightened, thinking while they are staggered. They listen with complete attention to Sharif. Robert is about to cry but is trying hard to hide his emotions. But Sammy and Robert begin remembering all what they had heard since their plane landed at Damascus airport. They remember what they heard inside the plane, what they saw, the soldiers they saw at the entrance to Al Darrah, check points that security forces police reinforcement had set at the middle of the main roads and other things. They associate all what they have seen and heard to what Sharif was telling them. Everything he said suddenly makes sense. They have now become even more alarmed and threatened. Sammy and Robert have just begun looking at everything in a more realistic way.

Everyone has finished drinking their tea. Sammy and Robert thank Sharif and his friends for sharing that information with them. They wish them safety and health. Sammy hugs Sharif and the other three soldiers goodbye. Robert tells the four of them that all the people are well-aware of the fact that they are not able to calmly sleep at night because of the sacrifices they make in trying to bring security. They all say farewell. They say goodbye to Sharif and his companions.

Robert needs to buy a pair of black socks for that evening's banquet. Sammy stands still for a moment so Robert would fix his knee strap. Robert is thinking he wants to bring up Nelly and dissuade Sammy from writing her a letter. He wants to have a serious talk with him about that. They enter a shop after walking for a short while. Robert looks around for a few seconds and buys the pair of socks he wanted. He also checks some shirts and T-shirts to wear in the house.

Robert uses his full stomach as an excuse and tells Sammy he needs to walk for a few minutes, so he would digest the heavy launch he had. He wants to get Sammy sit under a tree so he would bring up Nelly's letter and convinces Sammy what he is planning to do is not the best decision. Surprised and amazed,

Sammy agrees to walk and company Robert to the nearby park which is near Mr. Zahir's restaurant. The two of them start walking and discussing what Sharif told them. Robert says he believed every single word Sharif told them. He says Sharif's explanations has got him into defense mode as if he is expecting someone to assault him at all times. He asks what Sammy thinks about it all? Since Isis's terrorist attack, which caused Sammy losing his beloved father, he has developed a big level of hatred for Isis and its members. Sammy too says he believed Sharif and believes what Sharif said was based on reality and absolute truth. Sammy says he would get his mother a visa and take her abroad if necessary. As he needs to get his mother away from all violence. But he has not thought about where and when so far. As he has not seriously come to that conclusion until now.

Robert and Sammy reach the park. Sammy who is no longer able to walk because of his bad leg, chooses a bench under a tree and sits. He tells Robert he can just sit and wait for him to get back if he needs to walk longer and digest his meal. Robert sits next to Sammy. There is a moment of silence between them. Robert is thinking of a way to bring up Nelly and the letter Sammy is writing her. He has to start telling Sammy what he thinks somehow and tell him what he thinks Sammy is better off doing. Sammy removes his left shoe, massages his foot a little and wears his shoe again. he gets up and goes to the grass, sits down next to where he was sitting on the bench, takes a deep breath and decides he wants to lay down. He encourages Robert to do the same too. Robert lays down next to Sammy. He feels Sammy is having a very relaxing moment laying down on the grass. Sammy tells Robert he feels young and fresh, takes his smart phone out of his jeans and plays a nice relaxing music, closes his eyes and opens his arms wide, pretending he is about to take off and fly. Robert is still waiting for the right moment to bring up Nelly and Sammy's letter accordingly, when Sammy himself brings it up by asking Robert's opinion about the contents of his letter to Nelly. Robert pauses for a moment, begins speaking and says he has unfortunately not yet been able to read it yet, but he would certainly read it and gives Sammy an honest feedback. Robert knows Sammy is extra sensitive and therefore, he has to be extra care full not to hurt his best friend's feelings. The subject Robert wants to talk to Sammy about also is a sensitive subject in itself. So, Robert knows he has to be very careful not to hurt Sammy's feeling. He has to do his level best to find and use right terms and say them on right moments. His main objective is to help Sammy

understands that he has to trust his abilities and not to lose his self-esteem. Robert turns the hazard at last and asks Sammy to sit, because he wants to talk to him about Nelly. Delighted anytime there is a talk about him and Nelly, Sammy gets up. They both go back to the bench they were seated on moments ago. Sammy is not saying anything. He is just waiting for Robert to begin talking. Robert, on the other hand, uses all he has in him to use best words in order to induce what he wants to Sammy.

" Look dude," says Robert calmly and in an honest tone, "I want you to know how important you are to me, how much I love you bro and how dear you are to me. I know this feeling is surely mutual and because of the way we feel about one another, I allow myself to tell you certain facts I have in my mind. You see? When I sit and think about your positive points, I figure they're not countable, and everybody who knows you, definitely knows those great positive powers of yours. Everybody knows how well you study. I mean, your interest in mechanical engineering is probably the reason you have been successfully passing your exams and that's great by the way. When I think about sports, well everyone knows you are one of the best in the country. About your manners, again, the whole town talk about how well-mannered Mr. Sammy Samaha is. You are a sociable gentleman and have a very healthy attitude towards people and life generally. These positive points of yours I just mentioned are considered very important, maybe some of the most important characteristics of a modern man, buddy. I began my speech by mentioning your positive possessions first, because I'm trying to establish a point accordingly. Ok. Now I want to talk about you and miss Nelly, the pretty girl. You have absolutely no idea how happy Amer and I became when we found out that you have finally come across the girl of your dreams and have fallen in love. I also want you to know that such an incident would have one day happened to you, sooner or later. It's a fact. An unchangeable fact Sammy. Amer and I were actually waiting for this day to come. We knew it would come sooner or later. I swear to lord Jesus we knew Sammy. Until you paid your dad's grave a visit one day, unaware of the fact that destiny had pulled you to the cemetery, so you would get to meet Nelly and fall in love with her. I'm sure you remember my relation with Farida. I mentioned her, so you would be reminded that I absolutely know and understand how you feel at the moment. Believe me Sammy, if I call your mom right now and tell her that you have fallen in love, she would become so happy that she will not be able to sleep tonight because of the

excitement. That's how important this matter is for us all. Dude, you have gone through a lot in your life, like Amer, like myself, like everyone else. Some face less uglier situations and some others not. Some become alcoholics and junkies because they are not able to face life challenges, and some others, including yourself, become better men, because life difficulties and challenges thought them to. This is one thing I and everyone else have been proud of you for. But despite all happiness you're falling in love with Nelly blesses us all with, something has been chewing my brain. Something began bothering me soon after you revealed you had fallen in love. That my best friend whom I sleep under one roof with like he is my own brother, the person I eat my breakfast, lunch and dinner and share a food with, borrow clothes from each other and have nothing to hide from one another, does not unfortunately recognize his own values and loses his self-confidence occasionally. My friend, Sammy, bro, you have all good qualities of an absolute gentleman, yet you want to tell Nelly what you want by writing her a letter? Seriously Sammy? Do you know that a huge percentage of girls do not show interest in guys who have no balls to tell them they like them face to face? Dude, it's 21<sup>st</sup> century for heaven's sake. A letter? Many women, I mean young women, do not like this approach. Not anymore. You are Sammy Samaha. You are the role model for the younger generation. You are a mechanical engineering student, man, with so much talent and ability. What is this letter dilemma you've been talking about? Just go to her, see her and tell her face to face, like a man, that you like her and ask her out. Show her who you are. Show her how important she is to you. Look buddy, what I'm telling you is, in fact, what Farida thought me. She's a girl and knows what guys should do. A guy happened to like her. He apparently used to send her so many emails asking her out, because he lacked self-confidence. I personally asked Farida. I asked her what's wrong with asking you out by sending you an email. she said she refused to go out with the guy particularly because he had asked her out in an email. She told me that I have asked a good question. She gave me a good answer. She said, "Girls do not like to read someone's emotions in a text. Girls like to have the moment. To look into the guy's eyes and feel their emotions." She told me, "If that guy told me he liked me when he saw me, she would have probably gone out with him. But an email? Letter? A big no with a capital N." Farida used to tell me expressing one's emotions through emails, letters and sending texts are weak men's methods, and girls don't like weak men. Girls like guys who can be strong enough to stand to a girl and tell them how



they feel about them. Girls do not show any interest in weak and shy guys. End of the story.

Sammy has lowered his head and is listening to Robert carefully. He thinks Robert is right. Sammy himself had questioned effectiveness of a letter to Nelly while writing it and was about to give up writing. But what does he have to do instead? How can he express his emotions towards her? Does he have to stand on Nelly's path and tell her face to face how he feels about her? Oh my God, Sammy sighs. It is quite challenging doing that.

These are only some of the questions Sammy asks himself. He is simply waiting for Robert to finish talking, so he would ask Robert how he thinks he has to approach Nelly and ask her out. How can Sammy overcome his own shyness? How can he face Nelly? Robert finishes talking. He tells Sammy whatever he thinks he has to say. Robert's conscience is clear. He has done what any best friend, any real human who wants to see his best friend succeed would do. Sammy and Robert go into silence once again. They are both quiet for a moment. Robert glances at Sammy. He is relieved to figure from Sammy's facial expressions that his words have no negative or upsetting effect on his best friend. Robert is determined to change Sammy's mind in his approach in regards to asking Nelly out, and he thinks for a moment that he has achieved his objective.

"So," says Sammy in a desperate and depressed tone, "You mean I'll have to simply appear in front of her like a ghost and say what? Would you do such a thing yourself Robert honestly? Would you bro?"

Robert bursts into laughter because of the way Sammy puts it. "OMG," replies Robert, "Did you hear me saying I want you to summon to her in the street like a ghost and demon and say something to her? I said be smart. Appear in her path and pretend it happened randomly. Just say hi and then some small talk maybe, invite her for a cup of coffee, tea, lunch or dinner or something. If she accepts your invitation, the better. Otherwise, ask for her number. So, you would call her. If she is like she's restricted by her parents, you offer your cell-number and ask her to contact you whenever she feels she can talk. One of you would call the other and you'll take it from there. Tell her you like her and want to take her out for dinner or lunch or anything else. That's all."

Sammy doesn't really know what to do. Robert is right and Sammy knows it. On one hand Sammy thinks he does not have to give Nelly the impression that he is a guy with low self-esteem or no self-confidence at all, in the other hand, he is truly not seeing himself capable of doing what Robert is suggesting to him to do. His body is shaking, only thinking about coming face to face with Nelly, let alone talking to her and expressing his feelings for her and asking her out. Robert knows Sammy well enough to know what is happening in his mind. He knows Sammy, his strength and weaknesses, his morale, morality and mentality well. In fact, he knows Sammy in some cases better than Sammy himself.

Robert has found an opportunity to confront Sammy about what makes him lose his self-esteem. He asks Sammy the reason he doesn't want to talk to Nelly face to face. Sammy has to face his issues one day and now it is the best time for him to do so. Sammy's eyes well up and Robert notices it. He feels guilty for a moment for hurting Sammy's feelings. Robert turns his head away from Sammy, so he would not notice he has seen Sammy's tears and him becoming extremely emotional. Sammy wants to talk, despite the fact that he is gulping, he pats on Robert's shoulder and stammers in a very sad tone:

"For you Robert, having a healthy functional body parts, is easy to do such thing. You expect me to go stand face to face to her, tell her I like her? And invite her? Doesn't she ask herself despite all healthier, better looking, richer and more educated suitors she has, why does she have to even bother talking or wanting a relationship with a cripple? I know Robert. I swear to God I know what you say, you say it out of love and care for me. And I sincerely thank you for that. But I've been discriminated, laughed at, ignored and abused and been treated with discomfiture since my accident. I began noticing there were differences between myself and other kids. My mom and dad did their best to convince me otherwise, but my school mates, classmates, neighbor kids and every kid I knew made sure I actually was different from them. You expect me to limp towards Nelly and tell her I am, whom or what am I? You ask me not to hand her a letter. You suggest I come face to face with her and tell her how I feel. Would you do that yourself if you were in such condition as I am in now? Really. Would you have any self-confidence left in you after you went through what I went through? God forbid, if you limped yourself, would you do it yourself what you expect me to do? Would you have self-steam if you were me? Please put yourself in my shoes for a moment Robert, honestly. Would

you have enough self-confidence to approach her? You think I don't like having a relationship with a girl I like? Or I ever liked? I don't like taking a girl's hand, go out, fall in love, walk under the rain and experience love as it really truly is. I don't like to get married or engaged. God does not want me to. God doesn't let it happen to me or for me dude. God took my healthy leg, took my dad away, took away my self-confidence along with everything else and I have accepted it. It took me a long time. But I eventually surrendered to the army of fate.

Sammy is whimpering. Robert too begins sobbing as he's now influenced by Sammy's anguished state. His heart is filled with sorrow. He thinks to himself he must have said nothing to Sammy. Maybe he really didn't have to interfere in Sammy's decision about Nelly. But Sammy has already opened up to him and has complained about all that had hurt him for decades.

The discussion Robert initiated was on one hand good. Because Sammy could talk about what bothered him for years and empty himself. But on the other hand, Robert couldn't sympathize with Sammy, simply because sympathizing with him means he has a good and logical reason for not acting with self confidence in regards to Nelly and other women. Robert doesn't know what to do. He can't ignore Sammy's emotions. But if he agrees with Sammy that he has a reason to have no self- confidence, he has in fact accepted that Sammy has to feel and act like a cripple, and this is not what Robert's objective is at the end of the day.

Robert knows it is a very long time since Sammy has lost his self-confidence. He also knows why. He remembers many occasions when Sammy spoke about a girl, but when it came to communicating with her, he backed off. Robert knows Sammy was afraid of getting rejected by any girl he wanted to approach. Because he thought he was officially considered a crippled and girls were therefore going to refuse having a relationship with him. Sammy's accident that resulted into him limping, formed his lack of confidence. So, he did not even give it a try. Sammy thought he knew what would girls reaction be after he approached them. Since he began limping, Sammy thought he had lost his chance of having a romantic relationship, and despite the fact Robert as well as Amer noticing Sammy's shyness and lack of self-confidence, they never brought it up, talked to him and tried to convince him otherwise. So, Robert thought this was the right time and for the right reason to confront Sammy about it. But he actually wants Sammy

to admit he has a problem with his self-confidence first, convince him he is wrong in determining what the opposite sex would be thinking about a man with his physical conditions. Robert has to convince Sammy that he is not considered as a crippled and his walking problem has no such effect in him being successful to start a relationship with any girl. But now, after seeing Sammy's tears, Robert is strongly affected by his devastation and is about to cry himself too.

Robert is facing a dilemma. His main objective is to talk to Sammy and dissuade him from writing Nelly a letter. He must persuade Sammy and make him comprehend that it is wrong thinking less about himself. Robert just wants Sammy to realize there is nothing really wrong with him and his limp does not truly matter as much as he thinks. But Sammy is crying and Robert cannot see his best friend in tears. However, if he too gets emotional, yearn and sympathize with Sammy, that indirectly indicates that there is something to be sad and disappointed about and Sammy has a valid reason to lack self-confidence. He can't ignore his best friend's emotions neither. So, Robert does his best to control his emotions and prevent his tears rolling down his cheeks. Robert tries having a self-righteousness looks on his facial expressions. He frowns and tells Sammy in a serious tone to cry as much as he feels. He wants Sammy to get all that bothered him all those years off his chest. Sammy sobs for a while and begins talking again:

"I wanted to become a professional football player you know. I was a player at youth team. I played as forward and I was good at it. That's at least what my coach used to say. I had a good life. I had planned and worked out everything in my life. I had everything worked out. Life was going on and mine was great. Until that damn accident changed everything. It changed the direction of my life. Destiny began playing me a sad song. Playing football was off the table. Target shooting came into the picture instead. What I had never imagined would become my main hobby, and I entered the world of target shooting upon my father's suggestion. He had noticed I would shoot the game accurately, precisely where he wanted me to when we went hunting. This pleased him. That's why he encouraged me to do target shooting after I could no longer run after football. But I still wanted to play football. I couldn't just let it go. Do you understand me? Next, I lost my biggest support. I lost my father. You know Robert? I had to grow up faster than I thought. When I think about it, I see I've never been a kid really. I have never felt childhood.

As soon as I wanted to experience childhood's naughtiness, what's like being spoiled by your father, learn stuff from him and all that, I suddenly had to learn to be patient. I had to learn what destiny meant, how to respond to contemptuous comments about my disability. I had to learn how to walk as fast as I could with my stick, in case I didn't have my knee strap fixed. I had to sit and be a referee, while other neighborhood kids played actual football in the street. You know Robert? Sometimes, being different tastes so bitter that you question life and Destiny. We had a neighbor. His name was Mr. Al Sharghi. He had a daughter whom I had a crush on. We were friends but I secretly had a crush on her and she didn't know it. We were good friends. Her name was Hanieh. Hanieh happened to become the first girlfriend I ever had in my life. My first love. We loved each other so much so that our parents had difficulty separating us. I'm talking about kids kind of love of course. I was a very good student. Top of my class. I helped her if she had a problem with her studies. Oh, I remember like it was yesterday. She was so cute, so beautiful, small nose and big round eyes. She looked like an eastern version of a Barbie doll. She began getting colder and colder to me shortly after I came back home from the hospital. I mean after that accident. But I thought since I had met an accident, she would come to me all the time, comfort me, spoil me, like she would be with me in our own childish way. But this was not what happened. I got to see less and less of her. I used to call her name from my balcony all the time. As soon as I yelled her name, she would say: Sammy. But a few days after my accident, I used all I had in me to get up and go to the balcony. I was bored. I needed her. I called her name like I usually did. But she would not answer. I thought she wasn't home. So, I sat in the balcony to see her when she got home. It was around half an hour later, someone rang her home's bell and to my surprise, she came out, went to the door and opened it. So, she was at home all the time I was waiting at the balcony to surprise her. I thought she had not heard me when I called her. So, when she was going to answer the door, I began joking with her like always and asked her if she was getting deaf. Because I had called her name and she hadn't answered. You don't believe what she replied. She said she was not deaf. She said I was crippled not her. She called me a crippled. That broke my heart into pieces. I was speechless. I couldn't believe my damn ears. She opened her door and one of our neighborhood boys entered and went inside with her. Right there, at that moment, I tasted the horrible flavor of being different, being less than others. Robert, I swear to God you'll not be able

to be me for a single day of your life. It's too difficult being Sammy Samaha."

Sammy's sadness has transformed into anger. He is offended by everyone and everything. But Robert conducts patience. He lets Sammy say whatever that bothers him and has bothered him for a long time. Robert waits for Sammy to completely get all what he needs off his chest. Sammy continues saying of cruelties of life a few minutes more and gets quiet gradually. But Robert still has that gesture of self-righteousness. He is frowning and having a serious looks on him so Sammy would not think he has a good reason to be how he is. Robert wants to convince Sammy it is not how he feels. He doesn't want Sammy to continue thinking he has a rock-solid reason for hating life. So, he would not think he has presented a perfect reason for not being self-confident. Sammy gets quiet staring at Robert:

"Are you done?" Asks Robert, "Finished with all your nagging and bullshit? Guess what? I know you are upset, man. I know it's been a long time that you've been upset. But can you fight realities of life? Can you?"

Robert gets up the bench. He sits opposite Sammy, like he is kneeling. Sammy is looking away now. So, Robert holds his head and directs his head facing him instead, so Sammy would look into his eyes.

"Dude," says Robert quietly but very seriously, "What's this shit you've created in your mind? What are these terms you are using when describing yourself? Crippled? Disable? What is these bullshit in your head? And since you've never shared your thoughts with anyone and did never get a reasonable feedback, you've come to conclusion that what you are thinking is true? Dude, there's a guy who has lost his leg in the war. No leg, and he's getting married to a doll next month. Oh. I almost forgot. And his wife to be is a pharmacist you Moron. You think you are so different than others because of your leg? You think you are disabled? Well guess what? All people in the world are disabled. Just that some of their disabilities are physical and visible, and many others are disable in a none-physical way, a none-visible way. You think you are different? All of us are different man. There's a Persian proverb saying you have five fingers in a hand, but none of them are the same. They all differ from one another. Besides, you've got legs for heaven's sake. I have to admit Sammy, in this case, I totally absolutely disagree with you.

You've been thinking alone, concluding alone, been judge jury and executioner yourself. How do you come up with shit like that? Really. Teach me. Your reasoning sucks man. Baseless logics you have. A kid called you a cripple. Years ago. So? Does that make you a real cripple? She called you cripple and you made a sad story out of it? Such a drama queen you are. Grow the fuck up. I tell you this because I love you man. What kind of fucking mentality is that you're having. Don't girls need honesty in man of their dream? Don't they need dignity? Commitment, security? They only need a man with good legs? They just look at the guys leg as soon as they're approached to see whether they limp or not? Really, seriously, where do you get your info from? Your vast knowledge of social studies. Ok let's say you are the healthiest, richest, nicest looking man on the face of the universe, tell a girl you'll marry her, but you'll sleep with a whore every now and then. Let us see what she would tell you. You are fucked up, dude. It's been a long time you've made the problem you have with your limp an alibi to not do stuff you are shy to do. You are refusing to be adventurous, particularly because you have a little problem with walking, because you had an accident years ago and you should use knee strap or stick occasionally. Let me ask you a question though. How many times you prayed, praised God and thanked him for not letting you die after that tire hit you? Huh? How many times you are really happy for simply escaping death? Answer me God damnit. How many times you said thank you God, lord, Allah or anything you want to call him for not making me a vegetable? Which one of universe's laws say Mr. Sammy Samaha should not meet an accident, should become number 2 target shooting champion and have a medal hanged to his neck? Which law says Sammy should be on top 3 list in college's best student? Huh? This is definitely not your problem alone you Moron. All human being are assholes, wanting more and more. Without giving anything in return. The human wants to be the best, without doing his or her part or giving anything in return. You are not excluded. Sometimes you act like idiots Sammy. Sit and think, if like you always say, universe got away your leg, which did not by the way, see what did the universe give you in return? Universe has given you a mother instead who loves you to death, a healthy soul, a championship, powerful brains for you to study well, target shooting championship, and Nelly if you play your cards right. Let me teach you something bro, you cannot fight destiny man. Don't even try. Believe me, you going to lose big time."

Robert who is now breathing heavily because of the heated argument a much of excitement while talking, nods, let's go of Sammy's head and gets up standing. He takes a few steps to his right and pauses for a moment. Sammy on the other hand is staring at a point in front of him. He's quiet. He does not know what to say. He agrees with many of Robert's words and logics. He knows he has to overcome his weaknesses, his lack of self-confidence. Sammy sincerely appreciates what Robert is doing. He knows Robert and Amer had similar mentality when it came to his issues. Sammy glances at his wrist-watch, stands up and walks towards Robert. He hugs Robert, thanks him and says he knows Robert was right from the beginning. He promises Robert to do as he says, to go face to face with Nelly and tells her how he feels. Robert tells Sammy facing Nelly and expressing his emotions is not the only thing he means Sammy has to overcome. But he wants Sammy to overcome his general self-confidence issues, not only in regards to talking to Nelly, but about everything else that requires him to show a strong personality. Sammy agrees and once again promises he is going to work on his issues, but in regards to Nelly, he says he needs a few days to prepare himself mentally. So, he would go strong in talking to Nelly and express himself. Robert gets so happy and relieved hearing what Sammy promised him.

Robert is happy that his words could affect Sammy in a positive way. He seems he has achieved his objectives with Sammy. He finds out he can change Sammy's way of thinking about himself and people's point of view towards him. They both begin walking towards Sammy's apartment. They witness a few families loading their luggage and baggage's into the trunk of their vehicle. It is obvious they are leaving whatever they have behind, running before any bad things begin happening in Al Darrah. Both Sammy and Robert are quiet, looking at those families fleeing and both are once again reminded of severity of the country's security situation, Isis advancing and getting closer and closer to Al Darrah. They speak about all what Sharif has told them earlier, until they arrive the area where Sammy's building is located. Sammy's leg has begun bothering him when they reached the building.

Below Sammy's building, Mr. Al Arafı is coming into grips with his classic yellow color Volkswagen as he does every single day morning. Mr. Al Arafı has two wives. He has purchased two apartments in one floor, both apartments in the same floor facing each other and each of his two wives live



in one of the apartments. He has to spend each night with one of his wives according to Islamic family law.

Mr. Al Arafi's wives are fighting every single day and over every single excuse a matter. Residents of sky residential complex are already used to the two women quarrelling. Mr. Al Arafi has three daughters from his first and 3 sons from his second wife. He is a retired seventy-one-year-old man, believes he has waisted his entire life working in field of electrical jobs, whereas his talents actually lay in fixing classic vehicles, beautifying and refurbishing them.

Neighbors refer to Al Arafi's yellow classic Volkswagen as Adolf Hitler. No one has ever seen Hitler running or operational. The only time Hitler moves is when Mr. Al Arafi asks neighborhood kids to push it when he needs to relocate it. Mr. Al Arafi stops working and gets his head out of Hitler's hood as soon as seeing Sammy coming towards the building. Sammy and Robert reach Mr. Al Arafi and say hi. But he begins talking, without saying hi back to them.

"Never get married you guys," says Mr. Al Arafi, "Just find yourself a girlfriend and be with her for the rest of your lives. But never get married. That's all I have to say. It's women who made me this miserable. Women. If I were not married, I would pay and change Hitler's engine to a new one right now. Alas, one of them wants new carpeting and the other wants to have a plastic surgery on her ass. That ass is why I married her in the first place. Oh God. Their needs never end. They have never ending demands. When you want to attend to one's needs, the other one comes up with a new need and when you attend to both their needs, children have needs. It's a jungle. You have no idea. Do not get married for if you do, I'll never get to see your freely walking asses in the streets anymore. To hell with the women race. Goddamnit."

Having spent a few contentious and emotional minutes before getting to see Mr. Al Arafi, Sammy and Robert are as if waiting for an excuse to laugh. They burst into laughter after what Mr. Al Arafi says and how he says it. They stay with Mr. Al Arafi and speak for a while.

Robert and Sammy enter the building and Sammy's apartment. Sammy goes to his workbench directly after changing to his pajamas. He fixes his apron as usual and inserts his earphones into his ears. He switches the machine on and witnesses the machine begins shaping the piece slowly. After changing to

his pajamas, Robert examines what he wants to wear at night for the banquet. He unpacks his new pair of socks and places it next to his formal clothes. He lays down on the couch in front of the television. But he suddenly remembers Sammy's possible speech. He remembers he has to finalize all that Sammy has to speak about at the banquet. He returns to Sammy's room, picks his notepad and pen and begins reading it from top to bottom one last time to check if any editing needs to be done on it. Robert adds a few sentences, edits a few paragraphs and thirty minutes later, Sammy's speech is prepared.

Sammy is still seated behind his workbench listening to his classical music. He is staring at how the machine changes the shape of metal piece. Robert goes towards Sammy while holding his speech. Sammy has his back to Robert. He pats over Sammy's shoulder. Sammy removes one of his earphones and sees Robert holding his speech up to his eye level. Robert asks Sammy to read the speech several times so he would not face any problems in the evening at the banquet. He returns to the living room, lays on the couch and switches the TV on. Robert changes the channels until he stops on animal planet channel and begins watching a documentary regarding Africa and its animals. He watches the documentary for a few minutes until his eyelids become heavier. He falls asleep. Sammy's eyes are focused on the machine operating, his mind is elsewhere though. He cannot stop thinking about Nelly, and all what him and Robert spoke about. He is pushing himself to accept the fact that he has to implement Robert's approach in asking Nelly out for a date. He knows he has to overcome his fear, shyness, lack of self-confidence or whatever Robert calls it. He is in fact thankful to Robert for trying to make important changes in him. But he knows being thankful to Robert does not change anything and he has to change if he wants to get Nelly.

Sammy knows he has to make a major change in his mentality if he wants to get somewhere. Sammy looks at the clock. He gets his earphones off his ears, switches the machine off, stops the music and removes his apron. He rushes to the living room and looks for his binoculars. He takes it to his room after he finds them and stands by the window. He gets the binocular up to his eyes and begins searching for Nelly in the street. He is very careful not to be nosy and wakes Robert up. While looking for Nelly from his binocular lenses, he begins questioning what he has learned to do. He thinks even if he would see Nelly in the crowd again, so what? The more Sammy

thinks, the more convinced he becomes that he has to listen to Robert at the end, if he wants to get result.

Sammy feels restless. He has fallen in love for the first time in his life and can do nothing about it if he doesn't make the right move. Sammy is being tortured by his own disability to make up his mind and take a right step. He is disturbed by a maddening feeling. He starts praying while tears roll down his cheeks, asking God to help him achieve Nelly. Sammy is long craving for a change. For a major change in his boring, adventure less, loveless life. He expects an incident. An incident by which he would be having something to live for, something to breathe for and he thinks Nelly is the reason he was waiting for all his life. He asks God to provide him with enough confidence and ability to somehow show Nelly he is not only a guy like all other guys she has come across. To show Nelly how much he can be a good boyfriend or husband for her. Sammy calms down little by little. He has to take a final, final decision. He has promised to work on his self-confidence and faces Nelly when he is ready. Sammy wipes his tears, brings up the binoculars to his eyes again. He feels ashamed of what he is doing. It looks like he is stalking Nelly. This is not what Sammy has in mind. To see Nelly from hundreds of yards, using a binocular. Is this as close as he gets to Nelly he thinks? Does he have to only see Nelly from the windows of his apartment? Sammy cokes himself? It is when Sammy takes a decision. His final decision about Nelly. He has to see Nelly and tell her like a man how he feels about her. But he has to memorize all what he wants to tell Nelly word by word, so he would not begin stammering when the time comes Sammy thinks.

Sammy is giving himself hope, promising himself he would definitely talk to Nelly and express his feelings for her when he suddenly sees Nelly crossing the dream intersection. Sammy finds it difficult to breathe for a moment. His hand's vibrations are shaking his binocular. Sammy has a smile on his face. Nelly disappears just few seconds later behind buildings and even that raised Sammy's heart rate. Sammy has already decided to look into Nelly's eyes and tell her what she has done to him.

Robert's phone is ringing. He jumps and looks at his phone. There is an unknown caller ID. He hurries picking the phone up expecting the phone call may be in relation to Robin, his brother. So, he answers his phone with a coarse tone. Sammy

is so curious to know who has called Robert? He hears Robert saying it is a wrong number to the caller after a short pause.

Robert places his phone back on the top of the living room's coffee table. Sammy is guessing that the phone call without a doubt had triggered his brother's thoughts in Robert's mind. So, he decides to change the subject of Robert and prevent him getting into sad mood by asking him to get up already, as they have to get ready little by little to leave the house for the banquet. Robert gets up smiling. Sammy knows he has succeeded changing his best friend's mood by bringing up the banquet. Robert and then Sammy take a quick shower and shave one after the other. They get their clothes ready to wear and then polish their shoes. Sammy and Robert are formally dressed more than an hour later and are now waiting for Amer and Sara to arrive, pick them up and take them to the banquet.

Robert is standing at the balcony, looking at the amazing horizon in the sunset. Sammy sprays his cologne to his neck and face. He fixes his knee strap as secure as.

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Sara is seated at the living room along with her mother Saboura. She is dressed in a beautiful night gown and her hair is nicely done. She is waiting for Amer to arrive. Sara has kept her hair exactly the same since she did it at the beauty parlor earlier that day. Sara looks like the classy lady she is, has a mild make up that makes her even more charismatic. She is the kind of a girl who does not really need to apply much make-up to exaggerate certain spots of her face. Her facial members create a cute pretty face all together.

Saboura is at the kitchen. She's talking, giving Sara advices about the way she has to behave in the banquet, telling her not to get so close to Amer, especially since many people of Al Darrah will be there and because she and Amer have not yet been officially registered as husband and wife by a certified marriage office, a Sheikh, and have not yet been halal to one another.

Saboura is a bit concerned because she believes that people of all small towns, including Al Darrah, are in the habit of talking, spreading rumors and making negative comments behind their backs if they see Sara getting too close to Amer. For example, if she holds Amer's hand. So, she reminds Sara of

people's blabbing, their mentalities and habit of making up stories, exaggerating what they saw and their names would be the talk of Al Darrah's women for weeks.

Sara knows herself that they live in an Islamic country. That's why she needs to behave in order to prevent any rumors to be created and spread around the town. While talking to Sara, Saboura brings the tea tray to the living room. She places Sara's teacup next to her and calls her husband Yamen. Yelling his name several times, Yamen finally heads towards the house with a muddy flip-flops and dirty hands. He loves gardening, experimenting, cutting and imping different breed of plants. But before entering the living room, he hears Saboura's voice again, asking him to clean-up before joining them for tea. She reminds Yamen she has just changed her sofa covers less than two weeks ago and does not want him to leave any stains on them. Yamen changes his walking direction and goes towards the bathroom resentfully instead. He cleans himself up and combs his hair.

Saboura is now advising her daughter how to treat her husband. Yamen joins them at the living room while drying his hands with a few tissue papers. He interrupts Saboura and says he thinks Sara doesn't really need advice as she is already an adult. A young and wise woman. Yamen picks a cup of tea and sits next to his daughter.

Saboura continues on advising. Being polite, Sara just nods. She glances at his father naughtily. Yamen confirms what Saboura says. Sara's father blinks at her and they both pretend they're listening to her advices carefully.

When Saboura finishes talking, Sara clears her throat and tells her parents she wanted to share something very important with them but she found no opportunity to do so far. She explains to her parents all about Amer and his other family members decision on moving to Al latakia and according to Islamic law, in a few days and after she and Amer became halal to one another, she would be considered as Amer's legal wife, therefor, she has to follow her husband wherever he goes.

Yamen is waiting for her daughter to finish talking and then tells her how happy he is for the fact that her daughter would at least be living in a safe city. He says he supports them with their decision as he thinks it is the best decision by which her daughter would be safe and begins her married life without worrying about Isis and war. Yamen says he and all of

his friends know Al Darrah has lost its security and is no longer their safe haven. Saboura looks as if she does not like what she is hearing. She is peering into her cup. She looks like she disagrees with Sara's father. Saboura does not like her daughter to be away from her. She wants all her family members to be close to her. She's well aware that she is being selfish and has to stop letting her emotions take over her logic. But still, what Sara reveals, makes her sad and down. Saboura argues with her husband over this.

In a sad tone, Yamen says he is not happy seeing her daughter leave town. He knows there is no other choice but to accept the reality that Al Darrah is no longer a safe town to live in and they need to choose a different spot in the country to live. So, he says he would also begin looking for an apartment or a small affordable house for them, so they would also move to Al Latakia and would again be living close to their daughter's family. He says he knows after Sara leaves town; they too must look for a place to take shelter in. So, they would choose Al Latakia too. Sara and her mother jump up screaming out of happiness, they both run towards Sara's father, hug him, kiss and thank him for being such a lovely father and husband. Saboura looks deep into her husband's eyes and says thank you before tears of joy roll down.

Sara is immensely relieved knowing that she would still have her parents close by and she would not feel lonely sometimes. She is speaking to her mother about when they would move and that they must begin packing already. When Sara's phone rings once, that means Amer is already outside her house waiting. She gets to the long big mirror next to the entrance door and checks her appearance top to bottom once again. She kisses her parents, says goodbye and leaves the house.

\* \* \*

As soon as Amer sees Sara getting out of the house, he jumps off the car, paces to the other side of the car, acts as a gentleman and opens the car door for his lady. Amer is in tuxedo. He looks dapper, sharp and elegant, happy to see and to be with his fiancé. He takes a look at Sara from top to bottom and begins praising her and complementing her wonderful looks and everything else about her.

Amer becomes relieved hearing his in laws are going to be close to his wife to be. Because one of the matters that bothered him was the fact that Sara had no family, relative

or friends in Al Latakia and sooner or later, she was going to feel bored and tired. But now things seem to be improving. Sara has her parents around and it is a relief.

Sara and Amer reach the dream street near Sammy's building a few minutes later. Amer calls Sammy and tells him to go down the building along with Robert. Amer tells Sammy they are on the dream street, seconds away from his building. Robert who is at the balcony still notices Amer's vehicle approaching. He tells Sammy they have to go down as he can see Amer's vehicle getting closer.

Sammy and Robert exit the apartment. They're not really surprised to find the elevator out of order again. They reach below the building and at the same time Amer's car stops in front of them. Sammy and Robert get into the car and Amer drives towards the municipality's amphitheater banquet hall.

This is the very first time Sammy is going to spend some time with Sara. Because Sammy was at the capital with Robert when Amer and Sara met. Sammy and Robert were studying in Damascus university, then they went to Beijing and after that back to Al Darrah. So, Sammy never had a chance to spend any time with Sara really. Of course, he has seen Sara's photo a million times, as Amer is in the habit of bragging about being with such a lovely girl.

After entering Amer's car, Sammy expresses how pleased he is meeting Sara again. He says he has heard a lot more about her and is happy to be attending the banquet with her. Robert reminds Sammy that his cousin has an exquisite taste when it comes to women. Sara expresses the same and congratulates Sammy and Robert. She says she forgot to congratulate Robert last time she met him.

Amer begins telling his jokes and everyone is laughing on the way to the banquet. There is not a big distance from Sammy's building to municipality's banquet hall. Amer drives the car from dream street and turns left after reaching dream intersection. He drives on the garden road, which is the widest and the only main street in the town. As soon as Amer's car enters the garden road, everyone notices a man standing by the side of the road and trying to stop passing vehicles for help. Being a kind-hearted gentleman, Amer reduces his car speed after seeing the man by the side of the main road. He takes a few yards reverse until he reaches the man. Surprisingly, everyone knows who the man is. Al Darrah is a

small town after all. Most of its residents know each other somehow. The man is Mr. Nader, a teacher at Al Darrah's middle school. He was promoted to be the school manager's assistant. He is a tall and thin guy. He is known for his eagle pick looking long big nose and his half grey hair. Naughty school children used to call him Nader, the nose. Each teacher has a tag or a nick-name per say. Anyhow, Mr. Nader is standing by the side of the street asking drivers for help. He is as tall as always, but his nose looks like it has bent to the left somehow.

Amer gets off the car and they begin talking. Sammy and Robert too get off to pay their respects to Mr. Nader, as he was one of their teachers. Being an extremely talkative man, Mr. Nader begins explaining, telling them all that he had done since hours ago that led him to have a problem with his car. Robert goes to Mr. Nader's car to make sure it has fuel or the battery is fine. But as soon as entering driver side, he hears a few women's voice saying hello to him altogether. They startled Robert. But he takes his nerves under control, says hi back and tells ladies everything is going to be alright.

Sammy, Amer and Robert look into Mr. Nader's car, but can't find out what the problem is. Mr. Nader has a very old-fashioned suit on. His suit is maroon with brown gridiron. Mr. Nader says they were on their way to the banquet, points at his suit and says obviously he was in a formal outfit. Robert can no longer control his laughter. He looks for an excuse to explain why he is laughing. Robert notices Mr. Nader is staring at him and would have probably figured he is laughing at him or his so-called formal suit. But Robert says it is obvious he is in his formal suit. But what makes him laugh is something known as the murphy law. Robert says according to murphy law, the car has to break down moments before arriving at the banquet and that sounds hilarious to him. Robert is praying in his heart that his alibi for laughing has convinced Mr. Nader.

"What murphy?" Asks Mr. Nader, "Who? Why are you laughing at the law? Who's murphy?"

Now Amer and Sammy also cannot control their laughter.

"Murphy law Mr. Nader," replies Robert, "Murphy's law is an adage or epigram, that is typically stats as anything that can go wrong, will go wrong".

To change the subject and save Robert from further embarrassment, Sammy suggests everybody to sit tight and friendly and all go with Amer's car. Sammy has absolutely no



idea that Mr. Nader is with company. Amer agrees with Sammy. Only, Mr. Nader calls the ladies in his vehicle to get off the car. Mr. Nader's wife and their two daughters come out of his vehicle. It is dark and no one had noticed they were also seated inside Mr. Nader's car. His daughters called Mina and Tina are twins. They are sixteen or seventeen years old. Amer does not notice Mr. Nader's wife was at the front seat beside driver. He had also not noticed there were his two daughters. So, he goes towards his vehicle, opens Sara's side door and tells her that Mr. Nader and his wife will be sitting with them tight and friendly and they'll go to the banquet together since Mr. Nader's vehicle has broken down.

Being a kind-hearted girl, Sara also entertains the idea and is happy to help. But Amer's facial expressions change. He turns pale as soon as he looks towards Mr. Nader's vehicle. Sammy who is facing Amer and has his back to Mr. Nader and his vehicle, notices the huge change in Amer's face, but turns his head to see what has made Amer facepale. He figures the reason. Mr. Nader's wife and daughters weigh more than half a ton. One fatter than the other. They are huge. Sammy cannot believe his eyes. "How is Mr. Nader able to accommodate his wife and two daughters inside his vehicle, Sammy asks himself?"

Sammy turns his head towards Amer with an extremely shocked looks on his face when he notices Amer's angry eyes are glaring at him spitefully. Sammy doesn't know what to say? He knows he was the one suggesting Mr. Nader and his family to join them in Amer's car. But he had no idea there were two ogre looking girls were seated at the back seat. He had no idea how much Mr. Nader's wife weighed. Sammy thought it was only Mr. Nader and his wife. But he was the one who suggested they sit with them anyways. And now all fingers are pointed at him. He is the guilty one obviously. All heads turn towards Sammy. But it is too late to do something about it now.

Sara gets out of the car. So, they will all decide on the sitting arrangement. She is going towards Mr. Nader's vehicle to greet his wife and invite her to transfer to Amer's car. But as soon as she gets closer to the car, she notices the three very big and obese ladies. Her legs don't want to take another step towards them. Sara looks at Amer, Sammy and Robert, wondering if any of them would do or at least say something about the fact that they would never fit in Amer's car all together. Still nothing from any of the guys. Sara has to be polite and hide being shocked immediately. She says

hello and stands near them for an arrangement to be done by someone.

When Mr. Nader's wife and two daughters sit at the back seat of Amer's vehicle, almost all air in all four tires of the vehicle is pushed out. Amer is a decent guy and he is really shy to ask the three ladies to evacuate his vehicle immediately, even if his turns get red like a cooked beetroot after witnessing what happens to his car when the three ladies take their seats in it. He is just standing there, murmuring. He's cursing Sammy, while looking at his car. That's when Robert rushes to rescue by stating that not everyone is obviously able to fit inside the car at the same time. He proposes for Amer to transfer everybody to the banquet in two trips. Robert suggests Amer to take some of them, drop them and come back to pick the rest, since there is really not a big distance between where they are at and the banquet hall. Amer agrees immediately. He thinks it is at least better than Sammy's stupid idea of all going together. Amer decides to take the ladies first, drop them and come back for the gents.

Everyone looks happy with Robert's idea. Amer switches his car. Mr. Nader's huge wife takes a seat next to the driver and Sara sits between two daughters of Mr. Nader. looking like she has been squeezed, like a burger between two extra large size buns. Amer drives his car. Mr. Nader, Robert and Sammy begin walking by the side of the road slowly in their formal suits and tuxedos. They see Amer's car coming towards them. Amer picks them and minutes later, they finally arrive at the banquet. He parks his vehicle in a dedicated municipality's parking lot among many other vehicles, that indicates there are a big number of guests at the banquet.

Sara and Mr. Nader's wife and daughters are still standing outside the hall waiting for the gentlemen to arrive, so they would enter the banquet hall all together. Mr. Nader jumps out of Amer's car as soon as they arrive. He runs towards his wife and daughters, as if he was worried, they may be bothered by some young men. His behavior makes Sammy, Amer and Robert angry, surprised and at the same time makes them laugh at him. They check their appearances one last time, and everyone enters the banquet hall finally.

The banquet hall is surprisingly huge. From outside it doesn't seem that big. But once they enter, everyone stops walking, pause for a moment looking around. Everyone, all guests are in formal clothes. Ladies has their night gowns and gentlemen,

mainly has tuxedos on or formal suits. No kids can be seen amongst guests. Hall is filled by round tables, which has 10 chairs arranged properly around them. There is a beautiful bucket of flower at the middle of each table, white shiny sateen table and sofa covers and pink napkins for every guest. There are four jars of juice for each table with silver plated glasses, spoons, knives and forks.

There are waiters and waitresses with dark blue and white color uniforms roaming around guests, offering them juices, and other beverages. Some of the guests who know each other are standing and talking to one another. Some others are seated, playing with their smart phones. There is a nicely decorated and lighted stage at the north side of the banquet hall, which at the middle, there is a wooden tribune. At both sides of the tribune, around 10 to 15 yards, two identical flower buckets can be seen. As soon as noticing the tribune and the silver color microphone on it, Sammy figures he definitely has to have a speech, which is no problem as he believed he is already prepared.

One of the waitresses approaches them, asks for their invitations and then requests them to follow her so she would direct them to their table. Mr. Nader shows his invitation and he is told he can sit with his family anywhere except the VIP section. So, he, his wife and daughters are separated in the beginning. Amer, Sara, Sammy and Robert are directed to a table very close to the stage and tribune though. Sammy glances at his surroundings. He knows many of the guests he sees. Some of them by their names and some others just by their faces. He is walking ahead of others. So, he turns his head to make sure if his companions are following him to their table. They are right behind him. When Sammy turns his head back to the front, he notices Mr. Al Ateki, a member of city council and Mr. Haddad, a target shooting federation representative are standing near the tribune, while apparently checking their speeches before the program starts. Guests start applauding and cheering while Mr. Al Ateki walks towards the tribune. He hits the microphone a few times with the tip of his finger to make sure his voice is being heard by the audience. The microphone works well alright.

"Ladies and gentlemen," begins Mr. Al Ateki, "Welcome. I would like to request everyone, to kindly take a seat as the program is about to begin."

Guests begin applauding once again. Sammy is simply waiting to sit at his table. He is shy to be noticed. His heart rate has increased dramatically. Knowing Sammy and his shyness in situation like this, Robert begins talking to Sammy, asking him to ignore his surroundings and thinks of something else. He knows what is going on in Sammy's mind. So, he tries to distract Sammy by constantly talking to him.

The waitress they are following, finally shows them a table close to the stage. Everyone takes their seats and guests stop applauding at the same time. There is a silence, very short humming of the guests mixed with a very relaxing music after Mr. Al Ateki finishes talking. Robert's head is turning around, navigating his surroundings. He notices there is a "reserved" sign on their table. He immediately reminds Sammy to review his speech. Setting up a banquet with that level of professionalism, without a doubt requires Sammy to have a speech Robert thinks. So, he tells Sammy, since all their neighboring tables have reserved signs on them, it is apparent that the first row has been dedicated to the VIP and some other very important people for sure.

The banquet hall is almost filled with guests already. Sammy looks around and the only person he recognizes, is Mr. Allamah and his family, sitting on a table, a row behind them. Mr. Allamah, is a good, or let's say a great writer. Sammy has seen his name in newspapers, magazines and articles. His wife too loves writing. She is one of the top literature professors of literacy college. But she can never write as great as her husband. Mr. Allamah notices Sammy. Sammy smiles and nods at him, meaning to say hello from afar. Mr. Allamah waves hand in response. A few minutes later and when everyone is seated, 5 musicians walk up the stage and begin playing traditional Syrian music. They play traditional famous songs and are supported by the guests singing the song along while they play the instrumental.

Sara cannot stop smiling since she entered the banquet hall. She is a happy girl who is even happier spending the evening with her beloved fiancé and his best friends. Amer pretends to be mad at Sammy, looking at him with spite and hatred. He is still mad at the fact that Sammy had suggested Mr. Nader's huge family members to sit in his car and go to the banquet with them. But Amer is angry at Sammy in a quitter hilarious way, like Sammy can't stop laughing if he comes eye to eye with Amer. He promises Sammy he is never going to forget his stupid idea, which may have caused his car tires to get

totally flattened. Amer says he is going to take revenge soon. They both laugh of course, but Amer was initially angry for real.

Everyone is laughing at Sammy and Amer's argument, and their laughter becomes louder when Sammy apologizes to Amer and swears he had absolutely no idea how fat Mr. Nader's wife and daughters were.

Robert keeps on wiping his tears off his face because of laughter. He begs Sammy and Amer to stop as he cannot breathe anymore.

The band stops playing around 30 minutes later. All the audience take their seats, waiting for the next part to start. Mr. Al Ateki, a member of the City Council goes upstage behind the tribune again, tests the microphone once and starts talking:

"Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. I wish you have enjoyed the live music so far. People involved to make this night possible, including myself, welcome you esteemed audience from the bottom of our hearts and wish you all an unforgettable night. Tonight, we have the honor of hosting some of the elite members of Al Darrah society. I'm talking about those whose hard constant efforts resulted in our country, our Syria, to proudly gain a spot in the list of countries known for their international sports and scientific achievements. Tonight, we have the honor of hosting certain individuals whom most of you esteemed guests may already know. But, let's continue the program with a few words from Mr. Al Haddad, who represents target shooting federation tonight." The guests start cheering and clapping for Mr. Al Haddad.

Mr. Al Ateki who sees Mr. Al Haddad coming upstage, continues talking:

"Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Azim Al Haddad."

The clapping and cheering sound of the audience increase. Mr. Al Haddad stands behind the tribune and begins speaking:

"Hello ladies and gentlemen. I would like to thank you all for coming. Your presence has brought warmth and peace to this banquet hall. There is not much to say actually, except the fact that tonight's gathering was not possible if it was not for the cooperation and efforts of honorable members of the City Council, Mr. Al Ateki and his respectable colleagues. They took all the trouble of bringing everyone together in this banquet. Tonight, we also host some very special guests

that if it was not for their heartfelt effort and ambition, we would not have any reason to gather here tonight. But I want you to know that we were not aware that one of the guests, who is so special and dear to target shooting community was in Al Darrah. I'm sure he would forgive us and understands that tonight has been arranged to introduce and thank Al Darrah's elite members only. Regardless, it is definitely our pleasure to host the first-place winner of Beijing target shooting tournament. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Robert Shaffi."

The sound of clapping and cheering rises once more. Robert stands up and after a humble bowing down, he sits again. Mr. Al Haddad continues:

"Tonight, we also have a special and honored guest, the runner-up of this competition and we are asking him to talk for us to be known by those respectable guests who do not know him, who became our honor and an example for his next generations, who proved where there's a will there's a way, and if you want you can and you succeed all-out. I ask him please come on the stage and bless us with his words. Ladies and gentlemen, the runner-up of Beijing shooting competition from Al Darrah, Mr. Sami Samaha."

Hearing the name Sammy Samaha, the whole crowd stand up clapping and whistling for him. Almost everyone knows Sammy in the banquet. Everybody likes him too. While Mr. Al Haddad is speaking the whole time, Sammy's heart is beating faster. He is nervous, praying they would change their minds and would not ask him upstage. Robert thinks differently though. He believes Sammy talking in the presence of so many people would be a good start for him to gain self-confidence and overcome his fears. As, if Sammy can speak for all those guests, who are not a few by the way, he can surely talk to Nelly face to face and express his feeling for her.

While Mr. Haddad is upstage and speaking, Robert keeps on reminding Sammy that everyone is there to see him or at least they are there because of him and his achievements. So, instead of panicking, he better prepare himself one last time before being called up stage. It is clear as day that he has to stand up and walk towards the stage when Mr. Al Haddad's speech is over. So, he takes a deep breath, says the name of God, stands up and begins walking towards the tribune.

The crowd who are standing and clapping for Sammy, sit as soon as he reaches the tribune. But there are still applauding

and whistling. It sounds as if they have no plan for stopping. Sammy cannot believe how many fans he has. Tears form in Robert's eyes. But he has them under control and does not let them roll down. Sara notices Robert is under extreme emotions. Tears start appearing in her eyes too. As if getting emotional is a contagious thing. She turns her head towards Amer to ask why is Robert getting emotional? But she surprisingly finds her fiancé at the same emotional state. So, she decides not to pursue the matter any further and let it go.

Mr. Al Ateki and Al Haddad are now standing at both sides of Sammy. They are calming the audience down by waving their hands up and down. People stop clapping and whistling. Robert is very eager to see how Sammy begins his speech. He is the one who has prepared Sammy's speech and wants to see how he starts? But he suddenly freezes in his seat, loses color as he notices Sammy's speech is left on his empty seat. Robert holds his head with both hands.

"Oh my God guys," says Robert in a very disappointed way, "He's fucked. Idiot forgot to take his speech note." But Sammy is already behind the microphone and about to begin. Robert cannot reach and hand the paper over to him even if he has wings and can fly. It is simply very late. Robert draws a cross over his chest, begins praying for Sammy to remember everything by heart and speaks as planned.

Before going upstage and standing behind the tribune, Sammy was afraid he had to face hundreds of people on the same time and talk for them. But now, he is up there, behind the tribune and is surprised that he really cannot see anyone's face at all, because of so much lights pointing at him. That is a relieve for him. He pauses for a moment. He is waiting for a few last guests who applaud for him to stop clapping. Robert and Amer's heart rates have increased, nervous to know what they are about to hear. They are both sweating.

The hall becomes quiet finally. Robert expects to see Sammy looking for his speech note. But it is not what actually happens. He is worried Sammy may mess up everything he wanted to say:

"Hello and good evening to you all," starts Sammy, "Let me thank you all for being here and thank all involved in making such a beautiful gathering possible. Thank you for giving me so much value to have done all this. Please thank the ladies and gentlemen too by clapping for them."

People begin clapping again. They stop a short while later.

"And I also want to thank you for attending this banquet, still, knowing it is partly for my sake."

Everybody laughs and claps. Robert stops chewing his nails. Amer's lips get dry.

"I don't want to talk very formal and use cliché words. I don't even know how?"

The crowd laugh and clap. Everybody is interested in Sammy's speech. Robert looks around. He sees everyone very much interested to hear what Sammy has to say. Robert is so excited and constantly praying for the rest of his speech to go as good as it's beginning. He cannot believe Sammy can do it that much dominantly and beautifully, attracting the audience that well.

"I keep on remembering my late dad recently," Sammy continues, "I do remember him often actually. He used to talk to me and teach me that I had to set my objectives, goals and targets in my life. That I had to plan and then try hard to achieve them. He wanted me to try and try until I was where I wanted to be and get what I wanted to get. I remember when I began following my dad when he went hunting. He was in fact the very first person who taught me how to hold a rifle and God, I was so proud of myself when I did. He was the one who taught me how to target, exactly like he taught me the concept of targets of life. I was hesitant to pull the trigger initially. Not because I did not want to hurt a harmless animal, but because I was really nervous, worried what if I did not hit my target. That would have made my dad think I had no hunting talent. Of course, he never forced me to do anything. But in fact, it was the love and respect I had for my father that made me want to be like what he expected me to be. And it might have been my own childish ego, bringing me the fear of not hitting the target. Years later, I'm standing facing you good people, while my late father lays six feet under, but still, I'm sometimes nervous, worried that I may not hit a target in my life. In every stage of my life, my dad words echo in my ear. Luckily, in target shooting tournament, I was able to hit the target. That's why I'm now standing here talking. But I have learnt something much bigger from my dad. Way bigger than everything else. That you'll never know whether you hit the target if you do not pull the trigger. I wish you all to have good targets in your lives, good aiming sense and right time of pulling the trigger, so you'll hit all your lives targets. Thank you."



As soon as Sammy finishes his speech, the crowd burst and begins cheering for him, applauding and whistling. The way that banquet hall has never experienced it until. What a powerful speech everyone thinks. Robert is confused. Sammy had forgotten his speech note and did not use a word he has written him and still made a very effective and emotional speech. He stands up for Sammy too and tears roll down while cheering for his best friend. Amer and Sara jump up and down yelling what a speech. Everyone is quite impressed with Sammy's speech.

Sammy walks down the stage. He wants to walk towards his table when the federation target shooting representative and city council members stop him, give him an appreciation certificate along with a check as a gift. Sammy is very careful not to limp up stage the whole time. Some people pat on his shoulder and he is escorted to his table by Mr. Haddad and Mr. Ateki.

Robert and Amer take a few steps towards Sammy when he gets close to his table. Robert hugs him first, "You've done it dude," says Robert, "What the fuck man. What a speech. I was speechless. Everybody was. Did you see what the people did? You had a standing ovation. I'm so proud of you and happy for you buddy."

Robert pulls away from Sammy and Amer hugs him next. Robert keeps on pointing at Sammy showing him to the neighboring tables and saying. "He's my friend. Best friend." Everyone has gathered around Sammy's table congratulating him. "No one even moved a muscle while you were talking," says Amer quite excitedly, "Some could not digest your words, but those who could, really enjoyed how you said them. Good job bro."

Sara shakes Sammy's hand and congratulates him. Photographers and videographers who have been hired to take clips and photos of the event, have now gathered around Sammy's table as everyone wants to be there and complement Sammy. Sammy himself cannot believe he has talked in front of that so many people. He immediately thinks how speaking face to face to Nelly would be easy after talking for that huge crowd. He thinks talking face to face with Nelly is definitely not going to be as difficult as the speech he had just made. So, he has to listen to Robert's advice and face Nelly. He is thinking and strategizing about how to express his feeling to Nelly when

the music begins playing. The band has gone upstage again and started playing live music. People are talking to each other and the hum begins in the hall again. A documentary film made from Al Darrah is played at the back ground, where the musicians are playing.

Sammy feels he wants to be alone for a few minutes. So, he gets up and leaves the hall after apologizing to his friends at the table. He says he wants some fresh air and is going to come back after a while.

Normally, when he is angry, sad or when something bothers him, Sammy wants to spend some time alone. He takes refuge in solitude. Sammy stops outside the banquet hall entrance door, which leads to the stairs and parking lot. He is thinking and looking at the vehicles parked next to each other. He takes the few stairs down and begins walking between hundreds of vehicles parked, to find himself a quiet spot and sit for a moment. The parking security notices Sammy wandering around. He thinks Sammy is looking for his vehicle. So, he goes to him and offers to help. Sammy tells him he is okay and is just looking for a quiet spot to take a seat for a while. The security who is suspicious of Sammy's sanity, leaves him alone. He just tells Sammy he is not able to sit on any car's trunk as it is not allowed.

Unable to find a sitting spot with some privacy, Sammy goes back towards the hall's entrance door again. He notices a dark spot few yards to the left side of the balcony and since no one shows any interest in being there, he decides to go there. He goes to the dark spot and stands there thinking. He remembers his father. He wishes his dad was still alive and could witness and hear his speech. His father would have definitely been proud of him, Sammy thinks. Actually, Sammy is proud of himself too. He imagines if Nelly too is in the crowd, watching him having his speech, she would find out that Sammy is not a bum, a dumb guy like those uneducated individuals with pointless lives. She would have never got remorseful. Because Sammy is not a boring, adventure less person.

Sammy thinks of himself as a fun guy who enjoys loving and being loved. Sammy wishes Nelly knew that the banquet was held to thank him for being the pride of Al Darrah. Alas, Sammy thinks. Alas, Nelly was not there in the crowd, Sammy sighs. He is disappointed. He really truly wishes Nelly was there so he could proudly face her and express his

feelings towards her while he was on his highest point spiritually.

Sammy is deep into his thoughts when three of the guests exit the banquet hall. They take a few steps to their left and get closer to Sammy. But they cannot see him as he is standing in the darkness and cannot be spotted there. One of three whom the other two call Ahmed, takes out his cigarettes pack from his suit pocket and offers the other two as well. They take a cigarette each. Ahmed gets his lighter out, lights it and takes it near their faces, so they would light their cigarettes.

"There are different kinds of people in this shitty world," says Ahmed to the other two.

Ahmed's two friends say, "Ok?" Both together, waiting for him to continue talking.

"One: Those who have lighter, but have no cigarettes." Says Ahmed. The other two again say, "Aha," together, curious to hear Ahmed's rest of categorization. "Two," continues Ahmed. "There are those who do have cigarettes, but never have a lighter."

"Aha?" respond the other two. "Three," continues Ahmed. "There are smokers, who have both cigarettes and lighters, like myself. I always carry both, huh? Now, this part is the most important. So, pay attention. huh? There are also those who smoke, are considered smokers by any standard, but never have neither cigarettes nor a lighter, match box or any other lights in general. Like you dickheads. Exactly like you parasites you ass holes."

Ahmad's two companions faces change, staring at him. Ahmed acts very normal, looking around as if he never insulted them. Looking at the other two companions of Ahmad, Sammy bursts into laughter so loud that one of them drops his cigarette. This makes Sammy even laugh more even if he was not really in a good mood before that.

The three guys cannot see Sammy, but can only hear someone laughing loud. They're actually scared. Ahmed, whose face has turned pale after getting startled, is trying to spot someone in the dark area. He takes two steps towards Sammy but doesn't see him still. "Dude don't just stand there in darkness. You scared the fuck out of us for God's sake. I want to smoke a cigarette and relax for a moment."

Ahmed takes a few more steps towards the darkness. He spots Sammy after using his lighter. He recognizes him and begins laughing himself after getting face to face with Sammy, which has turned maroon because of laughing so much. Sammy cannot stop laughing. Tears slip down his face uncontrollably. Sammy is thinking to himself how stupid Ahmed's friends can possibly be to waste their time listening to analysis of a wise and learned character such as Ahmed.

Ahmed and his two friends get back inside after they finish smoking their cigarettes. Sammy who is now in a much better mood, thanks to Ahmed's analysis, decides it is time to go back inside and join his friends. But he suddenly sees his mother Zahra getting out of the banquet hall. Zahra looks as if she is looking for someone. Sammy calls his mom walking towards her. He gets his mom's attention. She starts walking also towards Sammy. He hugs and kisses his mother. Sammy is very attached to his mom. His mom kisses him and says she witnessed his speech and heard beautiful words he had said in his very attractive way of saying them. She tells Sammy she is so proud to tell everyone at her table that it is her son who made that beautiful speech. She sounds so proud of Sammy. Sammy is quite surprised seeing his mother getting out of the banquet hall, as she has told Sammy she is not going to attend, since her sister does not feel well and she wants to stay home with her. But she explains that around two hours before they came to the banquet, she changed her mind and convinced her that they too should attend the banquet. She says her sister agreed to attend if her husband took them to the hall and picked them up afterwards. So, her husband agreed, therefore they came.

Sammy asks his mother what was she looking for while getting out of the banquet hall? Zahra says she had been waiting for a chance to speak to Sammy after his speech, she saw him exiting, so she decided to get out and look for him to have a few words with him. Zahra's impatient and restless looks have made Sammy curious to know what does she want to talk to him about? He gets a bit worried. What is that important to make his mom get out of the banquet hall looking for him and cannot wait to discuss with him later Sammy thinks. Sammy holds his mom's hand and walks with her, taking her to the dark spot at the end of the balcony, where he was standing a while ago. He and Zahra are both quite for a moment. Sammy can't wait to find out what is wrong. He is impatient waiting for his mom to start talking.

"Look son," begins Zahra smattering, "You're not a kid anymore Sammy. Not a teenager anymore. Thanks God you have grown to a successful man. Believe me, when you were upstage talking behind the mic, I asked myself is that guy talking, the gentleman who has attracted hundreds of people's attention, is my Sammy? Is this the same Sammy, my baby boy, who killed a little yellow chick because he took it to the bath tub to give it a bath with hot water and soap? The same little boy who had scratched all his father's important documentation and industrial drawing? Is this gentleman my kid speaking for hundreds of people? Ah, my Sammy. My son. My dear. I'm sure you know it's every parent's dream to see their kids successful. You are now studying, doing your target shooting, you are a man with objectives son. I want to see you having someone and getting engaged. Just like Amer your cousin. I want to be there and see you in your groom tuxedo. I want you to at least get engaged Sammy."

Sammy has just realized what has been talked about time after time, is being brought up again. He wants to interrupt his mom, but she doesn't allow. She stops Sammy and continues: "Wait. Let me finish. You'll have also time to talk. I'm not done with you yet. You see sweetheart, you see how happy your cousin has become? You see he has a plan for his life? Don't you want to be happy? To share your life with someone? why? I tell you; I'll not be living for the eternity, you know. I wish you a long-life son, but you would need a companion, a confident. Don't you want to have someone to hand you a glass of water when you get old and loses mobility?"

Sammy can no longer keep quiet. He interrupts his mother at last.

"There we go again," replies Sammy sounding as if he is tired of hearing this again.

"Is this the right place? Or the right time mom? Which one is it mom? Do we have to do this here? Now? The way you talk as if there are hundreds of pretty girls standing on the queue, waiting to marry me and I say no to all of them. Mom, whom should I get married to? Who mom? Tell me. Please. Even if I find someone and I happen to like her, shouldn't she like me back?"

"Let's say some girl gets to like me back. Which fund do I use to make arrangements for an engagement ceremony, the wedding, all expenses, etc. Which house do we live in? Which job would I be working at? Where? Yeah, it's nice talking about it. I understand you. I really do. But be just a little

realist mom. A life needs security. Do we have it in this shit hole of a country?"

It is now her turn to interrupt Sammy. Listening to Sammy, she does no longer let him continue:

"You worry for an accommodation?" asks Zahra in a very serious manner raising her voice a bit. "We'll sell the land that I got, that your late grandfather, may God bless his soul left me. We'll buy a small studio flat for me, you can live at our apartment with your wife. Or, even you can sell the apartment too if you don't have good memories in there, buy a one-bedroom beautiful apartment wherever you and your wife decide. We'll use whatever is left for wedding expenses, gold, I don't know, ring and the rest. You see? I've thought about it and figured everything out already. You have no excuse son. Leave everything with me. I've got some savings too. You can start operation and make your late father's industrial workshop running. Just manage it. Hire some people, get orders, you know how to do that. Do you have any other excuses?"

Sammy shakes his head hearing every sentence coming out of his mom's mouth, meaning he is not taking everything she says seriously. When Zahra finishes talking, Sammy gives a kind look at his mom:

"Ok," replies Sammy with a very soft tone, "Let's say you've figured everything as you said. Let's say everything you said would work as you planned. Let's say I agree with you. Whom should I get married to, mom? Who? I don't even have someone to call a girlfriend. Who would marry a guy having a limp like me mom?"

Zahra pets Sammy's head. "Don't make your leg an excuse every time I speak about this." says Sammy's mom with a softer tone, "There is nothing wrong with your leg. Look, when I tell you your mom has figured everything out, I mean everything. Have you seen Hanieh recently sweetheart? Mr. Al Sharghi's daughter? Our neighbor in our previous house? have you seen what a beautiful young lady she has become? She is sitting with her parents. She's right now inside the hall sitting with her parents. Actually, they're sitting with us on our table. They think it would be more fun. Let's go inside see her. I mean make saying hello to your aunt, an alibi to come to our table and just have a look at her. Sit with us for a bit. Observe and see how lady-like her manners are. Leave her beauty. She's gorgeous. Her mother was telling me a few

minutes back that she has become a professional photographer."

Sammy is staring at his mother. He's speechless. He does not know what to respond. He hasn't met Hanieh for years. Besides, it does not really matter to Sammy how lady-looking and beautiful Hanieh, Al Sharghi's daughter, has turned out to become. Sammy's heart is engaged to someone else, to Nelly. Sammy thinks of telling his mom about Nelly. So, she would leave him alone for some time. But not yet. He has to make sure Nelly wants him too. To make his mom happy and satisfied temporarily, Sammy agrees to follow his mother inside and escort her to her table, glance at Hanieh while saying hi to his aunt and sit with them for a moment. So, he looks at his mom and holds her shoulders:

"Listen to me very carefully mom," says Sammy in a serious tone, "Ok. I'll follow you in and glance at Hanieh and would see how perfect she has become. I have a condition though. Do not, I repeat mom, do not say a word, anything about people getting married, whether mine or Hanieh's or anyone else's marriage plans or even something that resembles such a thing. I swear to my dad's soul I'll stand up and leave the banquet hall if you do. Do you understand mom? I don't want to hear a word about anything that would somehow points at getting married, marriage, engagement and similar. Look, I'm telling you I would leave, without saying anything."

Zahra becomes so happy and excited that her face turns red. She now has a big smile on her face. Zahra replies:

"I know you always want to make me happy, son. Thank you. Sure. I'll not say a word regarding anyone's marriage plans. Just come with me and have a look at her. You would realize why I'm insisting on it. You see her. We will talk about her tomorrow or later and you can tell me what you think."

Sammy smiles, holds his mother's hand and they both walk inside the banquet hall. Her table is almost at the middle of the hall. Mr. Al sharghi, his wife and Hanieh, his daughter, are seated at the table, along with Sammy's aunt Zinat and two other women Sammy does not recognize. Sammy and his mom reach her table. Sammy's aunt sees him approaching. She waves hand for him and says hello in a loud voice. Sammy reaches his aunt, kisses her and says hello to everyone at the table. This is the first time Sammy sees Hanieh since they were both kids. Sammy cannot believe his eyes. His mom was right. Hanieh, neighbor's spoiled little daughter who always thought

other neighborhood kids were dirty, has become a completely well-mannered beautiful lady. She and her parents were Sammy's neighbor while they were still living in their old neighborhood.

Sammy has not seen Hanieh since they moved to their new apartment. Hanieh has a beautiful black night gown with crystal beads sowed to it. She has her head lowered and is sending text messages to someone. She looks up at Sammy as soon as she hears him saying hello. She smiles at Sammy, says hi in a very low voice and looks back at her smart-phone. Hanieh does not look surprised seeing Sammy as much as Sammy her. Maybe she is surprised, but she is good at hiding it.

Sammy's aunt, Hanieh's parents and the other two stranger ladies congratulate Sammy and begin expressing how impressed they were with his speech. Sammy notices Hanieh is quiet and for his mother not to go over his head and nag at him why did he not talk a word with Hanieh, he asks her how is it going with her photography. A few questions to have made some small talk. But after hearing every question Sammy asks her, Hanieh lifts her head, answers with an artificial smile and looks back down at her cell-phone again.

Sammy is under the impression Hanieh is shy to talk to him, specially while their parents are seated next to them. She is busy with sending and receiving text messages, until she whispers something into her mom's ear and that begins an argument which is between them politely and quietly, particularly because there are others sitting on the table.

The only thing Sammy hears, is Hanieh's mother instructing her to go back home companied with her friends and not to go home alone at that time of night considering security concerns. Hanieh's mother stands up and looks at her husband, gives him a meaningful look, demanding him to stands up and follows her leaving the banquet. Mr. Al sharghi and his wife apologize for having to leave. They say that they need to leave unfortunately, despite enjoying their company, the ambiance and the music. They say they have to leave because Hanieh's mom suffers a severe migraine. They say they can unfortunately not stay for dinner.

Apparently, Hanieh has decided to stay for dinner at the banquet along with a friend of hers. Her parents leave the banquet hall. Hanieh says goodbye to Sammy's mom, aunt and Sammy himself and goes to the lady's room to freshen up.



Sammy decides to go back to his own table, where Robert, Amer and Sara are waiting for him. He tells his mom and aunt he would pay them another visit after the end of the program, before they head home. He leaves his mom and aunt and goes towards his own table. Robert and Amer are discussing something when Sammy reaches his table. But he can see no sign of Sara. Sammy takes a seat and asks about Sara. Busy talking and listening to Robert, Amer points at the lady's room meaning to say Sara is at ladies room. Sara comes back moments later, while another girl follows her. Sammy's head turns and sees Hanieh is approaching with Sara. Sammy is very surprised to find out Hanieh is introduced as Sara's best friend by her. He has just realized whom was Hanieh sending text message to while at his mom's table. He realizes why Hanieh was arguing with her mother to stay longer at the banquet with her friend and what her mom meant when she instructed her not to go back home alone.

Sara introduces Hanieh to everybody at the table, one by one. When she introduces Hanieh to Sammy, both Hanieh and him act normal, as if it was the first time, they were meeting each other. Hanieh sits next to Sara and they begin whispering things to each other's ears and giggling. Sammy notices Robert has forgotten to say what he was telling Amer before Hanieh and Sara arrived.

Robert cannot take his eyes off Hanieh. It is as clear as day for Sammy that Robert has a crush on Hanieh now. Sammy wants to begin teasing Robert, telling him he knows he has a crush on Hanieh. But the band stops playing before he says anything to Robert. The banquet hall suddenly gets quiet after the band stops playing. Mr. Al Ateki goes upstage again and stands behind the tribune, he thanks all the guests for staying and calls Mr. Al Shahed to join him upstage and speak a few words for the audience. Mr. Al Shahed is also introduced as a mathematician, known in science community as a theoretician. He obviously is also from Al Darrah, who has just presented a mathematics theory, which has included him in the list of top middle-eastern theoreticians.

Mr. Al Shahed goes up and reads three or four lines from a piece of paper, after guests applauded and clapped for a very brief moment. Not a very warm applaud is heard when he leaves the stage smiling. Mr. Al Ateki, a member of city council, goes upstage and says an introduction about another gentleman called Mr. Al Nezam. He is a middle-aged man with gray hair.

He achieved a championship in a chess tournament held in Russia two months ago. Mr. Al Nazem also goes up and speaks a few words. Not too many guests applaud as they are getting bored with people going up and down stage just talking.

Mr. Al Nazem's speech sounds more like a midnight story than a real speech. Neither Sammy nor any of his friends show any more attention to the other ladies and gentlemen called upstage to have a speech. No one else does as a matter of fact. Guests begin talking to each other, joking and laughing, discussing different banquet non-related matters. There is a continuous hum being heard at the hall. Finally, a gentleman goes upstage and announces that the dinner is soon going to be served. The poor guy sounds like women but has a very manly and rough face and body. He informs everyone that in order to have dinner, guests should transfer to the neighboring hall. Everyone is just looking around, trying to figure how they can go to the neighboring hall. Sliding walls begin opening minutes later, revealing a long dining table. Everyone stands up and races to the neighboring hall.

Not Sammy, Robert, Amer, Sara or Hanieh have ever seen such a long and complete food display. It is obvious a huge amount of money has been spent to prepare such a great buffet. There are kinds of food that many of the guests, even the wealthiest, have never seen before that night. Foods from different continents, from sea, land and air are available on the buffet. There are two other long tables are situated parallel to the main buffet, which contain deserts and fruits and on the other one all sorts of salads and starters. The buffet is so complete, rich and attractive that guests seldom go towards the starters buffet. The whole baked lamb is placed at the middle and both sides of the buffet. There are two big turkeys between lambs. People who are not yet hungry would feel like eating by just looking at the buffets. Sammy and Robert serve their foods and return to their table next hall waiting for Sara, Amer and Hanieh to also join them which they do moments later. Everyone begins eating while a relaxing music is played from the speakers.

Amer and Sara begin talking and joking when they finish eating. Robert attempts to get himself closer to Hanieh. Sammy observes Robert executing his strategy cleverly by asking Hanieh a few normal questions, making small talk. He initiates it by taking the conversation towards what he had heard interests Hanieh the most, photography. Being a social polite girl, Hanieh answers each and every question Robert asks her

patiently and politely. Sammy notices Hanieh is actually interested in Robert too. This brings smile to Sammy's face. He figures Sara has intentionally brought Hanieh to their table to introduce her to everyone, especially Robert. It is a scenario Sara and probably Amer have set and programmed. Sammy thinks, "Do they really plan this to introduce Hanieh to Robert?" Everyone knows Robert is not involved with any girl since his last girlfriend Farida. He has not found a girl who deserves him as Robert always states. Of course, he means a girl who makes him fall in love with her.

Sammy knows he has to leave Robert and Hanieh alone for some time. So, he apologizes saying he needs to visit men's room, so Robert would spend some time alone with Hanieh. He washes his hands and face, decides to get some fresh air. So, he goes towards the exit door. Between men's room and the exit door, Sammy is approached by an overweight, bold black-haired man. The man congratulates Sammy first and begins asking him a few questions about the tournament in China. Sammy answers all his questions openly while smiling and welcoming. But there comes a woman, who also has some questions and one after her.

Ten fifteen people now have gathered around Sammy, listening to all what he answers. Some ask for a picture with him, some take selfies and a few want to simply get to know Sammy. Sammy does his best to be welcoming. He answers all questions being about target shooting, personal or irrelevant, using best words coming to his mind. One of the people surrounding Sammy is a thin unshaved man, who spreads a very awful smell. Others have also noticed him and his odor. His armpits have perspired and made his shirt wet in a circle shape. He has a very thick glasses on and has an informal outfit. The man interrupts one of the ladies, who is talking to Sammy, and asks a very stupid impolite question from him.

"Are you crippled from birth? asks the man. "Or you became a cripple later on?"

The man's stupid, irrelevant and cruel question hurts Sammy badly. This man's question is so witlessly and impolite that even some of the guests are offended telling the man his question is not what a gentleman asks. They tell the man it is none of his business to know the answer to what he asked. One of the girls who has noticed Sammy becomes sad hearing that question, asks the man if he was born an asshole blind or he became a blind asshole later in his miserable life? But

the guy does not seem offended by people's comments. He is standing in front of Sammy waiting to hear his response. "No sir. I wasn't born like this," replies Sammy, "I had an accident years ago. A car tire hit my leg. I hope it never happens to anyone."

The rude man thanks Sammy and walks out, as if there was nothing wrong with his question. He simply says thank you for your answer and leaves the crowd. He stops a few yards further, takes his camera out, takes a picture from Sammy and turns his back and walks away. The man's question has really annoyed Sammy. He is very upset. His lips are vibrating. He goes towards his mom and aunt's table and sits with them for a moment. To change his own mood, Sammy begins talking to his mother, asking if she is okay staying with her sister for the time being? She says she is okay, as she agreed to stay at her sister's place, particularly to take care of her. Plus, she has to help her sister prepare for his son's engagement ceremony, not to mention that Amer and Robert need to stay with Sammy and she wants them to feel at home, being three bachelors together. She believes her staying with her son, Amer and Robert may give Robert specially, a sense of inconvenience.

Sammy assures his mom they are very comfortable at home. He wants his mother to know she has achieved giving them some space at home. Sammy's mom mentions that her main wish in her life is to see the day of his son's wedding. Sammy stares at his mother's face. The light from one of the lamps above has shined at his mother's grey hair and silk scarf. Sammy for the first time can see how old his mother has become. His mother and aunt stand up. They seem to be leaving and Sammy has to escort them out. Amer's dad, Aser, is going to fetch them and takes them home.

Sammy's aunt and mother request him to go to get Amer, Sara and Robert as they need to see them for a moment to say hi. Mainly because his mother wants him to think of Hanieh as a marriage candidate. But Sammy changes their mind, dissuades them, saying that finding them among all those guests who are also leaving slowly, is a difficult thing to do. But now, she is with Robert and Sammy does not want his mother to find out about it. He does not want to interrupt Hanieh and Robert's moments by asking them to go to see his mother. Sammy escorts his mom and aunt outside. They leave and go to the street side, waiting for Aser to come and pick them up. Sammy kisses

his aunt and mom goodbye, and walks back inside the banquet hall to be with his friends.

There are still 10-20 people left at the banquet hall. They are getting ready to leave already. The city council member, Mr. Al Ateki and Mr. Haddad, shooting federation representative, are saying goodbye to some people they knew from before. They actually say goodbye and thank any one leaving the hall. They go towards Sammy and begin talking to him, while Sara, Amer, Robert and Hanieh waiting for him to join them. They wish Sammy more success and achievements. Sammy also thanks them for all their hard work, creating such a lovely memorable night for Al Darrah residents. He goes to his friends and all of them exit the hall together.

There is a heavy traffic jam at the parking lot. Most of the guests drove their own vehicles coming to the banquet and now, all of them want to drive outside the parking lot all together. Sammy and others reach Amer's vehicle. Being so exhausted, Sammy enters the car, leans his head back and closes his eyes. He is happy for what has happened between Robert and Hanieh from depth of his heart. How nice it is, Sammy thinks. Robert and Hanieh have gotten to know and like each other without any mental or emotional disturbance, accept one another as they are, speak about whatever they feel like, and this makes Sammy happy. Robert has gotten to like a girl after having no serious relationship with any girl for quite a while. Sammy is happy for Robert also because he thinks Hanieh can play an important role in Robert's state of mind, despite being constantly sad and stressed for what may have happened to his brother.

Sammy is thinking to himself, wishing he could also get to talk to Nelly like Robert and the opportunity that occurred for Robert. Sammy knows Robert has for sure given Hanieh his cell-phone number and she would call him without a doubt, and their communication, therefor, begins. They would see each other after that, going to movies, concerts and dinners. They would hold each other's hands and would proudly walk in the streets. Oh yes. As simple as that Robert and Hanieh's love story forms. A big smile has come on Sammy's face without him even noticing it. He is happy for Robert and maybe he imagines what is happening between Robert and Hanieh is happening to himself and Nelly and that's what makes him smile. He deeply wishes them both never ending happiness.

Sammy has remembered Nelly and keeps on imagining, asking why such an incident occurred for Robert and Hanieh, does not

happen for him and Nelly? He begins laughing at his life. He blames his weaknesses for not having a happy romantic life. When he thinks about it, he has never been able to easily achieve what he wanted in his life. Since the time he remembers, he had to work his ass off to get whatever he wanted. Nothing had easily worked out for him. Luck had no part in his life or any success he achieved. Everything he has achieved was a contingent success. He had to work hard, fail time and time until he would finally get what he wants. Like what is happening with Nelly's case. Sammy is asking God, "Why such an opportunity that destiny introduced Robert and Hanieh, does not happen to him, where everything is ready for him to act upon?"

The only thing that makes him happy now, is thinking about Robert and Hanieh and the fact that he was the reason for them to meet. Sammy smiles and, in his heart, wishes his best friend luck with hopefully his new beautiful girlfriend. Sammy opens his eyes, leans his head against the car window and looks at the people getting into their vehicle leaving the banquet hall's parking lot. Men with their tuxedos and formal suits, and women wearing their most expensive night gowns, with their hair done, deviously have taken lots of time to get ready before they came to the banquet a few hours earlier. But now, everyone, full and tired, are all simply thinking of making it home, without paying any further attention to their appearances or what happens with the crowd around them, just think of their soft linen beds.

Sammy notices a man standing outside the hall as if he is waiting for someone to offer him a ride. The man suddenly pulls his neck tie off his neck, as if it is choking him. What the man did makes Sammy burst into laughter. Car windows are closed, but still, two girls from the neighboring car turn their heads towards Sammy and are wondering he is probably mentally ill, that's why sitting in the car alone with car windows up. Sammy is in a good mood in general. He is happy with his speech, the role he thinks he had in Robert and Hanieh's newborn relation and this alone makes him happy. If it was not for him, there would not be a banquet, they were not going to be invited even if there was still a banquet. Sammy gets bored of sitting inside the car. He decides to exit the car, stands outside like others, leans over the car and looks at what is happening around him. He is for some reason in the laughing mood and people's reactions are good subjects for him to laugh at.

Sammy gets out of the car, removes his jacket, folds it and hangs it to a hanger inside the car. He opens his cuff links and folds his sleeves. He puts the cuff links into his trousers pockets. They are left for him from his late father. So, he is extra careful not to lose them. He notices Mr. Nader and his huge wife and daughters standing by the side of the street waiting for a taxi. Sammy remembers he had offered them to join and sit with them in Amer's car and this makes him laugh. Hanieh had asked her mother for permission to stay at the banquet for a longer time and was permitted, only if she was going to be accompanied home by her friends, Sara and her fiancé.

Not only Hanieh's mom, no one feels safe in Al Darrah anymore. Everyone is cautious not to get caught by Isis terrorists. They've been spotted in Al Darrah recently. They're being sent to evaluate the town's situation and to gather other important information about any town or city they want to attack. People are so particular and careful with the smallest decisions they have to make.

Robert, Hanieh, Amer and Sara are standing a few yards away talking, waiting for the traffic to become lighter after some of the guests leave. Robert suggests they wait outside the car, as they would be only sitting inside the car waiting for the traffic to loosen. But Sammy knows there is another angle to what Robert actually wants. If they all sit inside Amer's car, Robert cannot talk to Hanieh about certain thing he wants in private. Sammy knows he will be hearing a lot about Hanieh as soon as they reach home. He knows Robert is exulted about getting to meet Hanieh and initiate some kind of relationship with her. Why not Sammy thinks.

The traffic is getting lighter. Everyone enters Amer's vehicle and Amer drives away. Sara and Hanieh speak about the banquet, guests and other things on the way home. They laugh and make fun of people they've seen. Sammy's eyes are shut. He is so tired and doesn't feel like saying a word. The two girls begin talking seriously about more serious stuff they have seen at the banquet. They talk about Sammy's speech and how nice it was. They keep on praising Sammy and his speech. Being exhausted, Sammy just replies with a single "thanks" and keeps quiet again. They arrive at Hanieh's house. She gets off the car and says goodbye.

Hanieh walks to her door, opens it and steps in. Amer drives away only after they make sure Hanieh is inside already. A few minutes later, they drop Sara and head towards Sammy's

house. No one speaks a word in the car. It looks like everyone enjoys the calm and quiet, just hearing the car engine's sound, except Robert who is looking outside with a big successful smile on his face, indicating he has still so much energy to talk about Hanieh till morning. But he knows his friends are tired and it is not a good time talking about Hanieh and himself. They arrive at Sammy's building. Amer parks the car and the three of them enter the building. The lift is as usual out of order. Being maddened and disgusted, they take the stairs five stories up and finally reach the apartment. Amer and Sammy notice Robert looks so fresh and energetic, despite the fact it is late at night.

"Some people, you know," says Amer in a cynical way, "had so much fun tonight that they can't stop smiling. Their lips are stretching to the both sides towards their ears and they don't even know it themselves."

"What is it?" asks Sammy in an even more sarcastic way, "Why are you smiling you go on? Close that smiling mouth of yours, tell us what you are dying to tell us."

"Nothing important really," replies Robert laughing loudly, "The only thing I guess I want to say, that the one I've been looking for, for years in the capital, I found here in Al Darrah. Now go to bed you two and stop interrogating me. I'll tell you all about Hanieh tomorrow. Oh my God, mysterious ways of God."

Lights go off one after the other and everyone falls asleep. It is almost midnight when Amer wakes up to go to the bathroom. He is very sleepy, with his eyes half open, he begins walking towards the toilet, being very careful not to crash into any object or any furniture, makes a sound and wakes everyone up. He gropes towards the toilet. He does not even switch the toilet's light on. So, it would not make him wide awake and wash the sleep out of his eyes. He tiptoes back to his bed when he notices a dim blue light. Amer sits on his bedding, pushes his hair away from his face and focuses his attention on the dim blue light. Amer is very sleepy. His accuracy and attention are not as good as daytime. Obviously, because of drowsiness and sleepiness, his concentration level is too low. He does not figure what the blue dim light is caused by. But when he focuses more, he suddenly notices two red eyes gazing at him. For a moment he thinks he is being played by the light and shadows. He thinks Robert maybe sleep-walking but he isn't walking. Maybe he has slept with his eyes wide open? Amer knows it is none of the things he is thinking. Who is he fooling, Amer thinks? He looks at where



Robert is sleeping once again. Again, he sees the blue dim light and Robert's scary eyes looking at the light. He focuses more, but to no avail. He is so scared that he does not even want to think of Robert being possessed by demons or jinn. Amer decides to ignore what he saw, forgets all about it and considers it lights and shadow illusion. He pulls his blanket over his head and tries going to sleep. Amer is terrified of what might have happened to Robert. He doesn't have the balls to go to Robert and ask the reason why his eyes look like an evil entity's eyes he had seen in paranormal reality shows. Now he can no longer sleep. The sleep has been washed out of his eyes. He thinks of what might have happened to Robert, one of his best friends. Amer thinks he would have known by now, after all those years of friendship, if Robert sleepwalked, if he was a psycho, possessed by a demon or had any other mental issues. Amer's eyelids get heavier and heavier thinking of Robert's problem. He slips back to sleep finally. Not a deep sleep though. Dizzy and drowsy, he decides to confront Robert about this in the morning as soon as they wake up.

Amer suddenly feels something getting itself attached to his body. He initially thinks he is actually imagining things and nothing is there with him. But no. He isn't imagining. There is definitely something getting itself attached to his body. He can feel it. The demon has probably left Robert's body and now is trying to attach itself to his body instead he thinks. Amer rolls on his bed. He suddenly feels a very cold hand touching his shoulder. That's it. He opens his eyes. That cannot be a human's hand. Not a living human at least. Amer's body begins shaking. But before anything else happens, he hears someone is calling his name, "Amer", "Amer", with a rough deep voice. Amer has to use all he has in him to open his eyes, and when he does, he comes face to face with the same pair of red eyes, but they are inches away from him this time. As soon as Amer wants to yell, the same cold hands cover his mouth. It is dark and he can't see anything.

"Now that you are awake," says Robert with a rough sleepy voice, "do you want to see Hanie's text messages to me?"

Amer pushes back Robert's hand after just figuring it was Robert all this time on his cell-phone exchanging text messages with Hanieh. Robert has a devilish smile on his face though, waiting for Amer to respond. Amer is soaked in his perspiration. He just stares at Robert for a few seconds.

"I strongly recommend," whisper shouts Amer, not to wake Sammy up, "you really seriously visit a shrink, psychologist, psychotherapist, doctor or vet or whomever maybe able to help

you with your mental issues. What the fuck is wrong with you? Really. Go get some medications. You scare the fuck out of me for fuck sake. Do you know what time is it man? Do you realize, understand, comprehend its night time even? Do you understand it's dark out there now? It's midnight? Have I made a mistake waking up to use the toilet? Go get some sleep. There's a tomorrow. Besides, what the fuck makes you think that I would forget about resting and I'm interested to see what you two have been texting each other about? I mean don't you have slightest consideration for others? You are such an idiot sometimes, go to fucking bed. We'll talk in the morning. You are really ill. Mentally ill. That's all what I can tell you now. You need professional help. This is like a mental hospital here right now."

Robert can't stop himself of laughter any longer. He stuffs the blanket into his mouth, so his laughing sound would not wake Sammy up. He backs off a little and laughs for almost a whole minute while Amer stares at the ceiling angrily. "To hell with you," replies Robert laughing still, "You senseless asshole. It's my fault. I wanted to share my happiness with your sad sleepy ass. It's my mistake to consider you an understanding friend, you idiot."

Robert crawls back to his own bed and continues exchanging text messages with Hanieh. Amer grumbles for a few seconds, gets quiet and goes back to sleep.

It's early next morning. Robert approaches Sammy's bed slowly. Sammy is still asleep on his bed. Amer too is still asleep in the other room. Robert kneels next to Sammy on the floor and gets his mouth as close to Sammy's ear as possible. He begins calling Sammy's name quietly and constantly. Sammy has a nice smile on his face. As though he is dreaming about something cool. Sammy is deep asleep when he feels some one's breathes on his neck. Sammy is still very sleepy as he is too tired from events the night before. He can barely open his eyes. He cannot even imagine the person who has gotten that close to him is actually his friend, Robert. He peeps at the clock and finds out what time it is. It is 06:05 A.M. But when he rolls to his right side, he notices two eyes staring at him, exactly like what Amer had experienced the midnight before. It is not still daylight and not dark neither. It is twilight. It scares the hell out of Sammy. Thinking Sammy has already noticed it is actually him, Robert, who is breathing normally, dying to tell Sammy about himself and Hanieh. But Sammy is still confused. Trying to figure out what is going

on. Sammy yells loudly as he gets very scared seeing the two eyes staring at him from a very short distant. Sammy jumps up after screaming and lands seating on his bed. The sound of his screaming wakes Amer up obviously too. He backs off a little bit and only then he realizes Robert is the one staring at him and breathing into his neck.

"Why?" asks Robert, "Why are you scared? What the fuck is wrong with you two? Jesus Christ."

Amer who has run towards Sammy's room after hearing him scream, sees Robert by the side of Sammy's bed. He also sees Sammy lost color, pale and shaky, sitting on his bed. Amer's suspicious looks turn towards Robert of course, having experienced Robert's crazy behavior. He remembers what Robert had done to him hours ago at midnight. He has no doubt this has something to do with Robert. Amer looks at Robert as if he blames him for Sammy screaming.

"Again?" asks Amer, "What did you do again you psycho? Are you really crazy? No, seriously. Don't you feel a need to sleep? To take a rest? But we do. Normal healthy people do. Oh, God, what have you done to our friend?"

He looks at Sammy,

"What's wrong with you Sammy?" asks Amer, "Why are you screaming like girls? You have no considerations for others. God damn you dickheads."

Staring at Robert's crazy eyes, Sammy turns his head towards Amer:

"Really?" replies Sammy, "He was so close to me. The tip of his nose touched my God damn eyeballs for God sake. He's crazy asshole. Put yourself in my damn shoes. What would you do? I was having a nice dream I forgot about when this psychopathic rubbed his face to mine. Crazy fuck."

Robert is below Sammy's bed, seated on the floor. He has his head between his knees and is quiet.

"You crazy ass," shouts Amer looking at Robert, "You've lost your mind. I know. It happened to you last night. Since last night, you have become totally crazy. You sick asshole. He wasn't like this before last night. I'm sure getting to know that girl, Hanieh, has something to do with his psychopathic behavior. He almost gave me a heart attack too at midnight. Are you having or experiencing any mental issues? Or nervous breakdown? Tell us what to do with a crazy ass psychopath friend like you? So, we should take you to a psychologist? You need a shrink for sure."

Sammy completes Amer:

"Let's get up already," says Sammy yawning, "He doesn't let us sleep this shithead. I can't sleep anymore. He made us both miserable starting our day with fear."

Robert's head is still between his knees. Sammy and Amer notice his body begins shaking. They initially think he is crying. Considering his crazy-like behavior since the night before, they don't think seeing him cry is something unusual.

Standing by the door, Amer signals Sammy to get himself close to him and make sure if he is really crying. Sammy slides himself towards the bottom of his bed and gets closer to Robert. Robert sounds like whimpering. Sammy and Amer have no doubt he is sobbing. So, they feel sorry for him. He is their best friend after all. Sammy and Amer are wondering how they would react to him sobbing. They are lost, don't know what to tell him or how to tell him. Sammy looks at Amer to see if he has an idea what to do. But Amer looks like dumb people. Amer is glaring at a point. None of them knows what is really going on in Robert's mind. It was only a few minutes ago, when Robert was trying to wake Sammy up and share his communication with Hanieh with him and suddenly, he became emotional. He sounded very happy finding Hanieh. But he is now crying and no one knows why. Being closer to Robert, Sammy pats on Robert's shoulder:

"What's wrong," asks Sammy in a kind tone, "What happened to you suddenly? Why are you crying?"

For Robert not to think his emotional state does not matter to Amer, he starts talking after what Sammy asks Robert:

"Yeah dude," says Amer, "What the hell happened to you suddenly?"

Robert brings his head up slowly. Amer and Sammy notice his red face and tears. But they suddenly realize Robert's facial expressions are not expressions of crying. But he cannot breathe because of laughter. He is laughing at them both all these times. Amer and Sammy can no longer being laughed at. They both attack him and begin kicking and punching him until he starts yelling for mercy. Robert cannot stop laughing even while being beaten the hell of. He begs them to stop while laughing, apologizing for his behavior. He keeps on telling them to stop beating him as they'll be getting remorseful if they continue. He says they'll pay for it. Amer and Sammy get tired of hitting him after a few seconds and stop after hearing him apologizing several times. They tell him he is

going to be punished and his punishment is to wash all day's dishes of breakfast, lunch and dinner. They tell him he has to prepare breakfast too. So, they push him towards the kitchen to get the breakfast ready.

Robert calls Sammy and Amer to the kitchen moments later, as he has prepared everything on the table. They all sit on the table to begin having their breakfast when Robert's phone makes a notification sound, meaning he has received a text message. He picks his phone immediately and begins reading the text message he has received. A smile comes to his face. He glances at Sammy and Amer:

"I kept on telling you. You'll be paying for what you did to me. But you animals didn't listen and continued biting me. It's my turn to take revenge."

Amer and Sammy look at him wondering what he is actually talking about. They hear him telling them they'll pay for beating him and they'll be remorseful, but they think it is an empty threat. Robert looks at both Sammy and Amer in a meaningful way. He smiles. A smile Sammy and Amer are too familiar with. Robert smiles like that, only when he has a secret he wants to hide and he can't. They both keep their mouths shut, so he would say what he wants to say. They are extremely curious.

"You assholes thought I was joking huh? Stupid guys. Now I know what to do with you. Specially you, Mr. Sammy Samaha. I'll reveal everything right now. Last night, oh, wait. First of all, Amer, please thank my dear sister-in-law, I mean your fiancé, for bringing Hanieh along and keeping her at the banquet until the end. Don't forget that. Of course, I know, it's clear as daylight that it wasn't you and your fiancé's plan to introduce us together. But still, if it was not for Sara, I would have probably never come across Hanieh. Not in a million years. Let alone seeing her, liking her and getting to become her boyfriend. Guys, I could not take my eyes of her. I fell in love with her the moment Sara brought her to our table. I had a very strange feeling after talking to her I can't explain. Anyways, we began talking about normal stuff last night. She asked me the reason I came to Al Darrah. I mean, she wanted to know if I was here for Amer and Sara's engagement ceremony. Which I said yes. Amer and Sara's engagement is one of the reasons I came to the town. I explained my brother's case. I told her Robin is missing. She told me about her very close friendship with Sara. She told me how close they are. She said about stuff they have done,

the naughtiness, their memories in school, that they are in a music group, in a band or something. It turned out my Hanieh is a very talented violin player. She said Sara was in charge of supervising the music group and all those things. I told her about you guys. But as soon as I wanted to say things about Sammy, she interrupted me and said she knew Sammy because they were neighbors when you were kids. She joked about it a little. I remembered Sammy telling me the story of the cruel little girl. The one who broke his heart by calling him a cripple."

Amer and Sammy are curiously staring at Robert. None of them interrupts him, so he would continue telling them the rest. When telling the part Sammy and Hanieh knew each other since they were both kids, Amer is looking surprised. But Sammy has a smile on his face, remembering those innocent days.

"We spoke about bullshit stuff, because there was actually nothing else left to talk about. I'm kidding. I made her laugh a lot. Again, Amer and Sara's engagement came up. She said Sara would make a good house wife. I also told her about Amer, him being a fully committed guy. The thing is, when a guy and a girl get to know each other they talk about everything and everyone. Probably because at some point they both run out of topic of conversation. I guess the same thing happened with Hanieh and myself, we have gotten to like each other a lot. We spoke about anything. She talked about her parents. She said both her parents suffer migraine. That's why they can't attend Amer and Sara's engagement party. But she'll come alone of course. It's her best friend's engagement for God's sake. I was happy deep inside for spending some time with her. I will not be without a date at ceremony. We also spoke about the banquet, but I don't know why. But as if God suddenly made me say it. I said I wished Sammy's crush was going to be present at Amer and Sara's engagement ceremony. That's when she asked who was Sammy having a crush on? I explained her the whole Nelly story. I said our bro, our Sammy had fallen in love with an apparently extremely beautiful girl and respectable young woman called Nelly. I even said Nelly does not even have any idea about Sammy's crush. That means she doesn't know that her beauty has made our friend fall for her. Because Sammy met her only once. And only by that one time, fell in love with her. As soon as I mentioned the name Nelly, she smiled and said that's no problem, because she said she knows Nelly well. I even asked her how was she so sure I was even talking about the Same Nelly? That's when she asked me how many Nellys did I think would exist in a small

town like Al Darrah with the same description? Which is true. She's right. She said she could swear I was talking about the Nelly she knows."

As soon as Amer and Sammy hear Robert saying that Hanieh knows Nelly, both Sammy and Amer's head turn towards each other. They look at each other with a kind of expression which cannot be described. There is a sense of wonder, mixed with surprise or maybe a bit doubt involved. Sammy's lips have gotten dried and his face turned pale. He is staring at Robert in disbelief. He shows neurotic symptoms. He keeps on snapping the tip of his fingers to the empty cup of coffee. His eyes beg Robert to continue talking and reveal the rest of the story.

Amer, in the other hand, is suspecting that Robert is pulling their legs and means to retaliate in return for being beaten. That's why he is simply making up stories and has planned to laugh at them both after a while, admitting all what he said were bullshit and lies. So, Amer frowns at Robert bitterly and says his joke is not a good one at all and he has never expected him to act like an asshole, making fun of Sammy's feelings for Nelly. But Robert is firmly standing there are no joke or lies involved and what he is telling them is nothing but the truth.

Robert assures Sammy and Amer he is not trying to mess around. He even swears he is telling the truth. Sammy begs him to say if he is truly telling the truth? Sammy stammers out of excitement. This is a huge progress. Sammy begs Robert stammering, not to forget anything and try remembering exact phrases exchanged between him and Hanieh.

Robert tells him in response that he wants Sammy to let him finish talking. Both he and Amer would realize all what he has told them is the truth. So, Amer and Sammy keep quiet again and listen to the rest.

"Why are you guys like this?" Asks Robert shaking his head. "I was amazed myself. In fact, I initially thought Hanieh was fooling and kidding me. But I noticed she was serious. No jokes involved. I thought she was still not that close to me yet to joke about such a sensitive matter. Anyhow, she knows Nelly. she said she knows Nelly well. She said Nelly, Sara and her, all had a part in their school's music group. They became best friends when they were kids and classmates. That they had spent so much time together before Nelly went away. Sara, Nelly and Hanieh, are like you, me and Sammy. I figured

it was an opportunity for me to ask her if she could bring Nelly along to Amer and Sara's engagement ceremony instead of her parents who couldn't attend. Because remember, she said her parents suffered migraine, therefore they couldn't attend the ceremony. She said of course she could. She promised she would convince her to attend Amer and Sara's ceremony. She then pondered a bit and smiled. She said she has done something bad to Sammy when they were kids and she has probably hurt Sammy's feeling somehow. She said something like she thought she had a moral debt to Sammy. That's why she would do anything for Sammy to forgive her. So, she said that's how she wanted to compensate and amend her childhood's mistake. She said she would bring Nelly to the ceremony. Yeah. You heard it right. She promised she'll bring Nelly along to the ceremony, even if it took her visiting her house, talking to her parents and convincing them to obtain their permission."

Robert now looks at Sammy,

"I guess what she meant by hurting your feeling is what you told me yesterday. When you said she called you names or she called you cripple and brought one of your neighborhood boys to her house."

Amer seems to have already believed what is Robert saying.

Robert continues talking again:

"I actually decided not to tell you guys anything about Hanieh bringing Nelly to the engagement ceremony. Why? Because I actually wanted to make absolutely sure, become hundred percent positive that it would happen, and then reveal this secret. I wanted to know for sure if she liked to come to the engagement ceremony herself? Whether her parents allow her if she likes to come? Or can Hanieh convince her parents to permit her to attend the party. When I became sure myself, then I reveal it to you. Why am I telling you now though? It's because I've just received a text message from her. She has written me that she spoke with lady Nelly last night. Nelly asked her which Sara's engagement is that? And Hanieh told her the same Sara who was a part of their music group back in school. When Nelly made sure she already knew Sara, their old school friend, she said, "Yes. She will come to her engagement party." The only thing, she has to ask permission from her parents. She has told Hanieh, she would talk to her parents tomorrow, means today. Because when Hanieh told her, Nelly's dad and mom were asleep last night. It was late in



the evening. Obviously, she couldn't wake them up and ask them. Here. Look. This is the text message I'm talking about." Robert holds his cell-phone in front of Sammy and Amer's face, so they would see he is not making everything up.

Bewildered and puzzled, Sammy is staring at Robert. He has a thousand thoughts circulating in his mind. Hope and excitement have penetrated his heart strings. What a marvelous, memorable and cheerful incident Sammy thinks. He can't believe that in a matter of days, he would be meeting Nelly, talking to her and expressing his feelings to her.

Amer pats on Sammy's shoulder, stands up and expresses how happy he is for Sammy, because of what opportunity the universe or God has provided him with. Robert tells Amer and Sammy that his text messaging and communication with Hanieh is still going on and he still has many other things he wants them to know. But he is going to postpone telling them about it as he knows Sammy is in shock, still processing the great news. Robert says he is going to tell them the rest, when Sammy gets out of shock and is back to normal.

Robert says he noticed Amer going to the toilet last night and wanted to share the good news with him. But he changed his mind after being ignored by Amer as he was very sleepy. So, he decided to tell Sammy this great news in the morning. But when he wanted to excitedly share the good news with any of them, he was attacked and beaten.

Sammy and Amer hug and kiss Robert. Amer is thrilled for Sammy. Amer is laughing loud hearing what Robert explains. But Sammy acts confused, as if he has heard nothing else rather than the news of Nelly attending the engagement ceremony. Sammy is finally given an opportunity to take a huge step towards Nelly and this makes Robert and Amer exhilarated for him. He acts confused and flustered, constantly asking his best friends what do they think he has to wear now that Nelly also would attend the engagement ceremony? What perfume smells better to girls? How does he have to behave in general.

Sammy looks up yelling while he prays to God for Nelly to succeed taking permission from her parents to attend without any issues raised. Amer and Robert try to calm him. He is vivacious, cheerful and hopeful, cheering and talking about the night he is going to come face to face with the girl of his dreams. Sammy hugs Robert once again for the news of Nelly

attending the ceremony. He kisses Robert several times and thanks him. He kisses Amer for choosing Sara as his wife. Because if it was not for Sara, Amer's fiancé may not have known Nelly., Sammy asks Amer and Robert within his excited behavior whether it is okay to introduce Nelly to his mother at the night of ceremony? Or at the party being held after the ceremony?

Sammy decides he has to go to the city and buy a tuxedo, particularly for the ceremony night and the party after the engagement ceremony. He's thinking to whether order his clothes from the existing online shopping websites. Sammy, Amer and Robert discuss this and at the end, Sammy's final decision is to visit some formal men's clothing stores.

Like a child who is happy receiving a favorite present, Sammy says whatever comes to his mind. He expresses himself without hiding any particular feelings. Robert holds his hand and helps him stand up. He holds Sammy's head and asks him to pay close attention to what he is about to tell him. With Amer's help, Robert convinces Sammy that everything is just going to be fine and there is nothing to worry or be stressed about. They assure him that Nelly's parents, after speaking to Hanieh and knowing Nelly is only going to attend a friend's ceremony with a girlfriend, would surely allow her to stay and have fun for as long as she wishes. Amer asks Robert to continue telling them what else happened between him and Hanieh. How he started communicating with her and how was he able to attract her undivided attention to himself?

"Yup," brags Robert. "Let me see if I forgot anything? Yeah. First, we spoke about our common interests and common hobbies. Then life issues came up, and we talked about them, like Isis attacks, the war, our families. I told her about Robin's disappearance like I told you. We talked about people we both knew. We spoke behind some people's back to be honest. I don't know if it was supposed to be like this? But we found more similarities and more stuff in common between us the more we talked. I mean I knew I had a crush on her as soon as Sara introduced her. I was determined to get her. So as soon as I saw her, I knew I had to ask her out for a date. I immediately planned to impress her more and more, because I knew she would be into me too when she figured I was very interested in her. I tried my best to make her laugh. Oh, I almost forgot. She said she will put up an exhibition, displaying her work, which are artistic photography, in like 2-3 days. She said after three days last night, which makes it the day after tomorrow

today. The exhibition is supposed to take place somewhere in Al Darrah. She has invited many people too. Like her friends, some of her relatives and old school or class mates.”

Sammy interrupts Robert suddenly without allowing him to complete his sentence. He asks if Nelly was invited to her exhibition too. And if Nelly was also going, what did he have to wear and how to act.

Being tired of Sammy's constant hyperactive and excited behavior, Amer pushes himself on the chair he is seated on towards Sammy, holds his mouth and yells at him to shut up and let Robert finish talking. Robert thanks Amer, frowns at Sammy and continues talking:

“Why don't you let me even finish talking man? Why have you become such a mental? Let me finish dude, and then ask what the fuck you want to ask. You see? I almost forgot what I wanted to say.”

Sammy has to keep his mouth shut and he has figured that. Holding Sammy's mouth, Amer asks Robert to continue. Robert gets up and places the dishes inside the sink. He continues talking while wearing his washing gloves:

Anyways, poor Hanieh sent invitation to everyone she knew through an advertising agency. The ad agency is based in Al Thawrah by the way. So, they even sent out proper invitations for everyone they wanted to attend also in Al Thawrah. She had resized and framed all her photographs and had them ready for display. She spent so much money according to her, and booked one of the classiest banquet halls. The ad agency had mentioned in every invitation that the invitee should inform the host whether he or she would attend. So, she would decide whether to add a buffet to her exhibition or not to offer anything at all. That's why she needed to know the number of people who were going to attend. Anyhow, they had sent 83 invitations out of which Only six people said would be attending. This was what they found out around two days after they had sent out the invitations. That meant the rest were not going to attend. Invitees were both from Al Thawrah and Al Darrah. Of course, more than seventy percent of the invitees were from Al Darrah itself. Angry and disappointed, Hanieh went to Al Thawrah to visit the person managing invitations and invitees at the ad agency. She went there and asked for an explanation. She demanded to know the reason why only six people said they would attend. Because she was under the impression something had gone wrong with sending the

invitations. So, the guy at the agency had told Hanieh that 70% of the people who had been invited to the exhibition were no longer in town. They had already left and some were preparing to leave and have no time or were in no mood of attending an art exhibition while feeling constantly threatened by Isis terrorists, who were said to be fast approaching. All in all, what he told her, was that not many people left in the town. The guy was right of course. No one is in the mood for art exhibition and things like that these days. Artists themselves are not, let alone normal people. Everyone's main goal is not to be captured by Isis animals. Anyways, she spent a lot of money, but at the end, she is forced to cancel her photography exhibition totally. Oh, my darling Hanieh was very sad and disappointed because of this. Obviously, I tried my best to comfort her. I actually needed to fix my next date with her. I did not want any long gap between last night and the next time I was going to meet her again. Our relationship just began forming last night as you know, and I did not want our new born relation to be fickle by a long gap between the sessions we would be having. I initially thought her exhibition was a great excuse for me to see her again. But when I figured there was no exhibition, I thought I could not use her exhibition as an excuse to see her soon. So, I figured it was best to ask her to be my date at the engagement party already, therefore, I would be certain at least I'll spend the ceremony evening with her. Let's say I wanted to book her in advance. Ha? Another idea came to my mind. I thought I better show myself super interested in seeing her photographs. So, I asked her to give me a private viewing. I knew any artist is quite happy to show off his or her artwork, even if it is to one person, especially if that one person has other interests in her as well, like myself. I showed myself interested to view her artwork while I was also interested in her personally. So, she asked me if I was serious and I was really interested to see her work. Which I said of course, it would be my pleasure. Her artworks are at the same ad agency in Al Thawrah currently. She said she would contact me to fix a date and time to go to the ad agency in Al Thawrah for me to have a look at her photos. That obviously meant that I would see her both for viewing her artwork and she would be my date at Amer and Sara's engagement party. Ok now. How did Sammy come up? We were in fact talking about his beautiful emotional speech. I mean I'm hundred percent sure she was going to show it to Nelly. No doubt about that. This is what girls do. She better shows it to her. So, she would realize who is the guy who has a crush on her. A person who's that important to speak for that huge number of an audience."

Amer has already released Sammy's mouth. Sammy is sad for what happened to Hanieh's exhibition. He sympathizes with her. Hearing people have left Al Darrah and cannot attend Hanieh's exhibition, reminds Sammy of what his mother said and asked him to do. To begin selecting and packing his most needed belongings. Robert seems finished. He already sounds and seems tired of talking. Sammy clears his throat:

"That's true," says Sammy, "I mean what the ad agency guy told Hanieh about people leaving or left already, 70% of people. We saw it with our own eyes more than a few times that people of Al Darrah had loaded whatever they could onto their vehicles. Some had even fixed a roof-rack to be able to load a greater number of boxes. Anyone you call is out of reach these days. Their cell-phones are switched off and their land lines, no one answers. My mom also asked me to begin looking for strong cardboard boxes as we would soon need them to pack our stuff. I'm sure you two are aware that we would leave town soon. all of us will move the next day after Amer's engagement. That means we will have to start packing already. My mom instructed me to gather all what I think I will be needing most, arrange them, pack them and get them ready for loading onto a car. Now I just want to ask Robert though."

Sammy pauses for a moment. His voice gets deeper and he begins sounding sadder. He looks at Robert for a moment.

"I already know the answer I guess," says Sammy in a deep sad voice, "But still you know Amer and I would like you to be with us wherever we go, even if we are certain you and your parents and siblings are safe in the capital. Our plan is to migrate to Al latakia. It's the safest city in Syria actually. Now, you should figure out what you want to do really. Besides, we will have to ask you from now on, what would you do with Hanieh? Like Amer, if we want to go somewhere, we have to ask Amer what his plan with Sara is. Now we have to ask the same from you. What would you do to see and be with Hanieh if you go home to Damascus or come to Al latakia with us?"

What Sammy asks, makes Robert ponder. He has finished washing the dishes and is drying his hands with a towel. He pauses for a moment and leans against the sink:

"You are right dude," replies Robert with his head lowered, "Of course I myself am ready to follow my buddies wherever they go. It would be more fun. No matter where our destination

is. Let me talk to Hanieh and find out what her plan or her family's plans are. I'll let you know. We'll figure out what to do. The thing is, my problem is not Hanieh only, guys. Remember, aside from being here for our best friend's engagement ceremony I came to Al Darrah also because I have to find my brother. I'll have to see what happens with finding him. I'll have to see how that would go too. I can't simply decide. Let me figure some things out first. We'll definitely talk about this again soon. I'll follow up Robin's case and I'll ask Hanieh's plans. Don't forget, in a few days, Sammy and I must be at the Damascus university. Our classes begin soon. So, no matter what other people's plans are, we must be at the capital, unless they close the university and cancel our classes. Like I said, you wait. I'll tell you what I think we should be doing."

Moments pass in silence. The three best friends are quiet for a while. Every single one of them is thinking about their own related issues. Robert is cheerful, delighted and noisy for the fact he has begun a relationship with Hanieh, but at the other hand distressed, agitated and disheveled because of his brother's disappearance. Amer is resolving and settling matters related to his engagement and marriage after that and Sammy is extremely excited and vivacious for the fact Nelly is going to attend the engagement party, he can naturally see her, at the same time, overtaken by anxiety and dread as he knows that is the best and probably his only opportunity to talk to Nelly and express himself. He is waiting, impatiently waiting for the ceremony day. Whether Hanieh can convince Nelly's mom and dad that it is a friendly safe ceremony followed by a party and their daughter would be in good hands.

Sammy thinks of asking Robert to follow that up with Hanieh several times and give him peace of mind to know whether she is, for sure, going to be at the ceremony. But a number of reasons push him to keep quiet and be patient. Nelly herself has told Hanieh she was going to convince her mom and dad to allow her to attend the engagement. So, that means she herself is interested to attend the engagement, Sammy thinks.

Since Nelly knows her parents ethics better than anyone else, she probably knows how to ask them so they would not have any objection against it. Sammy, at the same time, thinks that Robert has gotten to know Hanieh, although it is not more than maximum 15-20 hours, but it is probably not proper to ask Robert to follow the matter up with her. Sammy is extremely restless and fidgety. He wants Amer and Sara's

ceremony to happen earlier. Despite Amer and Robert being his best friends, Sammy still does not want them to know his restlessness by constantly asking Robert to follow it up with Hanieh. His pride prevents him to show his eagerness and desire to see Nelly.

In general, Sammy does not want Amer and Robert think of him as a weak person, especially when it comes to the matter concerning opposite sex. Sammy is struggling. It is too difficult for him to get a grip on himself. Like any other man, or at least many other men, he does not like to be considered weak by his friends in emotional matters and when there's a woman involved. Even if they are his best friends. But he can't fool himself either. The undeniable fact is that he is extremely attracted to Nelly's beauty, decency and both physical and moral qualities, and prays hard to be able to see her as soon as possible. Robert, Amer and him, never hide anything from one another. But still, Sammy thinks of this as a more sensitive matter and does not want to be considered a weak man. He doesn't want to lose his dignity and his imposing presence. At the end, he decides to hide his jitters or premonition until Hanieh finally contact Robert and tell him Nelly's status. Sammy thinks it is best to let destiny decide what should happen.

Amer is busy arranging contact numbers in his cell-phone. He had saved so many numbers in his phone's memory and now does not remember who is who. He is looking carefully into his call log to see if he can find the number he is looking for. Sammy gets up, takes his cane and walks into his room. He sits on his computer, adjusts his seat and switches his pc on. He enters the search engine and begins looking for men's fashion pages. He is looking at web pages that suggests how to set men's clothing. He is not sure if he can make a nice set of clothes with what he has. Sammy hears Amer talking to someone over the phone a few minutes later. He is making certain arrangements in regards to his engagement ceremony.

Sammy notices Robert is walking in the room. He directly goes to the closet and hangs all what he has worn the night before at the banquet. A few minutes passes. Amer makes a few other calls. He is trying to convince the person on the other end of the line. What they speak about concerned the pastry, fruits, cooking, the kitchen and the party menu and some other ceremony related matters. Amer begins grumbling and complaining about the fact that if he does not follow up every single aspect, no one is smart enough to take thing further

and would not properly attend to the responsibility assigned to him. Robert is laughing at Amer, who is now imitating how the guy at the other side of the line spoke. Hearing Robert laughing at his worries, Amer gets a bit offended.

"Now what the fuck are you laughing at?" asks Amer annoyed, "Moron. Yeah, you laugh now you stupid ass. Wait until it's your own engagement shit. Let me see how do you handle shit? I'll be the one laughing. You laughs at me? Instead of asking if I need any help? Or if you jerk can assist me in any way. You really are a douchebag."

Now what Amer says and how he says it, makes Sammy laugh. Robert is thinking what to tell Amer in response, when his phone rings. Sammy is on high alert, thinking it is probably Hanieh calling to tell Robert the good news. That Nelly is certainly attending the ceremony. He turns his computer's chair and looks at Robert. Robert glances at his cell-phone screen, says "oh God" and begins praying and murmuring. A strong sense of curiosity pulls Amer to Sammy's room, where Robert is standing too. Robert's phone is continuously ringing. But it seems he is afraid of answering his phone. Amer enters the room and stands right in front of Robert:

"Dude," says Amer angrily, "Why the hell are you not answering the damn phone? Who is it anyways?"

Robert shuts his eyes. Amer and Sammy notice his lips shaking because of so much stress. After ringing a few more times, Robert finally gives himself the courage to answer. The only thing he says is "hello major sir" and he keeps quiet, probably just listening to what major is telling him. The only thing Sammy and Amer can understand from Robert's conversation, is the fact that he is on the phone with major Al Ameer. That's all. Robert is praying not to hear any bad news about his brother, Robin, before he answers the phone. Amer and Sammy are curiously listening to figure what the major's phone call is about. But Robert just acts as the listener. He says nothing except when he said hello major sir at the beginning of his telephone conversation with major Al Ameer. He listens to major and says words like, "aha", "oh" and "ok" after that. A few minutes later he thanks major and his telephone conversation ends. Both Sammy and Amer are worried for Robert's brother. But their main worry is Robert himself for what he has gone through till now to find something out about his brother. They are now only expecting to hear Robert telling them what major's phone call was about.



They both stare at Robert. He has lost his color. His face has turned pale and he is quiet. He doesn't even say a word. Robert is pondering while he gazes at something. Amer can no longer take Robert's silence:

"Oh, my fucking God," yells Amer, "Do you want us to beg you to reveal what's going on? Talk. Why have you become mute all of a sudden? What's going on? Hey. I'm talking to you, you asshole. You know what? Fuck it, don't talk. I don't give a damn"

Also, angry and curious, Sammy loses his patience too:

"Yeah. He's right," says Sammy in a lower tone, "Why you are doing this shit I don't understand. We'll deal with it. Whatever it is. Tell me. What's up? Do you understand we are worried too?"

Robert shakes his head. He is about to cry. Noticing that, Sammy picks his cane and stands up, pats on Robert's shoulder and asks him calmly about what is going on?"

"It was major Al Ameen," replies Robert stammering, "He says the twins, those brothers, Robin's best friends, are transferred to Al Thawrah hospital. The major and his secretary have been following up this matter on an everyday basis. He said his secretary had started following the case of the twins up since early morning. He is told due to increasing number of mounded soldiers, Al Shafa hospital has no more capacity to accommodate any more patients. The hospital officials figured there were no more beds left to treat newly wounded soldiers who have been transferred from the war zone. So, they decided to transfer some of the patients to smaller hospital. What they mean by some of the patients, is exactly those wounded soldiers whose doctors have no hope they would ever recover or regain conscience and wake up from the coma. Exactly like the twin brothers. Because they know keeping them would do nothing good for them. It would just occupy beds, which can be used to treat soldiers with more recent wound and damages, who can actually be treated and would certainly recover. The twins are both in coma and not even one of the doctors there believes there's a slightest chance for them to wake-up and recover. They'll be sent to a clinic or smaller hospital to be in coma there. What the difference is for them? Actually nothing. They're in coma and nothing much can be done for them. The twins have been transferred to their own home town, if they wake-up,

well, better. But if not, at least they die in their home town and there will be no need to undertake so many procedures and paperwork to transfer their bodies aside from ambulance charges. Major called me now, also very disappointed. He asked me to go to Al Thawrah, visit them at the hospital and find out what's happening with them. He just wants to let me know the twins have been transferred to Al Thawrah. That's all. Oh my God. What if none of them make it? What if they both die? How will I know what happened to Robin? What a fucked-up situation is lord putting me in."

"Get up. Let's go," says Amer interrupting Robert.

Amer begins taking his pajama off. He goes towards the closet and picks a jean, so he would wear his clothes and get ready for going out. Sammy and Robert look at each other wondering what Amer is up to.

"No need to say the rest," continues Amer, "We get the rest. Get up Robert. Don't let me ask you again. We'll go to Al Thawrah hospital, visit the twins and would make sure what's their status. Who knows? They maybe even feeling better now. Let's go. We'll also have lunch there and then we'll come back. Move."

Amer is now fully dressed and ready to leave the apartment. He looks at Sammy:

"Let me fix your knee strap already, so we'll not waste any time on that anymore."

Robert is wandering around, holding his trousers in his hands. He suddenly hears Amer yelling at him asking to focus and get ready. He immediately begins changing his clothes. Sammy takes his knee strap from computer chair and gives it to Amer. He sits on the same seat and stretches his left leg as usual so Amer would fix his knee strap for him. Robert is now ready to go too. After making sure his knee strap is properly and tightly fixed, Sammy gets up.

Amer exits the apartment and says he is going to pour water in his car's radiator and checks the air in his car tiers. Because he is not sure if his car tires have enough air in them. Driving the car in the main road with airless tiers is very dangerous. Amer says he has to put fuel in the tank and therefor they need to stop at an intercity petrol pump, before

he closes the apartment door behind him. Amer says one last thing to Robert and Sammy:

"I'm going down. Don't you take long and come down stairs immediately."

But when Amer is closing the apartment door behind him, Robert makes a stupid comment and fucks up:

"I just hate to impose" mumbles Robert, "It's a long ride to Al Thawrah. I'm sorry."

Even with Robert murmuring while saying that, Amer stops the door from getting closed. He gets very angry and his face turns red. Sammy stops where he is standing, shaking his head and waiting to see each of Amer and Robert's reactions. Amer brings his head inside to see Robert. But he can't still see him:

"What did you say?" shouts Amer angrily.

"Nothing," replies Sammy instead of Robert, "He was talking to me. You go down. We'll follow you in a bit."

Amer looks very much pissed. He slams the door hard and makes a big bang closing the door. Robert peeps at the door from the room to see whether Amer is still standing there. Sammy stares at Robert for a few second for him to realize he had not made a good comment.

"I would get mad too," says Sammy. "Dude, what kind of a fucking comment is that?"

Sammy is right. What Robert said about imposing, is not what very close friends would tell and feel about each other. Amer heard what Robert said and got angry, because he felt his own brother was involved and has to figure out what is going on at Al Thawrah hospital. Bur Robert thinks he is imposing. It is not him who proposed going to Al Thawrah in the first place. Robert lowers his head down, remorseful of making that stupid comment.

Sammy and Robert get out of the apartment. Sammy begins talking while taking the stairs down with Robert watching him from behind.

"Stupid idiot," says Sammy, "Why did you even say that? He was the one who started getting ready to go to Al Thawrah hospital."

Robert and Sammy reach down the building. Robert follows Sammy from behind as usual, so if Sammy wants to fall down accidentally, he can grab. Amer drives reversed a few yards

to reach Sammy and Robert. They enter the car and Amer begins driving. He stops the car after driving a few yards, jumps down the car, cleans the wind shield immediately and comes back and sits behind the steering wheel. He begins driving again. Amer says, like he has guessed his car's tires need to have more air in them. Plus, he needs to put petrol in the car as the fuel too is not enough to take them to Al Thawrah. Robert says he can do both at the intercity petrol pump. There are air and petrol. Sammy has taken the back seat so he would be laying and stretches his legs. They head towards the petrol pump first and Al Thawrah hospital next.

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Daniel is on his bed talking to Sayed Majed. Sayed Majed is a well-known businessman and merchant. He is one of Daniel's first transportation clients in Al Darrah. He used Daniel's transportation establishment to transport commodities he would trade. Sayed Majed is a punctual and trust worthy merchant. He is prompt in paying his dues and true to his promises. He is Daniel's most regular customer. His business relation with Daniel began soon after Daniel established his transportation office in Al Darrah. He initially used Daniel's establishment to transport small quantities of commodities as he was not yet certain of Daniel's business capacity, commitment and generally his abilities in transportation industry. But he established a trust with Daniel with time going by, and when he became absolutely certain about Daniel's trustworthiness and commitment, he began using Daniel's transportation office to transport all his commodities. They have become friends. It is for years Daniel handles Sayed Majed's commodities even when he is actually not around, he's travelling or simply staying at home.

Daniel is discussing business with Sayed Majed while still in bed. The reason Sayed Majed has called Daniel, is to let him know that he has to have his transportation trucks ready to load the huge number of commodities which he has imported and are soon due to arrive the storage facilities near Al Darrah. Daniel picks a small notepad he always carries with him and places it on the night stand and begins noting down what Sayed Majed exactly wants him to do. He wants to note every single detail Sayed Majed tells him, so he would not forget anything. He is still in his pajamas. He has just woken up when Sayed Majed called him. He is explaining to Daniel and telling him about some goods he has purchased. He is telling Daniel that his purchased goods have to be transported from a warehouse

near the Al Darrah industrial area and taken to the buyer's warehouse, somewhere near Al Yaas town.

Daniel writes the origin and consignee's address and his conversation with Sayed Majed ends. But before they both hang up their phones, Daniel asks Sayed Majed not to hang up as he needs to inform him something. He asks Sayed Majed to hold on for a second for him to remember what he needs to tell him about. He does not remember what he wants to say. So, they say goodbye, but Daniel remembers what he wants to say seconds before they both hang up their phones. He keeps on yelling "aloo", "aloo" so Sayed Majed would hear him and not drop the phone. Luckily Sayed Majed is still on the line. Daniel begins talking, telling Sayed Majed about his decision to transfer his family to the capital. He tells Sayed Majed, to keep his family safe and away from Isis constant threats, he and his family have decided to migrate to Damascus. He assures Sayed Majed his migration, however, is not under any circumstances has any negative affect on the business they handle together and business is going to continue as usual. He tells Sayed Majed the transportation they just spoke about is going to be the last operation for him that he himself is there to supervise and manage. He assures Sayed Majed nothing is going to change in terms of operation quality, transportation related factors. Daniel tells Sayed Majed he has assigned a younger more energetic gentleman to replace him in managing his establishment's operations, therefore, there is really nothing to worry about in his end. Sayed Majed tells Daniel he thinks Daniel has taken the right step as he himself believes family always comes first. He wishes Daniel and his family luck and says he is absolutely certain they would meet each other in the capital on a regular basis.

Daniel goes out of his bedroom after hanging up the phone to have his very late breakfast. He has not gone to his office that they. His wife Eva told him to stay home as she needs his help in many chores. Daniel faces a very busy and messy corridor as soon as exits his bedroom. He walks slowly and carefully placing his feet between tens of items on the floor to take steps and go to the living room. The living room even looks messier than the corridor though. All closet doors and the small storage room's door, which all opened to the corridor, are all opened. All useless clothes, personal stuff and stuff that no one has used them for years have all thrown out on the living room floor. He sees his wife and mother-in-law sitting, arranging and categorizing them, folding the clothes and laying them in boxes. He can barely walk. Where

ever he wants to put his foot down, there is something, making it too difficult to take a step, without stepping on somethings.

Daniel sees several cardboard boxes on the floor near both Eva and her mother, Ezra. It is apparent they are preparing to leave town for a very long time. Noticing his wife and mother-in-law, Daniel clears his throat and says good morning, looks around and directly goes into the kitchen. He has just figured the reason his wife does not want him to leave the house going to his office. He finds out why Eva needs help that particular day. Their house looks like Friday market sarcastically. But Nelly exits her bedroom before anyone has a chance to answer Daniel. She says hello and good morning, and goes to washroom immediately after that.

"Oh yeah. Good morning to you too sunshine," says Eva also sarcastically, "I'm sorry. I mean good afternoon. Congratulations. You woke up from your hibernation. I guess you were seriously exhausted, huh? I keep on telling you not to work and work. You went to bed half past twelve and you woke up what? Five-ten minutes back? Anyhow, I hope you rested enough. Because mom and I need you a lot today. I mean the whole day."

Daniel massages his face for a moment. Thinking he knows there will be so many things his wife and mother-in-law are going to ask him to do that day. He doesn't really like doing house work.

"Yes, ma'am," replies Daniel yawning, "Your highness commanded me to stay home today and serve her and her honorable mother. What do I respond? Yes, ma'am is my respond. But I never say anything about when I'll be going to bed and when I will wake up in the morning. Do I? I think I took a complete rest now that I've decided not to show up at the office, so I'll be so energetic and sharp, attend to you and mom. Besides, the day has just begun, I'll be at your service as soon as I'm finished with having my breakfast."

Eva asks Daniel to just stay in the kitchen, and she will join him there to prepare him his breakfast. Daniel goes to the sink and washes his hands and face there in the sink. He dries his hands and face using several tissues. He suddenly notices his wife and mother-in-law are staring at him. He can guess what has triggered their sense of blame. He asks them to listen. He tells them Nelly is in the toilet first of all, and second, he doesn't want to cross so many junks on the

floor, which the house is full of them, risking his feet. So, he figured it is best to wash up in the sink. He is going to clean it at the end of the day anyways. Daniel takes a seat on the breakfast table waiting for his wife to join him. Eva also crosses the living room and reception room. She joins Daniel at the kitchen, arranges the breakfast on the table for him. She asks Nelly loudly whether she wants tea or coffee for her breakfast. Nelly yells from the toilet and responds she prefers coffee. She consequently exits the washroom, says good morning to everyone again with a positive smiling face and goes to the kitchen too.

All Daniel's family members are in a good mood that morning. They have all begun a positive day. Nelly kisses her father and mom as soon as entering the kitchen. She sits across from her father. She and Daniel begin having breakfast. While chewing some bread, Daniel asks Eva what does she need help with and how does she want him to help her? She says she is going to ask him to do many things during the day. But first thing first. Eva says she wants him to bring down their luggage, both small and big ones, from the top section of the closets, as the rest of the family members are firstly not tall enough and secondly, they are not strong enough to do so. She says she is going to give him a few cardboard boxes and some items. She wants Daniel to place the items she would give him in the boxes and place those boxes at the top section of their closets instead of luggage he has taken. She also needs Daniel's strong muscles to move certain stuff to and from the storage. She would continue telling him his next task. Daniel assures Eva that he has perfectly comprehended what exactly she wants him to do.

Eva asks Nelly if she is going to prepare herself for when they want to leave. Like her dad, she nods while eating, meaning the answer is positive. But she says she is going to do that only before her guitar lesson. As after she comes back from his guitar class, she has to study and catch up, reaching lessons others in her level have reached. So, she has to focus on her studies a bit more seriously. Eva, Ezra, Daniel and Nelly have decided to arrange and pack whatever they are going to carry with them migrating to the capital. Everyone has to attend to his or her own stuff, separating and preparing and arranging everything such as summer and winter clothing, personal belongings and tools, spare parts, etc. Eva has given each person responsibility of handling a particular category of items. She has to arrange and pack not only her own personal belongings, but she has to undergo the

same operation for 3 other boys. Preparing and packing John, Jacob and Liam's stuff in itself is a very complex issue. So, Eva has to implement every member of her family to assist her.

After serving Daniel and Nelly's breakfast, Eva is heading back to the living room to join her mom when Daniel stops her, holds her hand, acts like some teenagers who are in love. He asks Eva to sit on his lap for a second. But she refuses acting shy and embarrassed as her face turns red. She says she is going to sit next to him after Daniel insists childishly. She sits next to her husband. Daniel holds her hand in his own. Now Eva, Daniel and Nelly are all at the breakfast table. Ezra is laughing at her son in law's childish playing and acting while looking at the three of them in the kitchen.

Daniel and Ezra's relation is beyond a normal relation between a son in law and a mother-in-law. Since she does not have son of her own, Ezra considers Daniel as her son and calls her son in her conversations. Daniel remembers his son's previous night's noisiness, cheering and disappointed wooing and asks Eva about the final result of last night's soccer match, which she does not know and does not care, as she believes soccer match has no positive effect on her as it always involves extreme noisiness and yelling. The TV has covered live report about an important football match at midnight. John, Jacob and Liam have been obviously watching the whole match screaming, yelling and cheering, applauding their favorite team, disturbing every other one rest. Eva and Ezra ask Daniel not to be hard on the kids when they come back from school. Nodding and smiling, Daniel agrees he would not and continues drinking his tea. Finding a good opportunity to bring up Sara and Amer's engagement ceremony, Nelly begins talking.

"Mom," says Nelly, "Do you remember my friend, Hanieh?"

"Hanieh?" asks Eva, "Which one is she? Oh, yeh. I remember. The one who used to come home with you. The girl who played violin. Yes. That one. She's the one. So, what about her?"

"Now, you remember Sara too?"

"Somewhat. I guess she was your common friend. You were all in the music group as I remember."

"Yes. But she wasn't part of the music group. She supervised and arranged the group practices."

"Yeah. I remember. Now what about them?"



"Sara is getting married. I was talking to Hanieh last night. She has invited me and Hanieh for her engagement party and ceremony. I think it's not good if I refuse. So, I think if it's ok with you and dad, I would like to go with Hanieh. It's in a few days. In like three or four days, I guess. Hanieh said the party is not going to be taking long. It will not be till late in the evening."

Daniel has seen Hanieh in his house a lot. He also remembers Sara. But he can't remember Sara's face exactly? He knows Hanieh. Nelly, used to consider Hanieh as her closest friend before she was sent to the capital. Eva too remembers Hanieh well. They both remember Hanieh and sometimes Sara also, coming home together. Unlike what Nelly expects to see, she does not see any changes in her parents reaction after telling them about the engagement ceremony she wants to attend. Eva glances at Daniel. She pauses for a moment and says she does not see any problem with her daughter attending her old friend's engagement ceremony. Whereas her father's opinion is as important. Nelly's eyes turn towards Daniel now. Still laughing, Daniel begins talking too:

"Nelly, sweetheart," says Daniel, "You are now an adult. You are a very polite young lady now who can differentiate between good and bad. I consider you a responsible, thankful and logical girl and I'm absolutely certain you would not accept her invitation if you had a slightest doubt the engagement ceremony and party was not a decent place to go to. I say since you think it's ok for you to accept your friend's invitation, it's okay with me too. I trust you and your judgment honey. I hope you enjoy every second of it too. The only request I have is for you to allow me to take you there and pick you up after the party ends. Both myself and your mother would be more comfortable this way. You know yourself our country's security threats and instability."

Nelly becomes very happy and excited when she is told she can attend Sara's engagement ceremony. She tells her father she would be even happier if he drops and picks them up. Because she does not have to worry about getting there and coming back, specially going there, which she needs to keep her hair and dress staying fixed.

Daniel and Eva's heart is happy from some other angle. They are extremely happy that their daughter is becoming the same happy sociable girl she was before that incident. Nelly is getting back to society's arms. Like a normal happy girl,

with close friends, going to parties. Daniel and Eva are deeply happy for the fact their daughter is little by little forgetting the evil thing happened to her. She is getting stronger, going back to the crowd, she is no longer depressed and in panic all the time. Nelly knows she has to listen to the instruction Dr. Iman had given her. Dr. Iman had instructed Nelly to appear in the crowd, not to consider everyman having evil intentions towards her and to bring her guards down a little bit. Nelly herself wants to get involved with group activities.

Despite having the permission from her parents, Nelly is still staring at her parents. It looks like she has not yet done talking with them. Knowing her children and their responses and reactions, Eva knows Nelly needs to talk about some other things with her and her husband. Eva looks at Nelly, shakes her head, gets a curious gesture, waiting for Nelly to speak. "What is it baby?" asks Eva. "Is there anything else you need to discuss with us?"

"Actually, there is mom," replies Nelly smiling, "Something in regards to me attending Sara's engagement." Daniel gets curious. He and Eva both are paying complete attention to her.

"You have got to take me to the city," demands Nelly, "You should buy me proper night gown. That's all."

Daniel and Eva were looking at Nelly listening to her. Now they look at each other. Ezra starts laughing constantly at Eva and Daniel. She has heard all their conversation. She assures Nelly that her parents would definitely buy her a nice night gown. She tells Nelly if her parents refuse by any chance to buy her what she has in mind, she'll buy it for her. Nelly looks at her grandmother, smiles and sends her a kiss. But of course, Daniel would never allow that. He has never allowed his mother-in-law to undertake any of his family's related expenses. He thanks her and says he has no doubt and would never question her generosity, especially when it comes to her grandchildren. But he says he is going to buy Nelly the gown she wants. He glances at his wife to see what her reaction is.

"Ok sweet girl," says Eva in a kind tone, "tomorrow or the day after, we'll take you to Al Thawrah because I myself need a few pieces of clothes I need to buy. We will do our shopping and head back home."

Ezra is sneering again. Because Nelly is still staring at her parents. Like she's not done with her demands.

"Only one tiny little thing left," says Nelly, "I swear this is the last request. I'll let you help me choose. I need to buy her an engagement present also."

Ezra does not indulge and sneer any more. She practically burst into laughter and belly laughs this time. Ezra's deep laughter makes her face turn red. Her artificial teeth is about to get tossed out of her mouth and seeing this particular scene makes Nelly, Eva and Daniel laugh too.

Tears of laughter roll down Nelly's face too. She gets up the chair while laughing her guts out, kisses her grandma, mom and dad and heads towards her room to contact Hanieh and tell her the good news. Daniel and Eva are still talking and laughing while staring at Ezra's face. They laugh and laugh, waiting for her to say what laughter does not let her say. She stops eventually and controls her laughter so she would be able to finally speak.

"Oh, my poor Daniel," says Ezra now giggling, "You thought everything was about her, asking permission to go to her friend's ceremony. Ha son? You probably thought you'll be the good dad and Eva will be the understanding mom? Ha? In case you've not figured out yet, you'll have to buy your wife also some stuff too. I bet you didn't even imagine you'll be paying for Nelly's gown, your wife's underwear and a wedding present. Oh my god. You should look at yourself in the mirror my poor Daniel. Your expenses got out of hand drastically."

Daniel, Ezra and Eva keep on joking and having fun with each other while doing their household tasks at the same time.

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Hanieh is laying on her bed. She has applied some skin mask on her face to clear her facial skin from black-heads and pimple remains. She also has two slices of cucumber, one on each eye. She has a headphone on her ears, listening to music. She removes the cucumber slices off her eyes and picks the little mirror next to her on the bed and looks at her face to see how dry the mask has become. She notices she looks like aliens, having a dark gray mask covering her face, exactly like what you would see in scary or science fiction movies. She places back her mirror next to her, places cucumber slices

back on her eyes, and begins snapping her finger with the rhythm of the music she is listening and singing along with the singer occasionally. Until the music suddenly stops and her phone begins ringing instead. Again, she takes cucumber slices off her eyes and looks at her cell-phone screen. It is Nelly calling. So, she answers her phone and begins talking. Nelly tells her she has the permission to attend Sara's engagement ceremony. Nelly sounds very happy and excited. Determined to introduce Nelly and Sammy at the ceremony, Hanieh is delighted as she is one step closer to the plan she has in her mind. Hanieh tells Nelly that they will certainly plan the time and place they'll be meeting before going to the ceremony. She also mentions that they should not be worry about how they would be going to the venue. Because her father has agreed to drive them there in the afternoon and pick them up in the evening when they're done. For Nelly not to feel uneasy about her father's condition of driving them and picking them up from the ceremony, Hanieh pretends it is a great idea and she is glad they'll be having a ride.

Hanieh changes the subject immediately and masterfully. She asks Nelly about how her studies are going. Because of the incident Nelly had to overcome, and some difficulties she had faced during her past two years, Nelly is behind Hanieh and Sara by around two years. She studies at home and goes to school every now and then only to ask questions she has with what she studied. Teachers and the admin of the high-school are all aware of the incident that happened to her. That's why, all of them help her as much as they can when she goes there to ask her studies related questions. None of them hesitates helping Nelly even if they have to spend some more time particularly to teach her what she cannot learn by herself being home schooled. Nelly learns whatever she has missed during the school year.

Like normal students, Nelly goes to school for the exams at the end of each school year and undergoes tests. Hanieh and Nelly speak about days they went to school together. They remind each other of funny memories they had and naughty stuff they had done. When talking to Nelly, Hanieh is thinking of mentioning Sammy and his feelings for her several times. Something keeps on ticking her to say something about that. But how? She does not know. Knowing Nelly and what happened to her and the affect that terrible attack had on her, stops Hanieh to bring Sammy's case up. It is a very sensitive matter that cannot be talked about over the phone. It is not something unlike any other subjects they are speaking, joking

and laughing about. Sammy's case is an extremely delicate matter. Something, an idea, spontaneously comes to Hanieh's mind and she immediately decides to execute it. So, she says it would be fun paying Sara a visit to revive their old memories. She says she has decided to visit Sara and asks Nelly to company her. Nelly entertains Hanieh's idea of visiting Sara. She thinks it is a good idea to pay her a visit now, so she would not meet Sara at her engagement ceremony after all those years of her absence. Hanieh and Nelly decide to meet each other in front of Al Darrah's bank in the afternoon and go to Sara's house together. It is fixed, so, their telephone conversation ends.

Hanieh places the two cucumber slices on her eyes again, but she remembers she has to inform Sara she is going to meet her at her house with Nelly. She takes away cucumber slices, contacts Sara and tells her they will be visiting her in the afternoon. Sara gets excited as she feels also bored and has no special plans for the rest of that day. Sara says she would be expecting them.

Hanieh tells Sara almost about all that had been exchanged between her and Robert. She tells Sara she feels for Robert and she has established a feeling for him. She also talks about Sammy and Nelly, requesting Sara to assist her in introducing Sammy to Nelly indirectly, as she has a plan to match them up somehow. She asks Sara to help her talk about Sammy at some point, talk about his positive points and make Nelly think about Sammy in a special way, making Nelly ready and inclined to meet him. Hanieh had already told Sara about Sammy's feelings for Nelly the night before. Sara is surprised why Amer, her fiancé, has not mentioned anything in this regard?

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Amer fills the tank and checks his car's tires at the petrol pump. Sammy, who cannot sit for a long time, exits the vehicle and stretches his legs, observing what Amer is doing with his car tires. Amer is regulating his tire pressure and has inserted the air hose into the tires air valve, staring at the pressure gauge constantly not to put so much air in them. Sammy is now standing next to Amer. He has leaned against the car and watches what Amer does.

Robert is still in the car waiting when he receives a call. He glances at his cell-phone. He is right. It's Hanieh

calling. This makes Robert extremely happy. His relation with Hanieh is a young new relation. But things still have turned out to be moving forward fast. They both feel they know each other for years. Robert answers his phone.

"Hello and good morning sir." Says Hanieh flirtishly."

"Well hello to you too my lady." Replied Robert. How is it going?"

"I've got great news for your buddy, Mr. Sammy." Says Hanieh. Nelly's parents allowed her to come to Sara and Mr. Amer's engagement ceremony. So, Nelly will be attending the ceremony and the party after the ceremony, I repeat, Nelly will attend the engagement ceremony."

"Wow. I don't know what to say." Replies Robert. "I'm thrilled and speechless."

"Anyways, Nelly is very happy too. Nelly and I are going to pay Sara a visit in her house in the afternoon. Don't tell anything to Sammy about it yet. I'm going to mention Sammy and see Nelly's reaction."

"Ok beautiful."

Robert is so excited for Sammy. He keeps on drawing a cross on his chest and thanking lord for his kindness:

"Oh my God thank you a billion" replies Robert with a very happy voice, "First for calling me and then for the great news. I'm so excited for Sammy. Oh God. Thank you darling. Good for Sammy. Now you tell me please, when will I have the honor of seeing you my lady? Because I'm waiting to see your artwork and photographs. I also miss you and can't honestly wait. I mean the longer it passes, the lower my waiting capacity becomes. We're on our way to Al Thawrah. I'll explain later the reason we had to go there."

"Hmmm well. It would be impossible for today. But let me check my schedule and I'll let you know soon about when we can both go and see my art and photographs."

Robert and Hanieh's phone conversation ends here. The car doors open, Sammy enters the car and sits at the back seat again. Amer too gets inside, puts the key in the ignition, switches the car on and drives away.

Robert has no doubt Hanieh is into him as much as he is into her. His experience with the opposite sex dictates to him that if a woman or a girl dislikes a man, there's no reason for her to call him. Regardless of how important or and what

the call is about. Robert also knows regardless of how attracted a woman is to a man, she will not become very friendly quickly. That getting a woman to be feeling close and intimate to a man would require time and effort from the man's end, as women would need certain facts to be proven to them by time. That's why Robert has decided to be patient and not be pushy often. Robert sends Hanieh a picture of a rose. He turns his head back to where Sammy is.

"Dude," says Robert in a mysterious accent, "I want to ask you something. Let's say if I tell you Hanieh called and said Nelly spoke to her parents and got permission from them to attend Amer and Sara's engagement ceremony. What would you do? I mean how would you thank us? Like with a present? A thank you card? How?"

Suspecting that there is definitely a reason behind Robert's questions and the fact that what he asks is surely driven from certain facts he is still not aware of, Sammy replies he would first of all become overjoyed and animated, and he would invite everyone in the vehicle to the most famous kebab restaurant in Al Thawrah, called special Arabic kebab and would-be counting seconds to hear such a pleasant news. Sammy keeps quiet and begins gazing at Robert's eyes pleadingly, waiting for him to continue talking, telling him it is true and Nelly has actually gotten the permission from her parents to go to the party.

Robert starts acting crazy, jumping up and down on his seat, dancing and cheering and laughing. He tells Amer to get himself ready to eat special Arabic kebab for lunch. Because Nelly has actually gotten the permission and she is going to attend his ceremony. So, like Sammy promised a while ago, they'll be invited by Sammy for lunch. Hearing the news, Sammy hugs Robert from the back seat and begins kissing his head. Sammy has become so excited that he now stammers. He keeps on nodding and murmuring something. It is decided then. Their plan is clear. They know where to go for lunch.

Amer keeps on looking in the mirror to see Sammy's reaction to the news he has heard. He has probably never seen Sammy in that state. Amer asks Robert how he knows about Nelly in a suspicious tone. To let Amer see he is not making things up, Robert lifts his phone up in front of Amer's face and shows him his phone's call logs so he would see he is not joking. Amer, Robert and Sammy begin cheering, laughing and dancing

on their way, being especially glad for the opportunity that has been created for Sammy to make a move.

They still have ten to fifteen minutes before they reach their destination. Amer plays a bee gee's song called staying alive. It is all three's favorite bee gee's song. They sing along with the singers and move their bodies while seated in the car. This is how they express their happiness. Amer's phone starts ringing. He lowers the sound of music and answers his phone after inserting his earphones into his ears. Curious and quiet, Robert and Sammy wait to find out who has called Amer, which they do, after hearing his soft tone, spoiling Sara. While talking to her, Amer who is in a positive mood, begins spoiling Sara with some of cute words he is very good at. Sara has called to inform Amer they are not going to meet anytime in the afternoon, as she would be having guests. She says Hanieh and Nelly will pay her a visit in the afternoon, that's why she is not able to go out with him. She tells Amer that Hanieh and Nelly's visit is in fact a scenario Hanieh has written in order to reveal Sammy's feeling for Nelly to her somehow. Amer too tells Sara about the twin brothers, them being transferred to Al Thawrah hospital and the rest. Amer says he wanted planned to contact her and tell her about it.

Robert is squinting at Amer, having his every move watched. He can guess what Sara is talking to Amer about. Amer is explaining their day plan to Sara, telling her they have to visit the twin at the hospital, and then, they are going to have lunch at a special Arabic kebab restaurant as Sammy would treat them for lunch. Because Nelly has obtained her parent's permission to attend their party. Amer tells Sara that Nelly being able to attend their engagement ceremony has made Sammy so exhilarated that he has invited them for lunch to show his gratitude. Sara asks Amer the reason he had not mentioned Sammy having a crush on Nelly? But Amer says there is no particular reason for it and he has probably forgotten to share it with her. Amer and Sara decide to talk about Sammy and Nelly later as Sammy is in the car and Amer thinks it is not a good idea to talk about him in front of him about those matters. Their telephone conversation ends.

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Nelly's room looks like her house's living and guest room, Messy and disorganized with everything scattered all over the place. Everything is scattered on the floor. She is separating



her new and old clothes, shoes and personal items, so she would pack them and ready for moving. Nelly's room floor is covered with her shoes, clothes, diaries, winter and summer clothes, purses, bags, luggage, magazines and albums. But she thinks she will still have time to pack her things before leaving Al Darrah for the capital. So, she decides to look for what she wants to wear going to Sara's instead. Still helping Eva and Ezra since his breakfast was finished, Daniel is now replacing boxes and packs that his wife and mother-in-law wanted him to. Daniel suddenly notices his only formal suit he has is on the floor, like all other items they are organizing. He begins grumbling and showing how he is disappointed seeing his favorite formal suit in that condition. He really is attached to his suit. It is his only formal suit. He stops what he is doing and begins looking for a coat hanger and a suit cover, which he insists it is a senator style suit. But no matter how long he looks and how hard he searches for it; He cannot find any coat hanger or case. Nelly is Daniel's last hope now. So, he knocks on Nelly's door and waits for her to say come in. When he enters his daughter's room, he begins laughing, shaking his head in a way he feels sorry for the room and says he thinks living and guest room were the messy ones, whereas her room is way worse than anywhere else in the house. It is the best opportunity for Nelly to get into a trade with her dad. She tells him she has both a coat hanger and a coat cover. But she'll only give it to him if he promises to drop her and Hanieh to Sara's house in the afternoon and pick them up in the evening. Otherwise, she has no coat hanger and no coat cover to offer. Thinking his daughter is pulling his leg, Daniel starts laughing saying that he liked her joke. But after saying that and laughing for a moment, he realizes Nelly is not laughing and is staring at him with a serious face. Only he realizes that she is not joking and, as a matter of fact, she is dead serious. Daniel cannot believe that there is really a deal what his daughter wants. She actually wants to enter a transaction with him. Having no other choice, Daniel agrees to Nelly's condition. But he asks her what would she do about go to her guitar teacher? Thinking Nelly has forgotten about that. But she says she is probably not attending her guitar lesson, as she does not know how long she and Hanieh are going to stay at Sara's. But even if she decides to go to her guitar class, she would not be needing her father. She can walk alone or ask Hanieh to company her to her teacher's house. She brings her hand up and waits for her father to shake her hand and finalize their deal. Defeated and surprised, Daniel sees no other way except shaking Nelly's

hand and agreeing to the deal. Nelly gets up, opens her closet and takes a coat hanger and a cover out and gives it to her father. While exiting her room, Nelly asks Daniel to stop and tells him he has to be ready for dropping her and Hanieh around an hour and half after they have lunch, and he has to take her to Al Darrah's bank, pick her friend and take them to Sara's place accordingly. Daniel nods surprised, exits her room and joins back his wife and mother-in-law to be at their service again. When he gets near Eva and Ezra and while covering his so-called senator style formal suit in a hanger, he tells them he is so happy their daughter is recovering rapidly all of a sudden. Daniel continues by saying that he can already see some signs that Nelly is becoming the same happy naughty girl she was before the incident. Eva and Ezra agree with Daniel. They too have noticed positive changes in her, especially since Hanieh came back to her life, she is becoming more and more active and happier. Being an old experienced woman, Ezra had predicted Nelly was going to recover with time and she was correct. She reminds Eva and Daniel about what she had said months ago, about time repairing most of Nelly's damages. She promised them Nelly was going to even become better than what she is that day. Daniel nods and confirms all what Ezra said. He tells Eva that he has to drop Nelly and Hanieh to another friend called Sara after lunch. It is going to take him around half an hour. So, they do not count on his help an hour after lunch.

The more Nelly goes outside the house by herself, the more she re-establishes her long-lost relation with her old friends and school-mates, the more she becomes independent in handling her chores and running her errands outside her house, and the more Eva, Ezra and Daniel hopeful and optimistic become in regards to her recovering and forgetting the horrible incident happened to her. In the beginning, they were all afraid that she would never become a normal girl. She would always look at the opposite sex in a negative way, and being in a crowd where there are men, would bother her for the rest of her life. They were worried for Nelly to become distinguished from the others in the town and elsewhere and become as known as the village's pimp by being mentally ill. Their worry was a valid concern, because if that happened, no man was going to show any interest in Nelly and she would end up alone for the rest of her life. Almost all Al Darrah residents, being a small town with a close community, knew about what has happened to Nelly. Like many other small towns, people talked and everyone got to find out in a very short time that Nelly is still under therapy and

that is exactly what worries Nelly's folks. Despite the fact Nelly's unspeakable beauty was quite evident to everyone, still, most of the men want their wives to have the understanding, ability and mental and physical health to raise their children aside from having beauty alone. At least, this is how Al Darrah or many other men in the country thought.

What concerned Nelly's parent's was every parent's nightmare, especially if they had a young girl who was about the age of marriage. They were quite worried their daughter would not be able to have a husband, children and her own family and being considered as a psych or a mental patient. In fact, the main reason Nelly's parents sent her to the capital after the incident, aside from keeping her away from where that incident happened, was to keep her away from people's sight for some time, so everyone, including Nelly herself, would forget what happened. The illness of Nelly's aunt had become a good excuse for Eva and Daniel to send Nelly to Damascus. Every parent's dream is for their children to grow up and become successful, get married, grow a family, have children and be happy all in all.

Nelly knows herself that people consider her the most beautiful girl in Al Darrah and the neighboring towns, or even the whole province. She also believes what happened to her was in fact the result of what people think and say about her being very beautiful. Despite Nelly refusing to believe she is that beautiful that people say and considers herself as a normal looking girl, she knows what people think about her appearance had persuaded that psycho criminal rapist to plan and attack her. She believes she has become subjected to come a victim of her unwanted popularity and what people think and say about her beauty.

Since the incident Nelly brought her guards up against the opposite sex and believed no one could change the way she thought. She actually had no control over the way she thought about men. What happened to her, had made her scared of men making her think of them as monsters who had only one single thought in their minds and that was sex, whether consensual or in consensual. But now, with time passing, growing older and her brain becoming developed more and more accordingly, plus the help she is getting from her therapists, she has begun to forget the past little by little. This is getting obvious and it showed in her manners, behavior and mentality. She can now walk in the street, without fear and without any

of her family members keeping her company. She can do her own shopping, go to her guitar classes, school and elsewhere alone. Another good change that is being implemented by Nelly is the that she is re-establishing her relationship with her former best friends. All mentioned developments in her life have made her parents very excited. They look forward to see a completely normal Nelly. They are happy for the fact that she had a more negative mentality about opposite sex in the first months of the attacked. But she is growing up, analyzing and understanding things better by thinking logically and trying to find causes that resulted into her attacker in attacking her. She is getting to understand that not all men are the same, and she cannot generalize her attacker's behavior to all men.

Daniel is happy that his older family members have more time to attend to their own chores, since Nelly is showing more independency from herself. He had to watch Nelly every single second when she was in a more fragile state of mind. He had to pay attention to all aspects of his family's life, and he also had to pay special attention to his daughter, which was not easy for him to do, because Nelly was terrified to be left alone even for a minute. So, they decided for Nelly to be home schooled after a family meeting, they had. They decided to take Nelly to school every few days, so she would ask her teachers any questions she would have. And at the end of school years, for her to sit in the examination room and give her tests. Even taking Nelly to school and bringing her back home consumed so much of Daniel's work time.

Eva and Daniel knew Nelly was not able to concentrate on her studies in the school, and she was surely not able to learn anything while thinking of all what happened to her. That's why they figured she better stay at home and become home schooled. Nelly too agreed and they finally decided to hire two private teachers for her and for the subjects she was weak at, to come home twice a week and work with her. So, there would be no obstacles and barriers for her to learn her lessons at home.

Nelly had been a responsible and studious girl ever since, and everyone at her school knew it. The only problem was her spiritual and mental problems she had begun to experience after what happened to her. She went to school at the end of previous year's school year, like any other student. The interesting part was she passed all her exams with good marks without any leniency or compassion from any of her teachers.

Daniel took Nelly to her guitar lessons five days a week. She was very interested in music. Both listening and playing. It was also good for her, as her therapist had suggested her to get herself busy listening to relaxing music or even playing an instrument. It helped her relax and calm according to her psychotherapist. It happened, fortunately, that both her guitar instructor who was a woman.

Nelly had been strongly tied with music and this helped her a lot in the process of her recovery. Daniel could see that his patience was paying off. His patience, his wife's and mother in law's was paying off. Nelly as recovering and this could obviously be felt.

Daniel begins singing because of joy he felt seeing his daughter's smile, happiness and sense of inclusion. Eva and Ezra glance at one another and they too began singing accompanying Daniel. Ezra is happy seeing her daughter and son in law's smile. They keep on singing and being happy while preparing themselves to migrate to Daniel's late sister's big house in the capital.

\* \* \*

Sammy has his legs stretched at the back seat. He has removed his shoes and relaxed at the back seat leaning against the back door. He is searching google map to find the exact address of Thawrah hospital for Amer. None of them knows where the hospital is located. They've never been there. Sammy cannot find the address from the search engine, as if such hospital has never existed. No search engine has any information whatsoever about Al Thawrah hospital. So, he tells Amer and Robert that he cannot find any address from the hospital. Robert pulls his window down. He asks Amer to reduce speed and stop next to a man sitting on a little chair beside a kiosk, reading newspaper. Amer does what Robert asked him. He reduces speed. But cars begin honking behind him. They stop next to the man. Amer switches his hazard lights and takes his hand out of the window and begins waving to the vehicles behind him, directing them to take over and pass from the space at his left side.

Robert calls the guy yelling, saying hi and politely asks him if he knows Al Thawrah hospital's address. The man stands up and ambles next to Robert's window. He ponders for a moment and tells Robert which direction he has to take in order to

reach the hospital. Amer obviously hears the man as well saying they have to cross the second traffic light, going towards left until they reach a roundabout. He says they can see the east entrance of the hospital after around hundred yards passing the roundabout. He tells them to park the car as soon as they see the entrance and walk to reach the main entrance, as they are not going to find an empty parking space there at that time of the day.

They reach exactly the same east entrance the man had given them the direction to go a few minutes later. Amer asks Sammy to begin wearing his shoes already, as they has reached the hospital. He tells Sammy he thinks it is good where they are headed is a hospital and can treat them for suffocation Sammy caused them taking his shoe off exposing his horribly stinking feet. Sammy and Robert burst into laughing. Amer parks his car and the three of them get out. Like the man said, they walk until they reach the hospital's main entrance. The side walk is covered with items such as readily beautified flower buckets, edibles which are normally what patients can eat, and some other stuff that can be bought for visiting a patient. Robert get more anxious the closer they get to the hospital's main entrance.

"Why are you so worried?" asks Amer, "Robert, you have not even seen the twin. You don't even know how they look like. Maybe one of them at least would be awake when we reach there. You just can't worry yet."

"He's right Robert," confirms Sammy. "Besides, we're not here to mourn anyone dude. We are here to get something good out of it. What makes you worry anyways? We're here to find the answer to the question, where's Robin. Chill out man."

Robert just nods. He does not say anything in response to what Amer and Sammy tell him. It is obvious he is worried and anxious. He looks as if his eyes see Sammy and Amer, but his mind is elsewhere. They finally reach the main entrance and enter the hospital. Like a headless chicken, Robert does not know where to begin or what to do next? Noticing Robert flabbergasted, Sammy goes towards the information counter, lays on the desk, and asks the lady about the twin brothers which have been recently transferred to that hospital. The lady says there are over four hundred patients at the hospital and she can only find those whom Sammy is looking for just if he gives their exact name and surname. Sammy turns his head towards Robert who is standing next to Amer further down and

asks Robert if he knows the twin's given and surname or at least one of the above? Robert makes Sammy understand by hand gesture that Amer doesn't know what their name is. So, Sammy apologizes to the lady and tells her he'll be back in a moment. He paces towards Amer and Robert.

"Now what the fuck do you mean by that?" asks Sammy in a serious tone, "You mean you don't even know their fucking names? Why do we come here anyways? Call that guy, the major, and ask him. Hurry up."

Robert is frowning. He is trying hard to remember at least one of their names. But he cannot remember any of their names or family names. He takes his cell-phone out of his pocket and starts searching for major's name and number. But he suddenly closes his cell-phone's screen and places it back into his pocket. He says he remembers. The twin's names are Hassan and Hussein Soury.

Sammy shakes his head feeling sorry for Robert. He goes back to the information desk and tells the lady what the name of people they have come to visit are. As soon as he mentions the names, the lady interrupts him and says they have to visit the second floor, Room 140 ICU.

Surprised by the fact that the lady did not even feel the need to look for twin's names in the computer and knew by heart who Sammy is talking about. Sammy thanks the lady murmuring. He asks Amer and Robert to follow him by waving at them.

Sammy presses the elevator's button and waits for it to come down. There is another lady standing next to Sammy waiting for the lift. The door finally opens and two young nurses push a stretcher of the lift. Sammy and the other lady followed by Amer and Robert enter the lift. He presses the button to go to the second floor. He asks the lady what floor she is going. So, he would press her floor too. Sammy presses button for the fourth floor as well. The elevator's door slides open. Sammy gets out along with Amer and Robert. They look at their left and right sides. Amer suddenly asks the other two to follow him, after he asks Sammy what room number are, they in and Sammy tells him. Amer goes ahead faster and finds the room. He looks at Robert and Sammy who are following him. Sammy limps and has to walk slowly. That's why he is always behind. Robert and Sammy wonder why does Amer look at them instead of entering the room? But Amer says the twins

have visitors already and probably it is best to wait for a bit.

Sammy, Amer and Robert are now standing outside the twin's room, looking at a chubby lady who is whimpering and wailing nonstop. The woman who is in black is being comforted by two other women while an old man is standing by the glass staring at the twins. They know the woman in black must be the twin's mother. It is Sammy who suggests that they have to speak to their doctor or one of the nurses in order to find out more about them since the twins are unconscious and unable to communicate. Amer and Robert are convinced. Them entering the room with two guys in coma, alive only with assistance of life support, changes nothing and would have taken them nowhere. Besides, they still could not talk to even one of the brothers even if he was conscious, because there is a glass wall between visitors and the twins, separating them from the others, placing them inside the unit, but visible by people. It is clearly written on the glass that only trained hospital personnel are allowed beyond that point. Sammy asks Amer and Robert to take a seat outside the twin's room on the bench prepared for visitors to seat on. He knows the hierarchy of a hospital since the time his late father was admitted to the hospital after he was badly injured in the terrorist attack.

Robert and Amer go out and sit on the bench waiting for Sammy. Sammy goes to the unit's nurse station and politely asks one of the nurses about Mr. Hassan and Hussein Soury's condition. The nurse types something, looks at her computer monitor for a long moment reading something. She asks what Sammy's relation is with the patients. Sammy explains her briefly the reason he wants to know what state the twins are at. She asks Sammy to wait for a moment. She stands up, stretches her back and enters nurses break room, which is behind her. Sammy's eye suddenly catches Robert and Amer seated on the bench further on the corridor. They are looking at Sammy curiously and meekly. Sammy waves for them and they figure they still have to wait. The nurse comes out of nurse's break room after a few seconds and takes her seat. Sammy is gazing at her, waiting for her to talk.

Amer and Robert are quiet. They are seated outside the twins room, waiting for Sammy to return and update them about the twin's situation. Robert is uneasy and eager to know what their actual state is. He stands up, goes to the door and peeps into their room to pry what is going on. He sees the



visitors saying goodbye to the old woman. It looks like they are leaving. They address the old woman as Mrs. Soury and comfort her a bit before they leave the room. They are telling the woman that them, and their family members would pray for Hassan and Hussein. They say they are certain that God would hear them and would soon answer their prayers. Robert goes back and sits next to Amer again. He tells Amer he has no doubt that the poor woman is the twin's mother as the visitors addressed her as Mrs. Soury. Amer looks at Robert, frowns a bit and tells Robert to calm down and wait for Sammy. He tells him he is obviously under lots of stress and that does not change anything in the twin's status. Robert sits for a moment, but decides to peep inside the room again, but Amer holds his hand and pulls him down so he is not going to move.

Visitors exit the twin's room, go to the elevators, get in and leave. Robert and Amer's eyes follow and escort them until they disappear, and they see Sammy coming towards them in the background. They open space between them for Sammy to sit too. He takes a seat:

"Ok guys," says Sammy, "I've found out many things since I went to nurse station. Look, it seems these two brothers, Hassan and Hussein are in a real critical situation, according to that nurse I was talking with. Early this morning, the ward supervisor and the hospital director contacted Hassan and Hussein's house to ask their parents to see them at the hospital. They did not know that only their mother was alive and their dad had passed away years ago. Anyways, they informed their mother about their conditions and the fact that they had no hope whatsoever in getting them out of coma and keeping them alive. The woman inside, the one crying, is their mother. They told her Hussein was alive, only with the assistance of life support and there was no sign of life in him if it wasn't for life support. Life support breathes for Hussein, pumps blood into his veins and keeps his heart beating. Generally speaking, if it was not for life support, Hussein would have been pronounced dead days ago. Of course, all is true according to the human anatomy's scientific facts. Because in medical science, there's a definition for calling someone as alive. There are certain factors involved, certain signs in a human body to indicate whether he or she is alive or dead. Now Hussein does not have those signs and he's clinically dead. Basically, the hospital officials and staff tried to convince their mother to allow them to take Hussein off the life support and let him die in peace instead of reviving him and making him suffer. They told her they

believed he was not able; I mean did not have any more strength left in him to fight. Now, she's inside the room, deciding whether to allow the hospital to take her son off life support. Imagine, she has to decide whether to allow hospital to let his dear son die. It's a fucking difficult decision. Her other son, Hassan I mean, he still has some signs of life in him though. That's why doctors say they are going to keep him alive, help him fight and recover, even if it is with the assistance of life support. There's a 'but' though. They say they would keep Hassan on life support for a limited period of time only. What that means is they will give Hassan's body some time to recover itself and if his body fails recovering, he'll then face his brother's fate.

Sammy pauses for a moment and gazes at the floor, while Amer and Robert wait for him to continue saying what he was saying: "Look guys," continues Sammy, "We cannot do anything for them now. The only good thing is we came and saw with our own eyes that they are really here and we can come as see them as soon as any of them come to. At least we do not need to go all the way to Aleppo if we need to be there with them or see them urgently. We're forty-five minutes away from them. That's all."

Amer pats on Sammy's shoulder, thanking him for what he has found out. Robert is still quiet. Amer, Robert and Sammy are only thinking about the twin's mother and what she's going through. They pity her so much. Robert suggests they better get inside and stay with her for a while now that they are there already. He says he believes it is better for them to go in and introduce themselves to the poor woman and comfort her somehow. Amer and Sammy agree.

The three of them enter the room slowly. Robert introduces himself, Amer and Sammy to the woman and explains to her that her sons are his brother's best friends. He continues by saying that Robin, his own brother, has been missing for a while. The woman does her best to stop sobbing so she can talk. She becomes a bit calmer and confident after hearing the reason Sammy, Robert and Amer are there with her. The old woman introduces herself as Asma's, but she tells them they can call her Bibi Sama, which means mama Sama. She feels she is not alone and is supported somehow. As though she has just realized she is not the only one who has to face a tragedy and there are many more out there dealing with the causalities of war. Bibi Sama is assured they can understand her and the

situation she is in. She keeps on wiping her tears off her crumpled face skin. Robert begins comforting her that she has to be proud raising such courageous brave sons, defending their country. Amer does the same and Sammy assures the old woman that there are too many families trying to overcome the same challenge. That there are families who are in a similar or a worse situation than she is in. He uses Robert's parents as an example to what he is saying. Sammy says Robert and his family members, if not more than her, but are equally suffering. because they do not know their son's whereabouts. They do not know what fate had in store for their son, waiting for him to open the door and comes in.

Bibi Sama looks very kind and soft hearted. She knows sooner or later she has to give the hospital the permission to cut her son, Hussein, off from life support and let him go at last. But such a decision is one of the most terrifying decisions for any parent. It is surely like a nightmare. It is an impossible decision. Despite her sadness and grief, Bibi Sama picks up a little biscuit box that previous visitor brought her, opens it and offers Sammy, Amer and Robert. Sammy and Amer take a biscuit each. Since Robert is sitting farther, Bibi Sama wants to stand up, step towards Robert and offer him. But Robert gets up quickly and takes a biscuit before the woman stands up. He then sits next to Amer.

Bibi Sama begins comforting Robert, whilst she herself needs all comforting in the world. Robert is gazing at the ICU room, where the twins are being cared for. The room where the twins are at is separated from visitors room by a glass wall and a glass door, which is particularly used by the ICU professional staff.

Robert is looking at the twins. He's thinking if his brother Robin was with Hassan and Hussain, his best friends and comrades, and this happened to the twins laying in coma in ICU, then what would his brother's fate be? He's thinking that Robin too should be hospitalized somewhere and is in coma like the twins.

Bibi Sama speaks with Robert for a while. She wants to comfort Robert as much as she can. She is telling Robert he and his parents have to accept what God has decided for Robin. Bibi Sama says she knows what happened to her sons, was in fact God's will and no one can challenge that. Bibi Sama really truly believes she has to accept God's will and she is being tested by God. The three of them are sad, quiet, listening to

Bibi Sama and nodding. Maybe some of them really believes in what Bibi Sama believes too. But none of them actually knows what is happening in Robert's head. Amer, Sammy and Robert are truly impressed with Bibi Sama's kind hearted gesture. In spite of her being in such painful situation, she is still trying to comfort someone else, another human. Tears roll down Robert's face. Bibi Sama promises Robert she is going to pray for Robin to be found healthy and happy. Bibi Sama tells Robert that her sons may have even spoken to her about Robin, but she is already a forgetful old woman and probably has forgotten even if they did tell her about their best friend and comrade, Robin.

Bibi Sama cannot complete her sentence. She bursts into tears again. She cries and asks why did they not leave any will behind? She says she has found an envelope in one of her son's pockets. But she does not have her reading glasses and obviously cannot read whom is the envelope addressed to. She is sad that she does not find any of Hassan or Hussain's wills anywhere. Bibi Sama keeps on weeping and murmuring something. Amer gets his head closer to her.

"Please Bibi Sama," says Amer, "Don't get yourself more upset. You were the one who said no one could challenge God's will. Maybe they had asked a friend to hand it over to you or even they have posted it to you. Because this is what soldiers normally do in war. They usually give their wills and testaments to their best friends to deliver it to their family in case something happened to them. Besides, your sons are both still alive. Thanks God. Please calm down Bibi. Maybe God has called Hussein to himself. But, shouldn't you get yourself fresh and ready to take care of Hassan when he comes out of coma? Because I'm hundred percent positive Hassan would be looking for his mother when he opens his eyes. He will need your support for sure."

Amer holds a tissue box towards Bibi Sama. The woman pauses for a moment. She gets up her chair and begins searching for something under her seat. She takes a plastic case out from under her seat. She opens it, removes his son's military uniform out of the plastic case and searches its pockets. A piece of cloth falls on the floor. Robert bends and picks it up for her. It's an army uniform. Bibi Sama takes it from Robert and finds an envelope in it. She gazes at the envelope for a second, gets it closer and farther to her eyes to zoom in better. She says it is it. The same envelope she said she has found in her son's pocket. She hands the envelope to

Robert. Robert unfolds the envelope to see what is written on it. Sammy and Amer suddenly notice Robert loses his color. His face becomes pale and his hand begins shaking. The envelope falls off Robert's hand and lands on the floor. He can no longer hold the envelope. He cannot move. Amer gets up immediately, bends and picks the envelope. Amer's face becomes pale as well. He takes the envelope to Sammy's wondering eyes. There is a scary silence in the room for a second. Robert places the palm of his hand over his mouth and runs outside. It looks like he is about to puke. He runs towards the washroom. Amer throws the envelope on one of the seats and runs after Robert to see what happened to him? Sammy cannot believe his eyes. He gets up and picks the envelope from the floor. He slowly goes back to his seat and sits down. He is quite, pondering while gazing at the envelope. Sammy lowers his head. He is motionless, quite emotional and in shock. He looks at what is written on the envelope again,  
To: my dearest family members,  
From: Sergeant Robin Shaffi.

Sammy is now so worried for Robert. Bibi Sama is flabbergasted witnessing all that unfolded in front of her after the envelope was dropped on the floor. She looks at Sammy sobbing. Her eyes are feathered with so many questions. She asks Sammy the reason Robert had reacted that way, and asks him the reason Robert had gotten upset and the way he had reacted. With a special kind of serenity and calmness, Sammy begins explaining to her, that the envelope she found in her son's uniform was actually the will and testament Robert's brother has written. Bibi Sama pauses for a moment pondering. She gazes into Sammy's eyes,

"Now you see God's plans?" says Bibi Sama, "These are all God's will that you came here today and discovered the envelope. When they sent me my son's personal belongings after they got injured, I found that envelope in one of their uniform pockets. I did not honestly even know whether it was Hassan's or Hussein's. They are twins, you know. They are identical twins. They look alike, their sizes, bodies, everything is the same. Like your friend Mr. Amer said, soldiers ask their best friends to carry their wills and testaments, so if something happened to them, their friends would bear the responsibility of delivering it to their parents or family. I guess this is what happened here also. If Mr. Robert's brother gets back home, you will probably find my sons will in his pocket as well."

Saying every sentence, a tear rolls down the poor old woman's cheeks. But Sammy's thoughts are with Robert and Amer. He thinks if he did not limp, he could run after Robert too and see what happened to him. But he is okay, Sammy thinks, as he knows Robert is not alone and Amer is there with him.

Robert pukes in the hospital's toilet again. Amer is petting his back. He does not know what to do for Robert or what to say. He has not been in such a situation before to know what to do.

"This is on me dude," says Amer with a remorseful tone, "I did not have to bring you here today. I did not have to suggest such stupid thing. Idiot Amer. I mean dude. She found your brother's will in her son's pocket. So? She did not find Robin's corpse for God sake. It's a letter. A will. It does not prove shit man. So? what if she found Robin's will? It does not mean he's dead God forbid. You said it yourself. Soldiers give their will to one another. Think about it for a minute. If Robin was here, we would probably find the twin's wills in his pocket somewhere. That did not mean the twins were dead. But it's now not Robin who's in coma. It's them. No one came to your house to hand over Robin's will and say he was gone. No one officially informed you or your family that your brother Robin was killed. What I'm trying to tell you is that the will she found does not mean shit. Like I said. I did not have to bring you here. I'm stupid."

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Sammy consoles Bibi Sama in the waiting room. He does his best to comfort the old woman for a while. He takes a piece of paper out from his pocket and writes his cell-phone number, gives it to her and asks her to contact him in case she needs anything at all. He promises Bibi Sama he is going to pray for her and her sons to recover as quick and miraculously as possible. He thanks the old woman and leaves her alone with her misery. Sammy goes towards the toilet directly to find out what happened to Robert. But Robert and Amer exit the toilet before Sammy reaches them. Sammy holds Robert's arm and clears his throat:

"What's wrong with you, you crazy bastard?" whisper yells Sammy frowning. "What happened and why the fuck are you acting like this? Do you know something we don't? Why are you mourning deathbed? Who said something bad had happened to your brother? I mean, your brother has written his will, gave it to his best friends and asked them to hand it to your

family. That's all. Why do you act like this? I don't understand Robert. Seriously. People who died or will die are actually that poor old woman's sons, not your brother. Doctors have lost hope in Hussein, not Robin. Oh, I almost forgot. Do you remember what you told me when my dad died? Do you recall? You asked me to be strong, at least for the sake of my mother. Now I would want you the same, to be strong for your parents sake. But, not now. When you are absolutely hundred percent positive God forbid your brother is gone. You don't know shit now. Nothing is certain."

Amer tells Sammy he had been telling Robert the same things, but he acted like dumb people, as if I was not even talking to him.

Sammy looks at Robert again and continues

"Do I have to remind you of the same advices you were giving me when my dad died? Please dude. Get yourself together and think logically. We don't know where's Robin or what has happened to him yet, end of the story."

Robert nods while Sammy speaks. It looks as if he wants to say something in response. Noticing this, Amer signals to Sammy, asking him to stop, so Robert can express himself. Sammy keeps quiet. But still grumbles and murmurs. Robert asks Sammy and Amer to give him a moment to get his thoughts together. He coughs and clears his throat. The lift's doors slide open. The three of them get in. Sammy waves at the nurse he had spoken with about the twin's condition earlier and says goodbye to her.

The lift stops at the ground floor. They get out and walk outside the hospital building. Robert stops outside the hospital. He coughs a few times. He takes a few deep breaths. He makes a sign at Sammy and Amer meaning he is ready to go already. Robert begins talking. He says he agrees with all what Amer and Sammy told him. He admits that as soon as he saw Robin's hand writing, he lost control and did not think any of the facts they told him. But while Sammy talked to him, he figured he was right and there was nothing that indicated something bad had happened to his brother. Robert continues by saying not only seeing his brother's hand waiting made him lose his control, but also because his mother had told him about a dream she had when she spoke to Robert within past 48 hours or so. His mother had dreamt about her son, Robin, that he was writing a letter and when she asked him whom was, he writing to, he replied that Robert would tell her later. Robert says he had his mom's dream at the back of

his head when he saw Robin's handwriting. Everything together made him lose his control, panic and get severely distressed.

Robert tells all about his mom's dream to Amer and Sammy, and tells them he admits seeing his brother's hand writing on his will was still not a prove to any fact and couldn't be held as a strong reason to believe his brother was dead. But still, anyone else in his shoes, with a missing brother and getting to see his will instead of him, may have acted even crazier that he did.

Both Sammy and Amer can understand Robert. He has the right to feel that distressed and shocked. He came all the way to Al Thawrah hospital in order to find something good about his brother from his best friends, instead, he came across his brother's will. Tears well up in Robert's eyes and a lump form in his throat. He tells Sammy and Amer how much he appreciates their caring for him and his wellbeing. Robert thanks them both for being there for him and for being such good friends. Amer pats on his shoulder and replies he thinks, as each other's best friends, they have the duty of supporting one another and that's what best friends are for.

Robert cannot stop his tears from pouring out of his eyes. He weeps while complaining about the mysteries of the universe, misfortunes happening to him all the time, questioning God's judgment and everything else. One thing that bothers him most, is the fact that he had sent his father a text message when they were on their way to Al Thawrah, informing him that the twins were transferred to Al Thawrah hospital. He had told his dad that the three of them were as a matter of fact on their way to Al Thawrah hospital, to pay the twins a visit, in hopes of getting a promising news out of them. Robert is now terribly desperate what to tell his parents. He knows they are too desperately waiting for him to contact them and tell them the result of his visit to the hospital. Of course, he cannot simply say he has found their son's will in the twin's uniform pocket instead of hearing something that gives everyone hope.

Sammy can understand the situation Robert is thrown in. So, he is thinking of a way to help his best friend. They reach Amer's vehicle. But before getting inside the car, Amer asks Sammy in a very serious tone where the envelope is. Sammy gets his hand into his trousers' pocket and removes the folded envelope and gives it to Amer. Amer gives a very serious look at the envelope, Sammy and Robert.



"Listen up," announces Amer seriously. "what I'm about to tell you contains no joking or acting or anything like that involved. I'm dead serious. No one, I repeat, none of us will talk, touch or even think about this meaningless piece of paper we call Robin's will until my engagement ceremony is over. Because we all know it's something that Robin wrote. God willing, till Hassan will come out of coma and will clear many things for us. I mean he'll answer many of our questions. But soon, it's my God damn engagement ceremony for heaven's sake and it happens once in my life only. Hopefully, I have a ceremony which is right around the corner and I need my buddies. I need you guys to support me spiritually and mentally. And I need you two to help me in physical labor. Listen... look, I'm telling you right now, I'll be seriously pissed if I find out any of you two morons even thinks of this envelope. Leave it alone. Forget it till my ceremony is over. But I don't have proper memory these days. I have a thousand thoughts circulating in my mind. I might even lose the damn thing. Get this back from me Sammy. I'll give its custody to you, so you can be a depositary of it until later on. Exactly, the day after my ceremony, you can do whatever you want to do with it. I mean we'll talk about it if we want or think there is something to say about it. I don't care what happens to the envelope after my ceremony. If Robert wants to mourn, cry, or I don't know, announce his brother dead because of it, it's up to him.

Amer hands the envelope to Sammy and continues:

"Here dude, you hold on to this for now. Please. Please. Please. Forget this envelope and all that happened at the hospital as soon as you sit in the car. I will no more repeat myself guys. I'll be badly pissed of seeing it again or hearing any of you talk about it. Oh, I almost forgot to mention. Amer holds Robert's head and gazes at his eye and continues:

"Like Sammy said, you will not get your parents worried for no good reason. They are already in so much pain, I don't know what? But make up some shit and tell them. Just don't talk to them without thinking of what you want to say way in advance."

Sammy nods blinks at Amer. Meaning he has understood Amer's strategy in regards to Robin's will and testament. He glances at Robert to see his reactions and makes sure whether he has fallen for their act. It looks like Amer has been quiet

convincing as Robert seems he has agreed with the condition Amer has set. To change the subject, Sammy says he is starving. They sit in the car. He suggests they already head towards Arabic special kebab restaurant. Sammy opens the car door for Robert, gets his mouth close to Robert's ear and whispers to him to enter the car with a smile. Robert does that. Robert smiles and Amer ignites the car. He drives towards the restaurant.

Amer peeks at Robert every now and then. He has Robert within his radars to see whether he has to speak to Robert further to calm him down. Robert seems convinced that getting to see his brother's will does not mean he has died or something. To change car's ambiance, Amer plays a happy song like always.

Sammy knows bringing up Hanieh would definitely get Robert out of his negative thoughts about his missing brother. So, he asks Amer to lower the music. He smiles and says he knows they are under the impression he is inviting them for lunch because of the great news he was given about Nelly attending the engagement ceremony, but that they actually need to thank Hanieh for making everything even possible in the first place. Sammy had guessed it right. Bringing up Hanieh, changed Robert's mood dramatically. A nice smile formed on his face and he began talking about her.

They are in the car for a few minutes before reaching the restaurant. They get themselves busy discussing their sweethearts, Hanieh, Nelly and Sara. Robert's mind is completely distracted from worrying about his brother when they arrive at the restaurant. Sammy's mind, though, is still wrapped around that envelope and what is written in it. His sense of curiosity is persuading him to open the envelope at some point and read the contents. He is more than interested to read that letter. Something tickles him to open the envelope right there and find out what's written in there.

Amer parks his car in the parking lot. The three of them exit the car and walk towards the restaurant. Having dined at the same restaurant along with Sara a few times prior to that, Amer is worried they may not find an empty table. He keeps on telling Sammy and Amer that the restaurant is always full of customers and he hopes they can easily find a table to have a seat and eat. He tells Sammy and Robert that he had dined there at that restaurant a few times already. He says he and Sara had to wait for at least twenty minutes before they were allowed to enter because of so many people in there. Amer

proposes they should agree if the host or the restaurant manager propose to them to sit at the balcony.

Arabic special kebab restaurant is famous for using fresh and tender meat and preparing ordered food in the presence of the customer. Kebab is still one of the most popular foods in the country. There is at least one kebab maker restaurant in any corner of the country, in any city, province or even village. But people differentiate and rate them based upon the meat they use to make kebab. There are so many big and luxury kebab restaurants which have no customer because of the meat they use. There are also little but good-looking kebab restaurant where people stand on a queue to buy or eat there, also because of a good meat quality the kebab makers choose for making sticks of kebab. Generally, the best kebab ever is considered to be goat meat kebab which Sammy has decided to order when they are at the restaurant already.

The three of them enter the restaurant. But they face an almost empty from dinners against what they expected. There are only two customers occupying a table. Robert chooses a table next to the window. The three sits at the table, a waiter comes towards them holding three menus. He gets closer and notices Amer, Sammy and Robert looking around, wondering why the restaurant has no customers. Sammy is the one who asks why the restaurant has no customer eating in it. Amer continues what Sammy asked and tells the waiter anytime he has visited the restaurant to have lunch or dinner, he had difficulty finding an unoccupied table, but now, there is only two customers eating there. Knowing the number of their customers decreased dramatically, the waiter smiles bitterly and replies sarcastically that everyone already knows the reason. He says because of people escaping and leaving town to take refuge to a safer city, there are not too many people left to eat there. Besides, those who stay in the town are not in the mood to dine and eat outside in a restaurant. He says the chef previously set the menu according to the number of their customers and what they order most. But now, the chef has reduced the number of choices to a few dishes only, and they now only have three different dishes in the menu. Hearing what the waiter says, Sammy immediately asks if they still serve goat meat kebab? Goat meat is luckily being still served as their daily menu. Because goat met kebab is a traditional food in many Arabic countries.

Robert and Amer are deciding what to order while Sammy speaks to the waiter. They finally place their orders. Amer shakes

his head feeling sorry for what is happening to their country. Everyone is taking off, running to a safer place. The population in Al Darrah and neighboring towns, cities and even villages are deteriorating on a daily basis and this makes him feel extremely sorry for what is happening. He tells Sammy and Robert he believes their families are going to be the last ones leaving the town. Sammy and Robert pause for a moment. Amer is right apparently. But they take it as a matter of joke and laugh at his comment. The waiter serves their lunch a few minutes later. He places their food on the table. Amer has ordered chicken kebab, Robert has ordered special Arabic style kebab which is very oily and Sammy has ordered his favorite goat meat kebab. They dig in and begin eating.

It is not much later when everyone hears Robert's cell-phone ringing. He glances at his phone. He has guessed correctly. The call is from home. Robert's hands are oily. So, he requests Sammy to take his hands-free earphones out of his pocket and connects it to his cell-phone. Headphones get into Robert's ears with the help of Sammy. But before Robert touches the green button and begins talking, Sammy and Amer stop him. Sammy reminds him once again that he has no right to spoil his parents mood by bringing up or even mentioning a word about Robin's will. Amer also tells him his parents do not have to know what exactly happened at the hospital that morning. Robert is listening carefully. His phone rings constantly, but he is waiting for Amer and Sammy to stop talking already. He touches the answer button of his cell-phone and begins talking.

After some small talk, Robert's mom informs him that she has put their phone on speakers, so his father can also hear their conversation. Otherwise, she has to tell him what they speak about later on and she might forget some parts by then. Knowing his dad can hear him too, Robert says hello to him and begins explaining. The only thing he tells his parents is twins have been transferred to Al Thawrah hospital and they are both unconscious. He says he can now visit the twins anytime he feels like as they are way nearer to him than before. Robert tells his parents he is going to visit the twins on a regular basis, until one of them gains consciousness. He is going to find out from any of them who comes to first, about Robin's whereabouts. Robert tells his parents about severity of Hussein's condition and his doctors who have already lost hope in saving him. He says the twins' mother, a nice elderly lady called Bibi Sama, is sitting

outside their room, struggling to decide whether to listen to their doctors advice and gets him off life support.

Robert can hear his mom weeping after he tells them about the twins' mother. She becomes so emotional, probably because she is a mother herself and can imagine what a difficult decision Bibi Sama has to make.

Robert's mother has the same worries as Robert. She also wants to know whether her son was with the twins when they got wounded? What could have possibly happened to her son? She believes her son, Robin, is surely not in a better condition if he is still alive. She is actually right. She has a valid point. Robert's face turns pale again, like any other time anxiety attacks him. He does not know how to calm his mother, as the sound of her sobbing increases every second. Robert is doing his best to convince his mom that what happened to the twins does not necessarily mean the same fate has gotten Robin too. Robert has a valid point too.

Robert says he thinks maybe when the incident that wounded the twins happened, his brother may have not even been there with them. But his mom is way more emotional for logic to have slightest effect on her. No matter how hard Robert tries calming his mom, it does not work. She becomes more and more emotional and cries louder and louder. Robert cannot get her to calm down. She has freaked out and is neither listening to Robert's logic nor to her husband's supportive words.

Robert's efforts prove to be ineffective. Because as a matter of fact, he has nothing positive to say in order to calm his mother. He has no good news or at least something close to a positive news. That's why no matter how hard he tries; it does not work. To control his mother and father's emotions, Robert has to control his own emotion first. He has to somehow calm his mother. A mother who has sent him to Al Darrah's Al Namar military base to look for his brother.

Looking at Robert's facial expressions, Sammy and Amer pity him. They both know since they are seated at a public place, Robert has lowered his voice not to disturb the few people in the restaurant. Sammy and Amer try to show themselves normal, as if nothing bad is happening. But Robert can no longer keep his voice down. He has become emotional too. He cannot talk inside the restaurant any longer. Therefore, he apologizes to Amer and Sammy, gets up and exits the restaurant. So, he would talk in a normal tone to probably calm his mom down somehow.

Robert is influenced by his emotions so much so that Sammy and Amer can still hear him talking with his parents. They can figure from Robert's body language and gestures that he is struggling to come up with some good stuff in order to comfort his mother.

A few minutes later, Robert finally says goodbye and comes back inside being extremely sad. He sits at his seat and begins eating his lunch again. The spoon and fork vibrate in his hands as he is still under the stress and influenced by emotions. He suddenly looks up. Sammy and Amer look at each other, with eyes full of question. Robert looks back down and notices Amer and Sammy curiously looking at him. He smiles bitterly and says he was just praying to lord to give him a sign, even the tiniest one to see whether he should still look for his brother. Sammy pats on his shoulder and comforts him. He asks him to enjoy his kebab and stop thinking about anything else except his lunch. He says they are going to talk about his brother after their lunch if he still wants. But his food is getting colder.

Robert is taking down last pieces of kebab when he receives a text message from his dad saying:  
"Don't worry about your mom, son. She feels better now. She gets emotional anytime she speaks to you. I know it's because she misses you also. So, don't worry. She's ok and calm now.

Seeing Amer and Sammy's curiosity, Robert reads his dad's text message for them. Sammy and Amer tell him the way his mother got upset was not a rare reaction people, especially women show when expressing themselves, under certain circumstances such as desperation, depression and anxiety attacks. They tell Robert he does really not have to let himself under so much stress, because stress and anxiety are serious matters and can harm him in long term. Sammy consoles and comforts Robert for a few seconds. Amer tells him he believes if something happened to his brother already, no one, not him, not his dad, mom or anyone else can do anything to change or fix that. He tells Robert if something wants to happen to Robin, still nobody can do anything about it, if he is destined for anything. Amer says he believes it is best sometimes to leave things in hands of destiny. It would be best to accept what fate has decided. Both Sammy and Amer are telling Robert that they do not expect him to do anything based on his emotions instead of his mind as they believe he is an intelligent, well-educated young man, who decides and acts based on facts and figures, using his mind. They

generally want him to think and act logically, not emotionally and based on his feelings.

Sammy gives Robert his own accident as an example, saying he himself strongly believes that no moving and living creature could stop what happened to him that fateful day when a huge tire hit him. Sammy says he firmly believes all bad and bitter experiences he had in his life, were the result of what destiny had planned for him. Whatever the plan, it does not matter now. But he says he knows those are what fate had in store for him. Sammy continues by saying that at the beginning, he had so many questions and anger towards God asking why did those bad things have to happen to him and no one else? But he had at the end agreed they were his destiny and accepted he could do nothing to change them. So, he has found peace. Otherwise, the more he struggled to change things, the more he wasted his time. But he could only continue his life after accepting his fate. Sammy wants Robert to accept whatever destiny has in store for his brother, also accept that he cannot change anything. He tells Robert to enjoy the good things of his life, such as health, enough wealth, Hanieh, etc. and forget the misfortunes as he cannot change them no matter how smart he is or how hard he tries.

Sammy and Amer want to make Robert understand and accept that black will take no other hue, and if he accepts black to be a hue, other hues would look better to him. Robert is getting calmer after reading his father's text message and all what Sammy and Amer tell him. They are probably right, Robert thinks. He has to take it easy. He has been so hard on himself for some time now. He ponders for a moment and asks himself, what if Isis has already executed or beheaded his brother? what? What if Robin has been tortured and killed by Isis terrorists? Does he really have to mourn loss of his brother for the rest of his life? Does even his mom have to mourn for the rest of her life? Or would she, even? Would she be sobbing and mourning forever until her last breath? Robert knows well, he has read in an article that human's psychological recovery system would activate after losing someone dear or very close immediately, helping him or her forget and deal with his emotions at least. At least things would not feel or look as bad and sad as initial days of a bad incident. Then why is he so hard on himself when he has to call his parents and update them? He prays and wishes his brother to show up healthy and unharmed, get back to his parents' arms, putting an end to the terrifying nightmare or thoughts of losing him. But what if he doesn't come back at all? What? What if he is dead?

Gone? Killed and never comes back? These thoughts encourage Robert to consider his best friends' advices and accept them. He figures what his two friends tell him, is in fact what he believes in depth of his heart, but has no courage to accept them. But he is glad despite all misfortunes and disturbing matters he is struggling with; he is not alone. He has two dedicated understanding best friends he can talk to, shares his sadness and thoughts with and resolves some of his issues with. The best friends he can swear are as close as a brother to him.

Robert is most comforted with the text message his father sent him. But having Sammy and Amer supporting him has become an addition for him to calm down and relax. Robert apologizes to Amer and Sammy for making them have their lunch in stress and worry. But they say it isn't true and they were a bit concerned for him and his mom. That's all. Sammy is happy he had a role in calming Robert from depth of his heart. He calls the waiter and asks for their bill. Amer says he thinks he felt a little nap is what all three need. So, better if they head home right after getting out of the restaurant. Amer yawns and closes his eyes, pretends he is so sleepy. Being a contagious act, Robert yawns after Amer does. He agrees with what Amer proposes, also closing his eyes, pretending to be exhausted. But Sammy frowns at them both and not only they are not going to head back home, they have to stay very much awake, as they will be heading towards Al Thowrah's shopping center as he has to purchase clothes. Because, he does not want to be wearing his antique looking old clothes when getting to meet Nelly. Robert and Amer take a very long mysterious look at each other. They shake their heads knowing they have no other choice but to get Sammy's shopping over with. They have no choice. They think they have to spend the whole afternoon, waiting for Sammy to finish shopping. Otherwise, he would force them to come back to Al Thawrah, particularly for shopping. So, better to stay longer and let him finish shopping. They are not going to rest anytime soon they think.

The waiter places a pad on Sammy's table in front of him. The pad has the bill on it. Sammy pays the bill, leaves a generous tip. The three of them leave the restaurant. As soon as they exit the restaurant, Amer begins commenting about the food quality, saying he felt their food did not taste as before. He asks Sammy irritably what does he exactly want to buy. Because he knows exactly to which mall or market to go in order to buy what he needs. He claims Sara had brought her to



Al Thawrah for shopping so many times that he can get to any shopping mall or market he needs with his eyes folded and with one hand tied behind his back. He tells Sammy he better tell him what does he need to buy. But Robert answers Amer instead and says in a joking way that Sammy does not need many things to buy. He only needs lingerie, bra, tampon and probably some different lipsticks. Even Sammy himself laughs at Robert's stupid joke.

Sammy explains he has formal suit ready for Amer's engagement ceremony. But now that Nelly will be there and they are going to meet, things are a bit different. He says he has decided to buy himself a beautiful tuxedo as well. Sammy says he may wear his formal suit for other occasions he is going to meet Nelly, as he predicts he is going to have several dates with her. That's why he also wants to buy some casual clothing too, so he'll have both formal and casual outfits. Sammy says he prefers to buy branded clothing mainly for when he gets to see Nelly. Hearing what Sammy is saying, Robert shakes his head sorrily. He says he knows they are going to be shopping until late that evening.

While Sammy talks about buying branded clothes, Amer seems like he wants to say something, but he does not. He keeps his mouth shut despite feeling a need to say what he wanted to say. But he finally cannot control his mouth and says he believes Sammy is trying hard to impress Nelly by showing off his branded clothes. Amer says he knows this is how Sammy thinks can attract Nelly to himself. He says he wants to remind Sammy of mainly two facts: first, he says he believes not many girls would be impressed and accordingly attracted to a man because of what he is wearing and if he wears brands. Second, Sammy has to consider the fact that they'll be moving out of town the next day after the engagement ceremony. What Amer thinks about him buying branded clothes, he says despite the fact he has had not many girlfriends in his life, he also is aware that brand clothes are not going to neither impress nor attract a girl to a guy. However, wearing nice clothes on a date with girl is not ineffective neither.

Sammy believes the way a man dresses, indicates two facts about him. One, it shows what kind of a man he is and, second, the girl can figure how important she is or their date has been for the man to wear his coolest clothes. He insists to convince Amer and Robert that his aim is not to get Nelly like him because of what he wears at the ceremony or party the same evening. But he knows the way he dresses up, gives

him a more self-confidence and makes him think better about himself. That's all. About Amer's comment, saying they are leaving town the next day after the engagement, Sammy says he needs new good clothes wherever he goes and if it is about meeting Nelly, it does not matter where they are going to relocate to. He says he is prepared to travel miles and miles, just to visit the girl of his dreams. Amer is deeply impressed by Sammy's logical evaluations. He knows he has taken Sammy's shopping for brand clothes in a wrong way. Sammy is right. So, he admits he has taken it in a wrong way and apologizes to Sammy for judging him.

A few short minutes later, they reach Amer's car in the parking lot. They enter the car. Amer says he is going to take them to the west side mall first. Sammy has let Amer decide which shopping they better visit first. Like Amer said before, Sara has taken him shopping in several occasions. So, he is absolutely aware, which shopping mall to visit for purchasing any particular item. Amer is well aware about the location of each mall, center and market. Not only in Al Thawrah in particular, but Al Darrah, Al Thowrah and Al Yaas, etc. Amer begins driving towards the west side shopping mall.

Inside the car, they are happily speaking about Sara, Hanieh and Nelly, being the three musketeers and themselves, Amer, Robert and Sammy being the same as well. But Sammy is not sure about what Nelly's reaction would be after finding out what he feels about her. Sammy is not actually certain about anything yet. But when he pictures himself with Amer and Robert, being together with the three girls, Sara, Hanieh, and Nelly, he feels great. He knows if that happens, he would most certainly experience best moments of his entire life. The three best friends are even excited hearing one another making comments about all six of them, what they will do and how much fun they'll have.

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Miles away from where Sammy, Amer and Robert are, things are different in Robert's house. His sisters, Hellen and Ellen, Charlotte his mother and Abraham the father, no longer set the dinner or lunch table as a very close and loving family like they used to. Tension has mounted up. Mainly because of disappearance of the family's youngest son. Each and every single member of Robert's family are individually concerned about him and none of them is in the mood for dining as a family. This particular day also, there is no sign of

Charlotte or even Ellen and Hellen in their kitchen. No one is in the mood to cook. No one looks happy. Robert's father Abraham is at the kitchen alone, seated at the table and eating his lunch. He has not even bothered to switch the lights of the kitchen. It is apparent that his meal looks like it is left over from the previous day or even older than that. He eats with lack of appetite. Not only him, but everyone in his house is tepid and dull. Sadness and grief can be obviously seen in his face's wrinkles.

Charlotte is in the bedroom and is laid flat on the bed. She has her left hand under her chin like a stand and turns pages of a big album with her right hand, looking at her missing son's photos. A drop of tear rolls down her eye every now and then. Robert's older sister Hellen is seated in front of her room's makeup vanity, listening to a classical music and staring at herself. Her sister Ellen who is actually a believer in religious and spiritual principles and is known within the family and friends as a spiritual girl, has a beautiful bible in her hand, praying for her brother's safe return. She prays for her brother and all other members of her family to be patient and safe. A sad, heavy and tragic atmosphere reigns over Robert's house and everyone in the house can feel it. Sadness has dominated Robert's two-story house in the capital. Abraham stops eating at last. He pushes the plate away, again with lack of appetite. His plate is half empty. He cannot finish his lunch. He turns to his right so he can have a look at his yard, trees, flowers and plants from the huge glass window of his kitchen. Ellen mumbles some prayers and closes the bible. She goes to the kitchen, fills the kettle and puts it on stove. She turns the stove on. She has noticed her father in the kitchen looking at their courtyard. She calls her father and his attention gets redirected to his daughter Ellen. The sound of water getting heated little by little can be heard. Ellen asks her father where her mom is. Abraham tells her that her mom is still in her bedroom. He says Charlotte has not eaten and won't eat and if she continues the same bad eating habits, she is definitely going to suffer malnutrition soon, and they have another issue at their hands. While making herself a cup of coffee, Ellen asks if her father wants a cup too? But Abraham shakes his head and says no. Ellen takes a seat opposite Abraham and begins talking. She tells her father in response that she thinks his own stress eating habits too are almost as bad as her mother's. She suggests they better stop eating while under lot of stress and distress. As those are the foundation for other illnesses such as heart attacks, brain and heart strokes

to occur. Abraham replies with a point that he believes all his family member's bad eating and other habits are the result of Robin's disappearance. He proceeds by saying he believes by finding his son, safe and sound, all stress and anxiety in the house would without a doubt disappear and everyone is definitely going to get back to their normal selves, with normal eating, thinking and living habits. He pauses thinking of his son.

The sound of music coming from Helen's room suddenly stops. This makes Ellen and her father wonder why? She has been listening to the classical music for the past two hours. The surprising part is that everyone knows she doesn't like classical music at all. The only person who is interested in this kind of music, is Robin, who is missing now. Helen was at her makeup vanity, staring at herself in the mirror and listening to the music she doesn't like. The only sound that indicated there were living creatures in this house were Rheingold, Bach, Chopin and Mozart. When classical music suddenly stops, Ellen and Abraham give each other a curious glance. Abraham asks her to sneak in her sister's room and find out what is going on? Ellen ponders for a moment. She pauses, picks her personal coffee mug which still has some Nescafe in it and goes to investigate. But she suddenly hears footsteps, as though someone is coming downstairs. Ellen looks at the corridor to see who is coming down. She whispers to her father and says she knows it is her sister Helen coming downstairs after getting fed-up with listening to classical music. Ellen is right.

Helen too joins Abraham and sister in their kitchen. She stops by the kitchen door and stares at her father. Her father asks her if she needs anything or can he help her in any ways? Ellen tells her there is still hot water and she can prepare her a cup of coffee too. But she doesn't respond to any of their questions and only asks where her mother is. She sounds angry at both Charlotte and Abraham. Helen begins complaining and grumbling about the fact that their mother spends most of the day in her bedroom, mourning for her son, who no one actually knows whether he is even dead and they have to mourn. She begins criticizing her mother's behavior, saying Charlotte has forgotten how to live her life. Helen's words about Charlotte are surely harsh and sarcastic. But she notices her dad and sister are not actually looking at her. Their eyes' are directed behind her. She guesses her mother is standing behind her and heard everything she said. Helen turns her head and like she thought, Charlotte is standing

right behind her. She is pale. She has a plate, an empty glass in her hands and is staring at her like ghosts. Standing right behind her, she looks like what movies show as zombies. Charlotte walks passed Hellen and acts as if she hasn't heard any of her comments and complaints. She walks towards the sink directly. Ellen and Abraham say hi, both at the same time. She simply nods at them and begins washing dishes she has in her hands. She is used to taking her food to her room and prefers eating alone these days. Realizing her mother simply ignored her and brushed off whatever she said about her, Helen gets really angry. Her face turns red and begins shouting.

"Of course, the rest of us in this house are not considered worthy human beings to her. Everything is about Robin these days. We hear his name before going to bed and the very first word we hear when we wake-up is also the name Robin, Robin, Robin. We are here also. We are human too. We're your children too. I love Robin, he's my brother and I love him to bits. I worry too. I'm sad too. I'm sure Ellen is the same. But we do not know, read my lips mom, we do not know whether he's dead God forbid. How many days or weeks is this house going to look like a funeral home for heaven's sake mom? Ha dad? I'm talking to you too. You are the same as mom. We are your children too. We also need your love and attention. Oh God kill me and put an end to all this shit."

Helen begins crying and screaming while talking. She continues saying all what she wants to say, criticize and confront her parents with. She does while shouting uncontrollably and shakes out of distress:

"We came out of the same womb, even if, God forbid, Robin is killed in the war, he is gone. Don't you guys think you'll have to stop mourning at some point? Even if it's for your other children's sake? You two are our parents for God's sake, mom, dad. We have no breakfast, no lunch, no dinner, no TV, no fun, no smiling in this house, no joking. Until when do we have to go on like this? Huh? For how long? How much more? How long should poor Robert go from city to city, military base to military base, to find our brother? Answer me. For how many more days, weeks, Months? How long? Why don't you instead think Robin has deserted from army and is hiding somewhere? We all know he is not cut out for war. Don't we? Maybe he has taken refuge in a safe place. Maybe he has filed asylum in a neighboring country or even in Europe somewhere somehow. Why do you always think he's dead? Don't you think

me, my sister and Robert need attention too? Your attention? Our parents' attention. I get depressed when I'm outside and have to get back home. I pray I'm hit with a car before reaching home. So, I will not come back to this ghost house. Everyone's sad, mourning, depressed. Have any of you even asked us, I mean, when is the last time any of you asked us how do we feel? Are we good? Are we ok? Do we need anything? All what you two care, is Robin. Like I said, he's my brother and I love him to death. I'm worried for his well-being. I really am. I cry for him too. But we don't know if anything has happened to him. As if Ellen and I are not part of this house. As if we do not even exist. A monster of sadness and negativity inserts his paws into my whole being as soon as I arrive home. I'm hurt until I go back outside for some reason. Oh God. Shit. To tell with god.

Helen begins cursing, uttering blasphemy and crying when Abraham gets up from the table and goes towards her. He cuddles Helen and tries calming her down by hissing and kissing her head. But she has burst into tears and is definitely not going to calm down that easily. Charlotte has leaned against the sink and is quietly sobbing. She looks as if she has nothing good to say. She keeps quiet. She knows her daughter is right. She is just staring at the floor weeping. Charlotte wipes her tears and goes towards Helen and Abraham. She also cuddles Helen. Helen's sound of crying gets louder when she feels her mom's body attaches to hers after a very long time. Ellen is playing with her fingernails and staring at them. She is just quiet, waiting for her sister, mother and father to have that emotional moment. Helen's father sits her at the kitchen table and sits next to her himself. Her mother too. Helen is now sitting between her parents and opposite Ellen, her sister. Everyone gets quiet for a moment. Ellen slides the tissue box towards her mom, dad and sister. Helen is still crying, but without any sound. Her mother, on the other hand, is weeping loudly as she is really hurt by what fate has brought her family. Now Ellen begins talking:

"Mom. Why are you crying so much? Isn't Helen, right? No. for real. We have absolutely no clue where my brother is. We know nothing mom. I don't honestly understand you guys. The way you mourn, as if you know for sure you've lost somebody. I mean, Helen's right. He may have sought an asylum somewhere in a country. We don't know. Maybe he has gone undercover, under disguise where there's no phone, no internet and he has no means of communicating with us whatsoever. Who knows? He

might have hidden himself somewhere. Where he would stay unknown and unrecognizable until things take turn to a better turn. Robin is a smart boy mom. Or maybe they're under siege in an area of war zone. Or he might have crossed the border, entered Iraqi border and introduced himself as an asylum seeker to an American base. I swear I lose hope in life when I see my family members in such state of mind. Exactly like my sister, when I'm outside the house, I pray something happen, so I'll get to reach home later. Because in here, no matter how positive you think or act, you'll at some point join sadness club. It's for weeks mom has not cooked us a proper food. When was the last time we sat at a table, ate a meal like a real family? You see. Even if Helen and I have some hope and happiness left in us, we lose them when we come across our parents hopeless gestures, hopeless thinking and acting. Look at mom. She resembles a paranormal entity. She looks like a ghost for heaven's sake. White and pale, invisible and sad, just like a ghost lurking in a dark mansion. I mean if she happens to appear in my room at the middle of the night, let me tell you, I'll immediately have a stroke out of fear."

Hearing Ellen's last comment, Helen, Charlotte and Abraham who were crying till now, can no longer control themselves. They burst into laughter at the middle of weeping in sorrow, even Abraham begins laughing at this point. Even their father who is known to be mostly strict and doesn't smile much, begins laughing.

Robert's family members are all together at the kitchen and are laughing for the first time that loud after Robin went missing. Helen and Ellen hear their mother apologizing to them for not paying much attention to them. She says they definitely deserve a better treatment from both her and their father. She kisses them both and asks them to be prepared, as she has decided to cook their favorite food for dinner. She also asks Abraham to be ready as he has to go to the supermarket and buys the ingredients, she needs for cooking their dinner. On the refrigerator door, there is a notepad magnet with a small ball-pen attached to the side of it with a beautiful strand. So, when something amongst food stuff items is finished or about to finish, they would write the item's name on the notepad to remember what groceries they need to shop at the market. She goes towards the fridge's door. Everyone feels better. No one cries anymore. The ambiance has turned towards positive more or less. She asks Helen to write what she tells her. She has planned to cook

her family lasagna. It is everyone's favorite food and honestly, she knows how to cook it well. Moments later, Helen tears the page down and gives it to her father. He gets the page and says he is going to the grocery store in an hour or so to do their shopping and get them all the items they have noted down on the pad. He stands up and walks slowly, goes to the living room and switches the television on. Helen asks her dad not to change the channel to the news channel as when he switched the TV on, a very relaxing music was playing on music channel. He responds by saying yes mam and says he has no intention on listening to news anyways. But he is looking to find daily broadcasting schedule to figure out which channel shows a good movie and what time would it be shown, so we can all sit and watch a movie together and enjoy a real family evening.

Helen is seated quietly on a chair in the kitchen when her mom hugs her from behind, kisses her head and says she wants her to know that she feels no one of her children is better than others in anyway. She tells Hellen she would only understand what she means and how it feels, when she gets married and gives birth to her own children. The only matter that distracts her and attracts most her attention towards itself is Robin's missing fact. Hellen consoles her mother for a moment. Ellen joins the conversation. The three of them begins preparing everything for that evening's meal. Despite the fact it is still middle of the day and they have much time to prepare for dinner, but still, evening's meal is a great alibi for them to spend their every moment together.

\* \* \*

Sammy, Robert and Amer are at a men's clothing store. The store looks quite chic. It is evident a big amount has been spent for its decoration. Sammy comes out of fitting room. He discovers his tuxedo's trousers' leg and his jacket's sleeves are longer than normal, despite everything else fitting his body. The salesman, Robert and Amer, are all waiting for Sammy to exit the fitting room and issue his verdict. Sammy tells the salesman he wants the store tailor to cut his trousers' leg and shorten his jacket's sleeves for him. The salesman smiles and calls one of the store's tailors in. The tailor is busy working on some other piece of clothing at a neighboring section, which is apparently separated from the main store's space. Tailors section door is a bit open and Sammy can see a number of tailors, busy sewing on their professional sewing machines. The tailor reaches Sammy and starts measuring and



marking Sammy's trousers and jacket sleeves. The salesman tells Sammy that his tailor would start fitting his tuxedo after he finishes the project he is already working on. He says Sammy can probably come back and collect his tuxedo the next day in the evening. But Sammy is in a hurry and insists he has to be able to take his tuxedo by maximum the same evening. Robert and Amer support Sammy's demand. They haggle for a while until the salesman and his boss who has joined their bargaining, agree to Sammy's condition. But he insists the tailor is under no circumstance is able to finish working on his tuxedo earlier than sunset. Having no other choice, Sammy and his best friends agree to go back after the sunset to collect Sammy's tuxedo. Robert and Amer have to agree to stay in the city and spend some time somehow, so they can collect Sammy's tuxedo, otherwise, he will be forced them to travel all the way back to Al Thawrah, particularly to collect his tuxedo. So, they just look meaningfully at each other and agree to stay till sunset.

Sammy goes back into the fitting room. He begins trying formal shirts he and Robert have chosen. Amer is seated outside fitting room on a little chair, texting Sara, informing her about every move they make in the city, wherever they go and whatever they do. Robert is standing outside the fitting room, leaning against the fitting room's door frame. He has three shirts with different colors in his hand. A white, sky blue and a very pale pink shirt. He gives the shirts to Sammy one after the other. Sammy tries each shirt to make sure the sizes are correct and their colors fit his face and body shape. He separates the good shirts he wants to buy from others he does not like.

Sammy opens the fitting room's door after trying each shirt to see what Amer and Robert think. He asks Robert to take a picture from him wearing different shirts, so he would see later on how he looks in that particular color and design, because that fitting room is a very tight and small room with a wide mirror which has covered a whole wall out of four walls and Sammy cannot see himself from a desired distance. Sammy tries the last shirt and gets out of the fitting room. He says he is glad he bought the tuxedo, despite it's very high price. Because he believes it is best for Nelly to see him in his tuxedo first time, she sees him after the cemetery incident. Robert and Amer look at one another, speechless, they just nod, not knowing what to say anyways. Amer just looks at Sammy quietly. He tells Sammy to think it over once again before making a payment for the tuxedo. Because

according to him, paying such a big amount for a tuxedo he is going to wear just for a few hours is not a logical move. Robert approves Amer and says he thinks Nelly is not even going to notice how expensive his tuxedo is and how much has it cost. But Sammy is not hearing any of it. He insists he wants to wear something, some tuxedo, which looks and is better than other tuxedos, whether Nelly is going to attend the engagement or not. Sammy wants to make Amer and Robert understand he wants to wear his tuxedo for Amer's wedding party, when he and Robert are going to be Amer's best men, not for impressing Nelly.

Sammy says since Nelly is going to appear at Amer and Sara's engagement, he is going to wear the same tuxedo for both their engagement and wedding ceremonies, just changing the shirt and tie. Robert and Amer finally get what Sammy's plan is. But the reason they insist to convince Sammy not to buy the tuxedo, is it's price, which in fact, is four times other normal good-looking tuxedos. Particularly because it is made in Italy. That's all. They both soon realize what they tell Sammy doesn't change his mind. He wants to buy the tuxedo and nothing and no one is going to change his mind. So, they decide to let it go. Sammy provides the salesman with his cell-phone number and requests him to contact him whenever fitting his tuxedo is done. He pays for what he has chosen to buy, a tuxedo, t-shirts, two neck ties, a bow tie, two pairs of socks, a white and a black. He pays and the three of them exit the expensive men's wear store. They congratulate Sammy for his nice shopping.

Sammy asks Amer to take him to another mall where he can buy a few t-shirts and a pair of shoes too. Amer pauses for a moment, ponders and remembers something. He tells Sammy he knows exactly where to take him to buy t-shirts and shoes. He says there isn't a long distance from where they are to the shopping center he knows. He proposes they walk to the shopping center instead of going towards his car. He says they have to walk for about five minutes to reach the shopping center. Sammy and Robert accept to walk towards the shopping center Amer has in mind.

Robert and Amer begin talking about Hanieh and Sara. Sammy is quiet thinking. A subject has come into his mind moments ago and he knows he is going to forget something important. He pushes himself to remember what that subject was? It is an important and critical subject. "Oh God, what is it?" Sammy asks himself. He suddenly remembers what it was. He remembers

he has to, like every afternoon, machine the metal part and wait behind this window to look for Nelly to cross, so he would see her. These are what Sammy does every day, especially in the afternoon, and everyone in the house knows it. He attends to machining the rifle's metal part before five forty-five and exactly at that time, he picks his binocular and looks out his windows for Nelly.

Seeing Nelly, even for a few seconds, satisfies Sammy's eyes and soul for the day. He is really in love with her. Strange, but truth. Thinking about these, Sammy takes his steps quicker unconsciously and unintentionally to finish shopping and go back home quicker. But his legs suddenly walk slower. He thinks, first of all, he has to stay in the city till evening for fitting his clothes are done. Secondly, if Hanieh and Nelly are going to visit Sara in her house, that means Nelly has no intention of attending his guitar lessons that day. Besides, machining the metal rifle part is almost done. The only operation left on it, is sanding and softening the part and finally assembling it on the rifle at last, that's all. So, there is no rush Sammy thinks. He can neither stand and watch Nelly crossing the intersection, nor sit and watch machining the rifle's metal part. So, rest assured, he can do his shopping and whatever else he intends to do that day. Smile forms on his face.

They arrive at the shopping center Amer had told him earlier. Robert tells Amer they better sit in a coffee shop and drink a cup of strong coffee, while Sammy walk around the center looking at shops and finding what he needs to buy. He believes it helps them both stay awake and energetic. Amer knows Robert is right. He has a point Amer thinks. Sammy is walking a few steps behind them and doesn't hear what they are speaking about. Amer tells Sammy what he and Robert have decided to do while he does his window shopping. Sammy nods and sits on a bench in the shopping center. He lifts his trousers leg and asks Robert and Amer to tighten his knee strap before they separate. Robert makes the initiative like he does most of the time. He places his cell-phone back into his shirt's pocket, kneels down and fixes Sammy's knee strap. They separate from Sammy and go towards the coffee shop while Sammy heads towards the corridor, looking at store's displays at the left and right side.

Amer and Robert reach the coffee shop, they choose a table and take a sit. Robert picks a magazine immediately from customer's magazine and newspaper box, which is next to their table. He begins turning its pages and looking at its

contents. The waiter attends to their table moments later and gets their order. They both want to have cappuccino. Amer has relaxed, laying on the sofa, laying his head back and sighing. He has his eyes closed and breathing deeply, blowing off some steam. Robert closes the magazine. He glances at people who are walking, crossing at his left and right side. He frowns looking at Amer, as though something deeply bothers him. He calls Amer. Being exhausted, Amer makes a Humm sound in respond to Robert calling him. He sounds like a cow more than himself. Robert asks him in a surprised way hearing the sound coming out of his throat:

"Dude," says Robert worried and anxious, "I mean, like what if Nelly says she doesn't even like Sammy to begin with? Ha? What? You do know what I mean. What if she says she does not like Sammy, while our friend is doing all the shopping, spending all the money, which we both know is over and above what he can afford. I pity him you know? So much man. Shit."

Like a bucket of cold water is purred on him, Amer opens his eyes and sits straight hearing Robert's question. He gazes at Robert with wide open eyes:

"Yeah. You really had to fuck my mood, didn't you, asshole?" Asks Amer growling, "I have to be honestly been thinking about the same shit today several times. But what can we tell him? At least I can't tell him shit. Well, he said he had the plan of buying a tuxedo before all these. He said he wanted to buy it so he would wear it in my wedding party also. Now, he'll wear it for the engagement ceremony too, since Nelly will be there. But you're right man. But what can we do? Why do you have to shit in my fucking mood now? You Moron. I was just relaxing. Thank you, shithead."

The waiter places their cappuccino on the table for them and leaves. Amer lifts his cup and smells it. He places the cup back in its coaster:

"I actually do not want him to be disappointed also," continues Amer, "And I'm sure you don't want this either. That's what I'm certain about. But I don't know. I don't know what to say really."

Robert is playing with his phone and taking selfies from himself. He thinks for a moment and says he thinks it is best if they prepare Sammy's mind for every possibility somehow. Even for hearing that Nelly does not like him. Both Robert and Amer are aware of Sammy's sensitive emotions. They have

no doubt Sammy is going to be destroyed hearing Nelly does not like him or hearing anything else that indicates he is not going to have nelly. They know that would have the biggest and worst impact on Sammy. They know it is the first and the most serious time Sammy has shown such interest in a girl in his entire life. They are certain Nelly is Sammy's first love. Even in his age.

Most men experience their first love in a much younger age. But it is different in Sammy's case. The low self-confidence he has because of his disability and limp, has caused him a fear to pursue his emotional dreams and desires his whole adult life. It has caused him to prevent addressing his natural manly desires, like falling in love, approaching the opposite sex and establishing a relationship. This has kept Sammy a bachelor his whole adult life. But now, he has fallen in love and despite all his lack of self-confidence, he has come to the conclusion that he has to come face to face with the girl of his dreams and directly express himself to her for the very first time in his life.

Robert and Amer think it is probably Sammy's last chance to get out of bachelor land and join the couple land. This is probably his last chance to have a serious relation with another person from opposite sex. If Sammy's efforts to begin a relationship with Nelly does not result success, God knows if and when is Sammy going to get to like another girl as much as he does Nelly. Amer and Robert think about all these. They are quiet and worried for the future and emotions of their best friend. They are seriously thinking of a solution to come up with, by which they can get him prepared for anything. Any answer may Nelly have for him, whether being a yes or no, but first, they have to find out whether Hanieh and Sara mentioned anything to Nelly. Amer looks at Robert and asks if he wants to ask if they have mentioned Sammy yet? Sammy is lucky that he has two committed friends, none of whom wriggles out on him.

"Leave it for now," suggests Robert, "We'll think about it and deal with it later. Nelly has not said no yet. I don't want to contact her constantly and follow up Nelly and ask her what happened, ask her what Nelly said or how she reacted. It's not cool dude. We just got to know each other. Our relation is too young. No fucking way. I don't want to keep asking her, following up if they mentioned to Nelly anything and what if they did? I don't know how to put it man. I don't want to keep bothering her for this matter. Besides, they're

enjoying their time now. Joking and laughing and having fun. I don't want to be a burden. And not actually talk about ourselves, about myself and her, talk about Sammy and Nelly. No dude. Think about it. Would you do that if you were in my shoes? I'll ask her in the evening. I'll bring it up smartly in the evening. Actually, I thought of texting her and asking her if she was okay."

Amer keeps on nodding while Robert talks. He agrees with Robert. He thinks Robert has a valid point. Worrying about Nelly's reaction and its impact on Sammy is pointless at that time still. Amer says he agrees with Robert and even himself has decided not to barge in, call Sara and bother her while she has guests and is having fun with her friends. But still, both Amer and Robert are quite concerned for the outcome of Sara and Hanieh's strategy to bring up Sammy and see what Nelly's reaction would be.

"Yup," replies Amer, "You are right my man. Leave it. Forget it. Don't ask her anything now. She's a girl after all. She might think Sammy and Nelly are actually the reason you've shown interest in her to begin with. I also sent Sara a text just say I hope she enjoys her little gathering. That's all. In the evening, when we get to talk, if she does not mention anything about Nelly and what she thinks about Sammy, I may ask her myself. You don't do it, don't ask Hanieh even in the evening. It's dangerous. But I'm sure Hanieh will tell you about it herself. But regardless, like I said, you don't even bring it up dude. I'll find out myself."

"Yeah, you are right," replies Robert, "You do that. We'll sit and brainstorm about Sammy later. Let's see what was going on first. Let's see what she was saying about Sammy today. We'll see."

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Sara is placing cookies in a crystal platter. Expecting Hanieh and Nelly, she is preparing everything for her guests arrival immediately after she finishes having lunch. She has arranged the fruits in a big beautiful crystal bowl, has prepared coasters, forks and knives, waiting for her friends to arrive. Sara's mom is seated on a little wooden chair in the kitchen, observing her daughter's accuracy and attention in details. Sara goes to the dish dryer on the sink, takes coffee cups one by one and wipes them clean, places them on a plate to be ready to use. When she finishes though, she feels tired and

thinks about taking a quick nap, so she'll be fresh when her guests arrive. So, she lays on the couch at the living room and closes her eyes. She tells her mother she is relaxing for a bit before getting ready, put make up and change.

\* \* \*

Daniel is standing at the front door of his yard, holding the door, calling Nelly out and requesting her to bring him his cell-phone with her as he has forgotten it inside. He leaves the door to close itself and goes towards his vehicle. He sits in, puts the key inside the ignition and starts his car engine. But the car seems like it doesn't want to start. He pauses for a moment and tries once again, to no avail. He suddenly remembers he forgot to fill up his tank. Daniel hits his head to the steering wheel a few times, murmurs and grumbles, blaming himself for being an idiot forgetful stupid man. Nelly who has exited the house, stops after taking a few steps towards her father's car, and checks her purse to see if she has taken everything. She continues walking after she is assured everything is okay. In the meanwhile, Daniel pulls out a 4-litter petrol gallon which he has hidden in his pick-up trunk for emergency reasons, finds a long dirty funnel from the trunk and begins pouring the petrol from the gallon to his tank. Noticing what her dad is doing, Nelly gets a bit pissed off with him. She stops a few steps before reaching the car. Daniel notices his daughter standing there, staring at him angrily and thinks she is worried she is not going to make it on her appointment on time. So, he tells her not to worry as transferring the petrol to the tank is not going to take more than 2 minutes. He removes the funnel from his tank's cover and throws it back at the trunk along with the empty 4-liter gallon. He glances at Nelly, signals to her he is done and they can move already. Daniel sits behind the steering wheel first. Nelly sits next to him and Daniel says as he told her, it did not take even two minutes to cheer his daughter up. But Nelly gives a very meaningful look to her father and says she was actually not worried if they were going to be late, but she was totally against the thoughtless act of keeping petrol, a very flammable liquid, in the vehicle. Nelly explains she has watched many documentaries in television and internet about hazards of keeping petrol inside a vehicle. Daniel is quiet and of course speechless. He cannot justify his dangerous practice. She is right he thinks. Nelly makes her dad promise and swear he is never going to repeat that mistake. Daniel is nodding and coming to

conclusion how close his daughter's comportment and behaviors are becoming to her mother's.

Nelly is becoming Eva's younger version, Daniel thinks. Daniel apologizes for delaying her for her appointment. He turns the ignition again and starts the vehicle at last. Nelly takes her dad's cell-phone she has brought him from their house and places it in front of him on the dashboard. But she immediately changes her mind and places it on her father's lap, saying she is afraid thieves would snatch cell-phone or other valuable items from a vehicle, even on move when the glass is pulled down. Those kinds of thieves are known as biking snatchers. Daniel places his phone between the two seats, where no one can in fact snatch it that easily. There is a petrol pump on the way. Daniel slows down a little bit. Nelly looks at him seriously if he really wants to stop and fill-up the tank? But Daniel shakes his head and says no in response. When they go further, they both realize how long the petrol line is and how many vehicles are waiting for their turns to fill up their car tanks. Nelly and Daniel look at each other and burst into laughter spontaneously. Because they both have realized if Daniel had driven his car towards the petrol pump's entrance, they would have had no choice but to stay on the line for hours. They would have been stock for God knows how long.

It is apparent that most of the vehicles in the petrol pump were travelling. As they have roof-racks installed on the top of their cars and have loaded their luggage and some boxes. It is evident they have carried their life with them. Some vehicles have even over loaded their trunk, so in order to close their trunks, they actually had to use a belt or a piece of rope to keep their trunk closed. Daniel has seen such things before, as he is outdoors mostly working, but it is new to Nelly. She rarely goes out and if she does, she has a particular route, going to her school every now and then and visiting her guitar instructor. So, she does not see much in her route. Seeing travelling people is interesting to Nelly. Nelly is really surprised to see so many travelers lining up at the petrol pump. Daniel notices nelly's shocked gesture looking at those vehicles:

"You see sweetheart," asks Daniel, "Poor people. They're all running away. I just pray for them. I hope they have somewhere to go. Otherwise, they'll all be wanderers, homeless with no choice, no plan and nowhere to go. I'll have to remember to fill the tank before we move."



"Midnight is the best time I guess." Replies Nelly. There will be much less people waiting. Don't you think papa?"

Daniel and Nelly arrive at Al Darrah bank moments later. Nelly jumps out of the car and begins looking around to see if she can find Hanieh somewhere. She looks at all directions with her very acute eyes. But there is no sign of her. Nelly thinks it is best to give her a call and inform her she has arrived Al Darrah bank already. But a taxi stops near them on the street and Hanieh gets out before Nelly calls her. Hanieh pays the fair and goes towards Nelly and Daniel. Nelly and Hanieh hug and kiss each other. They are so noisy and screaming happily to see each other. Daniel witnesses them hugging and kissing each other from the mirror of his car as he is seated in the car. He remembers days when Nelly and Hanieh spent most of their time together, mainly at his house. Daniel notices they are in each other's arms for a long time. It means they miss one another very much and have a lot to talk. Nelly leads Hanieh towards her dad's car. Daniel exits the car when they get closer. Hanieh says hello and Daniel replies with the same while having a mild smile on his lips. Everybody sits in the truck and Daniel drives away. Since seeing Hanieh after very long time, Daniel cannot really stop smiling. Nelly notices her father's never-ending smile and looks at him curiously. Daniel begins explaining the reason, after noticing Nelly's questioning looks. He says he cannot believe both his daughter and her friend have grown up that much since he saw Hanieh last and he believes they have turned out to become very polite young ladies. He also says how time has flown amazes him and makes him smile.

Hanieh and Nelly hobnob with each other, have fun joking and talking about funny moments and memories both had when Nelly again notices her dad smiling again. Daniel is unaware he is smiling. He glances at the mirror and sees himself smiling. Nelly's right he figures. Daniel says he is reminded of old times. That's probably what's making him smile unwillingly. He says he is remembering the time both Nelly and Hanieh were kids, that they are reunited now and begin their old friendship and that makes him happy, therefore, he smiles. Hanieh asks Daniel what differences can he see in her. Daniel says he believes both her and Nelly's faces are exactly the same as when they were kids. But they only look more matured and behave more like adults. Hanieh and Nelly laugh after

hearing Daniel's point of view about them. Daniel notices they still have their childish girlish laughter and giggles.

Hanieh guides Daniel towards Sara's house. She tells him where to go every few seconds. But Al Darrah, being a small town, almost all people know where's where. So, Daniel has immediately recognized the address, when Hanieh mentioned it at the beginning. He almost has an idea whereabouts of Sara's house. It is not long before Daniel stops his vehicle next to Sara's place. Hanieh and Nelly thank Daniel. He asks Nelly what time does she want him to come to pick them up before they say goodbye and enter Sara's house. But Hanieh replies before Nelly has a chance to think. She tells Daniel he doesn't have to worry about picking them up anytime soon. She says they are going to call him half hour before they decide to leave. They say goodbye and Daniel heads back towards home. He can guess, from how much Hanieh and Nelly spoke in the car, that separating them is something next to impossible anytime soon. Specially there is going to be another girl, exactly talkative like them, called Sara, who also has so many things to say after a long time of being separated.

Daniel drives back home, so he would continue assisting Eva and Ezra. He reviews his memories he had when Nelly is younger and what Nelly, Hanieh and probably Sara did those days.

Hanieh and Nelly are standing outside Sara's house after Daniel dropped them. They fix their appearance a bit. Hanieh rings the bell. A few seconds later, Sara comes to the door personally to greet them and leads her guests in. The sound of laughter, joking and welcoming covers the whole alley when Sara, Hanieh and Nelly hug and kiss each other. The three of them have met after a long time. They enter the house, where Sara's mom is expecting them, standing at the entrance door. She has also come to welcome Hanieh and Nelly. They say hello and pay their respects to Sara's mother, who also knows them from long ago, just like Nelly and Hanieh's parents do. She leads the way and leads everyone to guest house. Hanieh, Nelly and Sara take their seats on the guest room's sofas. Sara's mom goes to the kitchen moments later and calls Sara to the kitchen too. Sara joins her mother at the kitchen, while Nelly and Hanieh peek at their surroundings and speak about differences they notice since the last time they were there. They suddenly hear Sara's voice when she yells from the kitchen, asking whether they prefer drinking tea or coffee? They both reply and say they feel like having a great cup of Sara brewed coffee. Sara adds a half teaspoon of cocoa powder

in her coffee jar when it is brewing and this spreads a very nice aroma and Sara is known for being the inventor of that recipe. Nelly requests a glass of water in advance. Sara joins Hanieh and Nelly a few seconds later, holding a silver-plated plate with water, milk, sugar, tea spoons and some little cookies. She offers Nelly the glass of water holding the plate in front of her and she offers Hanieh as well. She puts a cup for herself and another for her mother, only then she sits and seems ready to talk and be with them already.

Sara's mom asks how Hanieh and Nelly's parents are first? She asks them both to send them her regards. Nelly and Hanieh respond very respectfully to Sara's mom. Sara stands up again and goes back towards the kitchen yet again. This time she brings the crystal plate of cookies and pastries to the guests room with her and offers everyone of course. They all begin talking while drinking their coffee and eating cookies and pastries. They speak about Sara's engagement coming up. Nelly finds this as an opportunity to formally congratulate and wish her a prosperous happy married life. She asks Sara in a naughty way how did she and her fiancé meet? Sara begins explaining first day she has met Amer in details, while being over excited about the whole thing. She explains their story so well, that even her own mother is listening so carefully despite the fact she knows and has probably heard that story a dozen of times at the very least. Hanieh too has heard her story in many occasions. But Nelly asked Sara and she is explaining to her. So, she has no other choice but to hear it again like everyone else in the room. When Sara explained A to Z of how she and Amer got to see, like and know each other, she starts counting Amer's good deeds, manners and how nice he is. Just like any other girl does about her "to be husband". She goes on and on about Amer's kind heart, him being a true gentleman, and a great listener.

Nelly notices Sara's mom that her facial expressions are changing when her daughter speaks nicely and highly of her future husband, as if she does not agree with all what Sara is saying about her fiancé. She looks as though she believes her daughter is exaggerating when talking about Amer's good deeds somehow, and she disagrees with some of what her daughter says about her fiancé. Nelly notices when Sara looks at her mother when she is talking about Amer's good points, her mom nods with hesitation, so her daughter wouldn't get offended in the presence of her close friends. From that Nelly can figure, Sara's mother does not seem very happy with her daughter's choice and is simply forced by Sara or has no say

in the matter for some reason. Probably Sara has forced her to agree with her marrying Amer, Nelly thinks.

A few minutes after Sara says all the good things about Amer, their conversation takes a more girlish younger women's turn. And this makes Sara's mother realize she doesn't have to sit with her daughter and her friends any longer as she feels she is making her young guests including her daughter uncomfortable. She notices they watch carefully what they are saying and how they want to say it while she's sitting with them. She immediately realizes she has no reason to be sitting with girls who are all her daughter's age. So, she decides to give them some space, before causing further inconvenience for them. So, she says one more time how happy she is that Nelly and Hanieh have made them visiting their house. She asks Hanieh and Nelly feel at home and they are more than welcome to drop by anytime they feel like. She says she has something to do and apologizes and leaves her daughter with her friends and heads towards her bedroom. Sara, Nelly and Hanieh feel no more obligation to speak formally any longer after Sara's mother leaves them alone. As soon as her mother leaves, Sara begins talking quietly, admitting the fact her parents were not absolutely supportive of her marriage with Amer initially. But they are left with no choice, when Amer coped with all conditions her dad had set for him to marry his daughter. Amer has overcome the conditions he had set for him to give his blessings. Sara continues by saying she is waiting for a few days left to her engagement date with Amer, so they'll be formally and legally announced engaged and it is done and over with at last.

She stops talking suddenly after saying the sentence about her engagement ceremony, as if she has remembered something spontaneously. She gets up and says she is going to be back in a second. Sara runs towards her room and takes an envelope from her book shelf. The envelope is in pink and has so many flowers designed on it. The text it says is an invitation letter. She opens the envelope, picks a ball pen and writes on it Nelly's name and family name with a very beautiful handwriting. She returns to the guests room and joins Hanieh and Nelly. Sara hands the invitation letter to Nelly and says in a jokingly way she is now formally invited to attend her engagement ceremony and its party in the same evening. Nelly does not initially get what the envelope indicates and why has Sara given it to her. She opens the envelope wondering what it contains. There is a cardboard kind of a card inside. She removes the card and begins reading. Only she gets to

understand what purpose the envelope carries. It is a formal invitation letter. Nelly thanks Sara smiling. She gets up, hugs Sara and kisses her. She assures Sara she is going to attend her engagement, both the ceremony and the evening party. Once again, Nelly congratulates Sara and wishes her a great couple's life.

Sara smiles, thanks Nelly and heads towards the kitchen. One more time she brings coasters, knife and forks she has washed along with the crystal fruit bowl, so her guests would have some fruit too. Hanieh and Nelly keep on telling her not to bother herself offering them fruit and other edibles. But this is against Syrian people's principles in terms of guests and visitors visiting them in their house. Sara's parents have taught her to value her guests and offers them or share what she has with her guests. So, despite Hanieh and Nelly being Sara's close old friends, still they are considered guests and guests have to have a good time and enjoy their host's hospitality according to what Sara has been by her parents. Besides, Sara loves hospitality. She loves treating guests and making them have fun. Probably because she wants to somehow prove to her friends that she is prepared running her own house and she is ready to treat and take a good care of her own guests when she is married and moved to her own house. When Sara holds the fruit bowl towards Hanieh, she blinks at Sara and signs at her room, meaning she wants Sara to take them to her own room, so, they would bring up Sammy with her. Sara gets what Hanieh is trying to tell her. She whispers, "I know. Wait Hanieh."

\* \* \*

Sammy checks the shops displays one after another carefully to find t-shirt styles he is looking for. He has already made up his mind and knows what he is looking for to purchase. But still, if he finds something else, he likes by any chance, he is not going to waste any time. He would have immediately bought it. He suddenly remembers Robin's will, the envelope he has in his pocket while window shopping. He is even convincing himself it is okay to open the envelope and reads what's written inside. He is so curious to read what Robin has written for his family, but every time he wants to, he changes his mind, morality takes over and stops him doing so. He keeps on walking and searching store displays, until he sees what he wants displayed at one of the shops. Sammy enters the store immediately. A thin small girl welcomes him. The girl has so much make-up on and she is dressed to kill. Sammy

says hello and asks where the t-shirt section is situated. The girl guides Sammy towards the section in which t-shirts have been orderly arranged. When Sammy takes a few steps towards that section, he turns his head and surprisingly notices the girl is following him. So, he gives the girl an artificial smile and turns his head back to the front. The girl is sweet-spoken but a talkative girl. It is obvious she has been hired by that store particularly for her public relation skills. She really knows how to treat customers.

The girl follows Sammy up to the section where t-shirts are. She asks Sammy to stand facing her for a moment. Sammy does not know what to say. But he does as the girl asks. She gives a complete look at Sammy head to toe, and tells Sammy she is a fashion designer herself and is quite good in setting clothes for men specially. She claims she is well-experienced, but Sammy has his doubts still. She looks at Sammy head to toe again, but this time, it takes her around fifteen to twenty seconds. Sammy is getting bored already. The girl suddenly stops staring and asks him to follow her. The girl picks a few t-shirts which all have almost similar colors. She gives them to Sammy and asks him to take them inside the fitting room, wear them one by one, so she can give her opinion about each. Sammy takes the t-shirts inside and wears the first one. She's right, Sammy thinks. It really looks good on him. He wears the second and the third. They look good on him, all of them as a matter of fact. He opens the fitting room's door a little, so he would ask the girl a question. He peeks outside, but finds no sign of the girl. He sees the girl somewhere farther he expects. She has chosen a jean and a cotton pair of trousers and coming towards him. Sammy forgets what he wants to ask the girl after seeing the girl coming towards him. Sammy wears the two pairs of trousers, and he absolutely loves them on him. With the assistance of the girl, Sammy gets two pairs of trousers and four t-shirts which have all been fitted and set by the girl in terms of color and takes them to the cashier. There are three others also waiting to pay. Sammy just remembers what he wanted to ask the girl when he was at the fitting room. He wanted to ask her about t-shirts' price. But it is too late, he thinks. He is at the cashier and has to pay already. Sammy is a bit nervous. The store looks like it's items are expensive and Sammy has a limited budget for buying his clothes. Sammy is thinking about the amount he has to pay for what he and the girl chose when he hears the cashier saying next. He gets even more nervous knowing he has to pay now. But when he drops all what he has bought for the cashier to

calculate how much he has to pay; the cashier tells him they are on sale. By choosing two t-shirts, Sammy is getting one t-shirt free and by purchasing one pair of trousers, he has to pay half for the second one. What a relief Sammy thinks. The stores' items are expensive of course. But not as expensive as Sammy cannot pay.

Sammy pays the cashier. She throws Sammy's receipt, his t-shirts and trousers in a white plastic case, smiles and hands them over to him. Sammy exits the store after thanking the girl. He is happy and excited he has proper clothes now and can meet Nelly and begin his relationship with her. Despite paying a big amount, Sammy is glad as he thinks he has purchased what he needs to wear when meeting Nelly. Sammy takes longer steps to reach the coffee shop faster to join Robert and Amer. Before Sammy reaches the coffee shop, he sees Amer from far. He is playing with his smart-phone. He also sees Robert sitting on a sofa opposite to Amer, turning a magazine's page. He joins them happy and excited. He sits and orders an espresso immediately. Amer puts his phone on the table and snatches the plastic case from Sammy's hand. He is curious to see what Sammy has bought. Robert too throws the magazine on the table, waiting for Amer to empty the plastic case. Amer takes the t-shirts out and their payment receipt gets tossed out too. Amer picks the receipt and looks at it, a long meaningful look:

"Oh. Goddamnit Sammy," says Amer frowning, "Look how much you've spent. Fuck man."

Amer is very upset because of the amount Sammy had spent over t-shirts and his two trousers. But Sammy ignores Amer's attitude and says there is no problem as he wants to buy what he actually likes. Amer keeps on remonstrating him, accusing him of being an over spender. Robert reacts differently though. He asks Amer not to jump on conclusions. He picks t-shirts one after the other and looks at them carefully. Sammy has Amer and Robert's re-action surveillance to see whether they would like what they see and what their reaction is in general. Seeing what he has bought in the beginning, Amer's face changes slowly. He is no longer frowning, as if he is also getting to like what Sammy has bought. He has bought some beautiful pieces of clothes and Amer has begun to realize that as well. Amer finally begins talking. He admits Sammy has bought nice t-shirts. But he still believes he has over paid. Robert thinks differently. He congratulates Sammy and says Sammy has done the right thing. Because there are a

reason Sammy's t-shirts are expensive and the reason behind that is the quality of his t-shirts and trousers. That's why those clothes are called branded clothing.

In Robert's opinion, it is better to have a set of branded clothes rather than having ten sets of low-quality clothes. He says what Sammy purchased are not going to get worn down easily, because of the quality and craftsmanship used in making them. He says Sammy can keep on washing and wearing them for a very long time without worrying they get destroyed. Robert says cheaper clothes which obviously have a much lower quality, would look good and new only the first few times and lose shape afterwards.

The waiter serves Sammy with his espresso. Hastening to Robert's explanations, Sammy drinks his espresso. He glances at his phone's clock. It is still so much time before sunset. He thinks for a moment and proposes watching a film in the theater located at the same shopping mall they are in. Amer and Robert give it a think, look at one another. Amer is the first one to accept Sammy's proposal, as he can sleep in the theatre in case, he doesn't like the movie. Robert nods and the three of them get up and walk towards the ticket office.

Aside from speaking about Amer, his love and commitment towards his future wife Sara, how nice and kind he is, Hanieh, Nelly and Sara speak about different subjects of life, specially society's critical situation, hot and common topics, such as the war against Isis, their threats, people leaving Al Darrah to seek a new and safe beginning. They talk and talk for a few minutes until Sara cleverly asks Nelly if she is interested to watch her pictures with her fiancé, Amer? Sara's main objective is obviously to pull Nelly to her room and bring up Sammy with her. Knowing Sara's intention already, Hanieh jumps in immediately and says she is very much interested. Sara's savviness pays off. Exactly after Hanieh shows interest to see Sara and Amer's pictures, Nelly also says it is nice to see their pictures. Probably she thinks it isn't polite to say otherwise. So, Sara stands up and suggests it is best they move to her room as her computer is there and also, they are going to have a bit more privacy too. Hanieh and Nelly follow Sara to her room. They enter her room and shut the door behind them. Sara sits at her computer's desk, Hanieh sits on Sara's bed next to her computer, and finally, Nelly pulls a little wooden chair next to Sara and takes her seat. Sara opens a picture file and starts showing her photos with her fiancé one by one and explains a little about each



picture, says where they took that picture, why they thought they had to take that picture, etc. A few minutes pass. It is apparent Hanieh and Sara look as if they are slowly preparing to execute their pre-decided plan. The plan is crystal clear and their objective has been set already. They have to show her Sammy's photo and reveal the secret, say how Sammy feels about her after getting to meet her at the cemetery, after giving an almost detailed introduction about him, his life and how good he is in general. Sara and Hanieh look into each other's eyes as though they are exchanging a thousand words as they both know why they have gathered in Sara's room anyways. They speak just by looking at one another. Until Sara winks at Hanieh the way Nelly wouldn't see, and asks why she didn't bring Nelly along when she went to the banquet? Sara immediately starts her acting performance, looks at Hanieh:

"Should we tell her? asks Sara, "Or later? Too soon? Never mind. We'll tell her later on."

Hanieh looks a mysterious look at Nelly and says they are going to share an important matter with her in a while. Seeing Hanieh mysterious way of looking and smiling at her, Nelly's sense of curiosity rises.

"Wait a minute," says Nelly with a suspicious smile, "What's going on here? Why are you girls being so mysterious? I mean you both look and sound and seem you're up to something suspicious. What banquet? What are you going to tell me in a while?"

Hanieh and Sara, and even Nelly herself burst into laughter when Nelly finishes talking. Answering what Nelly asked is the perfect opportunity to introduce Sammy and telling Nelly all about him, Sara and Hanieh think. So, they give a more serious look to each other and make each other understand it is the right time to say whatever they want to tell Nelly about Sammy already. Hanieh begins talking. She is ingenuitously wise and begins explaining:

"Nothing. We're kidding you," replies Hanieh, "I'll tell you right now. We are trying to make you suspicious. It is a prank actually. What happened, is we were invited to a banquet. It was held to appreciate some of Al Darrah's elite residents for their achievements in different fields. The organizers had invited those elite members, along with their families. Of course, there were many others too, like some government

officials had brought their families along. The organizers and their family members and many others. It was a great luxury banquet, with great buffet and international food menu. Sara is going to show you the pictures now."

Sara begins showing the banquet's pictures one by one, while Hanieh describes each photo.

"Anyhow," continues Hanieh, "We were also invited through one of the elite residents of Al Darrah called Mr. Sammy Samaha. Now, who is Mr. Sammy? He is Amer, Sara's fiancé's cousin and one of his two best friends in this world. Because they're actually three inseparable best buddies. One of them like I said is Sara's fiancé, Amer. The second one is a guy called Robert, which I'm going to tell you about, and finally the third one is Sammy. They are three best friends, like me, you and Sara. Now, why was Sammy chosen as one of Al Darrah's elite residents? Because Sammy and Robert, are professional target shooters. They both have achieved championship cups. Sammy has won a prize in a target shooting tournament held in Beijing china a few days back. Robert has also won a prize, but since only Sammy is an Al Darrah resident, he was the only one obviously chosen as an elite Al Darrah resident.

Both Hanieh and Sara have realized from the way Nelly listens without even blinking, that they have successfully gotten her full attention, plus her sense of curiosity, and since they know it is already the right time, they begin talking about Sammy more. Sara tells Nelly about Sammy being well-read and studious. Hanieh tells her about how family man he is. Hanieh talks about his persistence, perseverance, and Sara says about him being objective oriented. While Sara speaks of Sammy's kind heart, Hanieh speaks about him being such a nice person. Both Sara and Hanieh invest their energy on introducing Sammy the way he is without any exaggeration, good, kind hearted gentleman who know and can differentiate between liking and loving and lust. From what Hanieh and Sara have figured, and from what Amer and Robert have told them, they know Sammy lacks self-esteem, self-confidence because of his disability and limp. But he has gotten to routinely see Nelly, fallen in love with her, and now he doesn't know what to do. But since they know he is not having of any evil intentions, they think it is their duty as a fellow human to do something in order to help him, so he would experience sweetness and bitterness of love too. While talking about Sammy, Sara finds one of his photos and shows it to Nelly. Nelly is carefully listening to what they say about Sammy.

But she frowns and looks at Sammy's photo curiously when Sara shows his picture. She knows she has met Sammy before, but don't remember when and where.

"He's the one," continues Hanieh, "He made an amazingly cool speech at the banquet where everyone had frozen on their seats listening. His speech was truly inspiring."

Sara nods confirming Hanieh's opinion. Hanieh plays Sammy's speech on her cell-phone. Nelly takes her phone and holds it in front of her own face, so she can properly see the whole speech. Nelly thinks very hard to remember when and where she has seen Sammy before? Sammy looks familiar, Nelly thinks. She absolutely loves Sammy's speech. She nods while watching Sammy's speech. She notices Sammy limping when exiting the stage. She feels sorry for Sammy and asks if he is paralyzed? Everyone is quiet for a few seconds. The three of them face each other while seated. Hanieh and Sara reply to Nelly by telling her Sammy's accident he had when he was a kid. They tell her the whole story. They describe Sammy as a decent, educated, persistent and persevere guy. They tell Nelly about how he lost his father, that he is a good mechanical engineering college student and the fact that even his limp has not stopped him achieving his goals and getting to his dreams, even in target shooting as a sport activity. Hanieh and Sara tell Nelly whatever they, as girls, think Nelly should know about Sammy in advance, but Nelly is still pondering where she has met Sammy before. Nelly returns Hanieh's cell-phone back to her.

"Oh, poor guy. What a speech," says Nelly with an alas tone, pitting Sammy, "He said so many good things. It is obvious he has suffered a lot in his life. Don't you think? But yeah. Like your guys said, he's not disabled, like paralyzed or something. He does not limp that obvious."

Sara and Hanieh are under the impression they are getting closer and closer to what they hoped to achieve. They agree with Nelly about Sammy, his speech and limp. They know they have gotten themselves involved in a very sensitive matter. From one hand they know Nelly is not easy and comfortable about opposite sex after what happened to her, and from another hand they are well-aware of Sammy's eagerness to establish a contact and a relationship with Nelly, no matter what. And he thinks of her day and night, regardless everything is absolutely depended upon what Nelly thinks of him. Everything is depended on her reaction to hearing how

Sammy feels about her. Since seeing Sammy in Hanieh's clip of Sammy's speech, Nelly's curiosity has gotten more and more until she can wait no longer:

"Girls," says Nelly frowning curiously, "This Sammy guy's face is crazily familiar. It's now about an hour I'm thinking where I have seen him before? Where and when?"

Sara and Hanieh give another mysterious look at each other. Nelly's full attention is fixated on a picture of Sammy on Sara's monitor screen, thinking hard to figure out where she has seen Sammy before. She notices Hanieh and Sara's mysterious and suspicious behavior, looking at each other, after few moments passes in silence between the three:

"What's it with you two?" asks Nelly, "Why the hell do you look this mysterious as if hiding something from me? Oh, for God's sake. Tell me."

Hanieh can't keep herself from laughing:

"Wow. chill out," says Hanieh laughing, "I'll tell you now. We know where you saw Sammy. You keep on saying you've met him before. You've met him at the cemetery. Ok? Remember now? There. We said it."

The three of them want to laugh, but they all keep their mouths shut. So, there is a moment of silence again. Nelly is still staring at Hanieh's eyes after she finishes talking. She doesn't know whether to laugh? Frown? Smile or wonder? Sara can no longer stop herself laughing. She bursts into laughter and turns her head from her monitor's screen towards Nelly. Nelly is shocked pondering. She looks back at Sammy's photo on the monitor screen and remembers when Sammy and she spoke at the cemetery. She gazes at the computer's keyboard for a moment. She remembers everything alright. Everything in details. But now, the most critical question still remains. How do Hanieh and Sara know that? So, Nelly stops wondering and begins asking:

"But, how do you know?" asks Nelly with a shaky shocked accent.

Sara answers Nelly's question instead.

"Nelly sweetheart," replies Sara instead, "I will explain everything to you myself. You are by the way right about our mysterious and suspicious looks. You are absolutely right my dear friend. By the way, we already told you we were going to explain everything if you remember. Now it's time for you to

know. Everything started from the banquet in which you saw us in the pictures. Hanieh got to know and liked Robert at the banquet. Like I already said, Amer, my fiancé, Robert and Sammy are very close friends aside from my fiancé. Amer and Sammy are cousins. Our lovely friend, Hanieh and Mr. Robert got to like each other at the night of banquet and started dating ever since for your information. I mean like texting, talking over the phone, etc. Robert who is originally from Damascus and is Sammy's guest here in Al Darrah, apparently has fallen for Hanieh big time. Now, why is Robert here in Al Darrah? That's a different story I'll tell you about. But now, we'll talk about Sammy. Anyways, while Hanieh and Robert talking, Sammy came up and they talked about him being a champion, his nice speech and Sammy as a person in general. Being a girl and curious, Hanieh asked Robert who Sammy's girlfriend was, which Robert replied by saying that Sammy had no girlfriend, but he had fallen in love with someone recently. It was love at first sight scenario apparently. According to Robert, Sammy had visited his father's grave and met a girl at the cemetery who was so beautiful and angel-looking that had made Sammy fall in love with her right there. And since meeting the girl at the cemetery, he couldn't stop thinking about her. Of course, these are what Sammy revealed to Robert, one of his two best friends, initially. Anyways, Sammy saw the same girl minutes later accidentally in front of Al Darrah's kindergarten. Luckily, the kindergarten was where Sammy's cousin, Rana, used to take her kid to everyday.

Hearing the name Rana, Nelly can already guess the rest of the story. But she listens to what Sara says and reconstructs that day's occurrences while Sara explains what happened. She remembers all what she has done after getting out of the cemetery and reaching her little brother's kindergarten. Sara changes the story as she knows she does not have to mention the part Sammy followed her from the cemetery to the kindergarten. So, Sara tells Nelly slightly modified version of what happened that day.

"Yeah. Anyhow," continues Sara, "I guess Rana, Sammy's cousin, was somewhere around the kindergarten to pick her kid too. It looks like Sammy had asked his cousin Rana about an extremely attractive girl entering the kindergarten. Rana told Sammy the girl he was telling her about, was called Nelly, and she used to be her guitar student. To cut the story short my dear Nelly, you've turned Mr. Sammy's life upside down because your beauty made the poor guy fall madly in love with you. Sammy's heart and mind got hooked to a girl he had

met at the cemetery called miss Nelly. He's in love and he's truly in love."

Sara frown at Nelly in a joking way and is shaking her head in pity,

"What have you done to the innocent guy you evil girl?" Asks Sara impersonating witches.

Sara, Hanieh and even Nelly all burst into laughter once again.

"He's right to fall in love with our gorgeous friend," says Hanieh laughing, "Isn't it Sara? Look how beautiful our best friend is. She's pretty, kind, lady and exactly an angel."

"Oh, stop it." Replies Nelly.

"Of course," responds Sara, "Everyone knows our friend is the most beautiful girl in the whole country. Now this is what's happening. Those three buddies, Amer, Sammy and Robert are all in love, with me, you and Hanieh. The three of them and the three of us, all will be at our engagement ceremony."

Nelly's face turns red a bit as she feels shy.

"I vouch for Sammy. But seriously, they're all good decent guys. Really. Not because Amer is my fiancé. I meant in general. They are all well-raised guys. Amer, of course, he's my love. Sammy will soon be family. Robert is crazy about Hanieh. And about Sammy, let me be honest Nelly. Like I said, I vouch for Sammy. I assure you, he's a great guy, emotional, sensitive, funny, romantic. Look what you've done. You visited the cemetery for how many minutes only? You've made a guy crazy about yourself, only by making an appearance in the cemetery."

Nelly too laughs at Hanieh and Sara's comments. She asks them to tell her why is Robert in Al Darrah? Hanieh tells Robert's whole story of coming to Al Darrah looking for his missing brother and attending Amer, his friend's engagement party. Neither Hanieh nor Sara can guess Nelly's opinion about Sammy from her facial expressions. Nelly's face looks closer to the face of someone surprised more than any other emotion. Nelly is not talking about Sammy. Not even a word, unlike what Hanieh and Sara expected she would react. They expected her to become happy, shy, neutral or probably even angry considering what they know about her background and what she would be hearing about Sammy's feels for her. But none of

them even guessed for a moment she was going to look surprised. Nelly acts very cool and calm, laughs at Hanieh and Sara's jokes and comments about her and Sammy. But she wouldn't make the smallest comment about Sammy. Not a word. Not anything that even indicates how she feels and what she thinks of Sammy and his feeling towards her.

Sara thinks for a moment it might be best to end their conversation about Sammy and Nelly. She thinks it may be best to leave the subject open and let her think or digest what she was told. Nelly stands up suddenly. Both Sara and Hanieh get very off ground. They are immediately concerned that Nelly did not like what they told her about, probably misunderstood why she was brought to Sara's house and now she suddenly decided to leave. Being the host, Sara stands up too. But before she says anything to her, Nelly asks where the washroom is. Both Sara and Hanieh sigh of relieve. Sara asks Nelly to follow her. She shows her where their guests bathroom is, comes back and joins Hanieh in the room. Hanieh suggests changing the subject immediately as hearing things of this nature may disturb Nelly and make her feel uncomfortable. Hanieh proposes that Nelly may still not be mentally ready to engage in such conversations.

Nelly returns before Sara has a chance to respond to Hanieh's comment. Nelly returns to the room and asks Hanieh to play Sammy's speech clip for her once again as soon as she takes her seat. What Nelly requests surprises Sara and Hanieh. They look at each other in disbelief and smile. Hanieh plays Sammy's speech clip on her smart-phone and hands her the phone. Sara and Hanieh are wondering why does Nelly want to watch Sammy's speech again. However, Nelly is a girl, and such news and occurrences are to tickle her sense of curiosity regardless of the indisposed happened to her. Sara plays a nice and soft song on her computer, while Nelly watches Sammy's speech once again. When she finishes watching the speech clip, Hanieh and Sara are staring at Nelly's mouth to hear what she is going to say. Nelly puts an artificial smile on her lips after she notices the way Hanieh and Sara stare at her:

"I get it," says Nelly, "You guys are now waiting to hear what is my opinion about Mr. Sammy? To hear what do I have to say. Well, I say this Mr. Sammy, your future relative like you say, seems to be a nice guy. But I'll have to say no to him. I don't know how to say that. I have unfortunately established a kind of hatred for men in general and can't have a slightest emotion towards them. I'm sure you both know

what happened to me. Since that incident, since what happened to me that shitty day, I cannot even think of being with a man. And actually, getting interest in men never happened to me again. But even if it did, I would not be able to feel anything good about a creature of an opposite sex. I have, like I said, established a hatred for men. I don't have any control over how I feel about them. It does not matter how nice and kind or educated or cool the guy is, I hate men in general. What happened to me made me depressed, stressed and gave me constant panic attacks. I'm still on medication because of that criminal mother fuckin rapist. I'll have goosebumps when guys stare at me in the street when I'm walking. I'll get sick, when they look at me more than usual, let alone having a relation with a man. Relation I mean like having a man as a boyfriend or husband. It doesn't matter honestly. I don't think I'm going to be fixed. At least not for very long time. I don't think my hatred for male gender is going to end anytime soon guys. It's not about Sammy in particular. You may not understand me. I do get it you if you don't, or it may be difficult accepting what I'm saying. But if it happened to you, maybe you became even worse than me. This is honestly the first time I know someone has a feeling for me since the incident. The interesting part is that I don't feel anything knowing someone out there is in love with me."

Nelly sounds genuine but saddened. She speaks, pronouncing her words distinctly and articulated way. She sounds more sincere and honest. Hanieh and Sara are at the other hand, all ears. They have drowned in ocean of Nelly's words. They feel sympathy with her. Till now they had no idea of the impact of that incident on Nelly.

"Yes dears," continues Nelly. I can't even think about being with a man. I have no feelings towards them whatsoever. I feel absolutely neutral towards them I mean. Besides, this is the first time in my life that a non-Christian guy, a Muslim guy has expressed such strong feeling for me. We are Christian you know. I'm certain at least you guys know that. Never in my life a Muslim guy had such feeling for me or at least I know of. Mr. Sammy looks like he's a nice guy. Really. I'm saying this in a sincere way. But, like I said, it's not him. It's all me. Your friend is a psycho you know. A mentally disturbed crazy, good for loony bean type of a girl."

Hanieh and Sara do not laugh at Nelly's joke. They get a bit serious, both frown and ask her to stop discriminating herself



and ever never consider herself as a crazy mental girl. After Nelly finishes saying her last sentence, takes a deep breath.

"We understand Nelly," says Hanieh in a sympathizing tone, "and honestly, we give you the right to feel this way about men. But we're absolutely unquestionably certain that time will fix everything without a doubt. Time will fix and repair many things generally. Time changes people, their mentality, their way of doing things, etc. I have no doubt everything is going to be alright. I promise. I have a question. Let's say one day you wake up and you don't feel hatred towards men. Let's just imagine, if one day you decide, let's say getting married, is it important for you to have a Christian husband? Or the religion does not matter as long as love is there? I mean to ask; do you have a problem marrying a Muslim guy? The same guy, Sammy for instance, if one day you charges your mind about men, do you have an issue with Sammy being a Muslim? I just want to know. I'm curious. Like if you want to get married to Sammy or another guy who is a Muslim, is there a problem for you, or your parents even?"

Like a person who has already discussed such a matter before and knows what she exactly wants, as soon as Hanieh finishes asking her question, Nelly readily responds without a pause, without giving it a thought for a second:

"Yes," replies Nelly, "I have a problem with Muslim men. Oh yes, I do. Specially about having a relationship with them, let alone marrying them."

Nelly's response shocks both Hanieh and Sara. They do not see a point continuing that discussion with Her. They decide to end their conversation about men. What Hanieh and Sara had in mind is to continue discussing Sammy's case with Nelly further, in hope they get some more out of her mouth. But they have gotten their answer loud and clear. Nelly is simply not interested in having a relationship, not with Sammy and not with any other guy, and even if by a miracle, she changes her mind about opposite sex, she is definitely not going for a Muslim man. As simple as that. Sara and Hanieh have already started to feel pity for Sammy. They have just gotten to figure Sammy has no chance with Nelly whatsoever. Not one in a billion.

Nelly's mentality and opinion about men in general, and Muslim men in particular has already been formed, and both Hanieh and Sara have their answers. But none of them are offended in

anyways as they are aware of the fact that Nelly's opinion and point of view about men and Muslim men has been formed as a result of what happened to her. They actually give Nelly the right to be angry at men, but they cannot digest her opinion about Muslim men and generalizing Muslim men. That's why they are extra curious to know why?

They need to hear more from Nelly about her bad and negative opinion towards Muslim men. On the other hand, Nelly has noticed her friends being surprised and shocked by what her opinion is about Muslim men and is in fact worried she has unintentionally offended them or her outspokenness has caused them any kind of misunderstanding or their feelings being hurt. She thinks she might have better been expressing herself in a more diplomatic and reserved manner, considering the fact both Hanieh and Sara are Muslims. So, despite the fact none of the two continues talking or discussing that subject further, Nelly continues talking to rationalize what she says her opinion:

"Look guys," says Nelly, "I'm resuming my friendship with my old friends, which you guys are the main ones. I'm repairing and rebuilding the relationship I had with some selected people like my psychotherapist instructed me to, and believe it or not, I'm enjoying this, our girls gathering, every moment of it. I went to Damascus after what happened to me and I lost contact with you guys. Believe it or not, since what happened to me, this is the first time I have overcome my fears, am able to give myself strength to come out of my house and come here to be with you guys, to see you guys whom I know for a long time. And I want to know offending you, my good old friends is the last thing I have in mind. I guess what I mean to say is that I hope I have not offended you in any way when I told what my opinion is about Muslim men. Or when I said I can't be with Mr. Sammy caused you to misunderstand me. When I say I cannot be with any man, is because of the fear that has made its nest in my mind since that happened that shitty day. And about the second thing, which I said about Muslim men, that's my personal opinion. That's all what it is. So, please don't get pissed with me. I love you guys."

Sara holds Nelly's hand smiling. Hanieh holds her other hand.

"Are you crazy Nelly?" replies Hanieh, "Why do we have to get offended? Don't be silly. Everyone's entitled to her opinion here. We want you to be with us today, because we too want to resume our friendship with such a nice friend like yourself,

not because we have to convince you to do something you don't like, not to convince you to accept Sammy, particularly because he's one of the three guys and we want you to be with one of them like us. Not at all. Don't take our gathering wrong. This has nothing to do with the guys like I said. It's about us, and only us. It's about resuming our friendship. In fact, we want our old friend back. We missed you. Sammy just came up. That's all. If we say Sammy is fallen for you, it is because he really has. The rest of what we said, is just girls talk. Okay?"

Nelly notices Hanieh and Sara's innocent faces. Sara now cuts into what Hanieh is saying

"She is telling you the truth Nelly. We want our old friend back. That's all. Sammy was never why we gathered at my house today. Like Hanieh said, it's none of our business. We found out ourselves through Robert. Because Hanieh and her new boyfriend Robert were speaking about Sammy. So, it's actually Robert who told Hanieh about Sammy and his feeling for you. We just mentioned it because well, we are friends, we think you should know. You did the right thing by the way coming here today Nelly. It takes courage overcoming your fear. Good for you. You have to start in some point. We mentioned Sammy, because this is what girlfriends do. Now, the rest is not our concern to be offended or pissed at you. You say you are not in a good emotional or mental state. I think fine, if you were, Sammy was a good choice. Because that's what it is. Because he's a real nice guy. The rest is up to you and Sammy. Why do we have to feel bad? We've got you after a long time my dear Nelly, and we have no plan of losing you. We want to continue having you as our best friend. We are thrilled that we're together again, re-united and happy. Thanks for trusting me and Hanieh and coming today. We'll not speak any more about Sammy. End of the story."

"Nelly," continues Hanieh, "you are safe as long as you are with us. I promise you no man, whether Muslim or Christian, will not have the balls to get even close to you. I'll tear him apart myself. All three burst into laughter. Sara gets up and says she will come back soon. She goes to the kitchen, prepares three glasses of fresh juice to bring to the room with her. Nelly begins talking with Hanieh while Sara is at the kitchen. She says even she herself is not happy with her lack of emotion with the opposite sex and how she feels about men. But the fact is that she has no control over how she feels. She says she just can't help it. Hanieh consoles Nelly

like a kind sister while holding her hand. She gives her hope and tells her time is going to fix many things. Hanieh promises she is going to feel better and better while she is with them as both she and Sara are going to help and support her to recover.

But deep in their hearts, both Hanieh and Sara worry about what is going to happen to Sammy's emotions finding out what Nelly has said about men and Muslim men. They both feel sympathy with Nelly in the other hand and do not want to force Nelly to have a relation with Sammy.

Sara comes back to her room, holding a plate with three glasses of juice in it. As soon as she enters, she makes a pondering facial gesture and tells Nelly:

"However, I am thinking now I really want to know more about why you think what you think of Muslim men. I mean I want to know what caused you think this way about Muslim men? Maybe because the asshole who attacked you was a Muslim? Is that why?"

Nelly takes a look at her wrist watch and pauses for a moment

"I don't know Sara really. Maybe that incident added to it. The thing is if I want to explain it, it's going to take long. You'll have headache and will feel bored. Leave it for when you are ready and have enough time."

Nelly looks contemplating. She is thinking she is probably going to make Sara and Hanieh hate her for what she believes and thinks Muslim men are. She is afraid she might get them seriously offended now. So, she tries changing the subject. But Hanieh specially is smarter than that. She realizes Nelly wants to change the subject because she is worried, she may hurt her and Sara's feelings. So, after she looks at Sara to see what her reaction is, she continues:

"What do you mean you'll give us headaches? Tell us. What we have more than anything else in this country is time. Don't worry. We are not here to neither judge or make fun of each other. We are three old friends sitting and discussing stuff. I actually enjoy talking about matters that show me how my friends think about things, what's their point of views and opinions about different things. I'm sure Sara does too. We all agree that everyone is entitled to their opinions. I say this because I want you to know no one is going to be hurt by

ones opinion. I mean I also would actually love to know where's the root of your hatred for Muslim men. Look, you may tell us something we have never even thought of. So, go on. Don't worry my friend."

Nelly takes a sip of the juice Sara has brought them, smiles and starts talking:

"Alright," says Nelly, "I'll tell you. But promise you'll tell me when I'm talking too much. Like I said, it might take me a while saying these things."

Hanieh and Sara are all ears. Nelly takes another sip, she begins talking:

"Look guys, I have been thinking about the subject of religions, believes, role of religion in different cultures, and so many questions were arisen for me about those subjects, way before what happened to me that day. I mean the day criminal rapist stalked and attacked me. I have had those questions since I was in the middle school and I had no answer for any of my questions. Remember, when I say religion, I don't particularly mean Islam. I'm talking about religion in the whole. All religions and believes and cultures. I became ill mentally, physically as well as spiritually since that asshole attacked to rape me. My parents transferred me to Damascus after what happened, for several reasons. First of all, I had so much stress and depression and panic attacks, and my psychotherapist had suggested to keep me away from environment in which that incident happened to me. The second reason, was the fact that people are little by little thinking Daniel's daughter, that means me, has lost her mind and has turned crazy after seeing me in that state being taken to doctors and psychologists. People talk you know. People gossip and Al Darrah is a small town. So, a gossip will circulate like blood in the veins. The other reason, is that my great aunt who lived in a huge mansion back in Damascus had been diagnosed with cancer. But the biggest or let's say the main reason was because in Damascus, being capital and a big city and all, there were many more well-known psychologists and psychotherapists. Let's face it with Al Darrah's doctors and facilities, my parents could probably never help me become my own self, like I am now sitting in your presence. Al Darrah has no specialists whatsoever. There are doctors, but only so far, they can treat you. My parents initially tried Al Darrah's doctors. But when they were told by one of the same Al Darrah doctors that we had to stop

wasting our time here as we were not going to get the result we needed here in Al Darrah, they decided to take me to the capital. Like I said, my aunt had developed some mental issues herself after she was diagnosed with cancer. So, she knew many good famous doctors. Anyways, we went to the capital and my aunt referred us to a doctor she knew, and that's how my treatment, the real treatment began. We visited the doctor. He diagnosed me with PTSD."

"What is it?" asks Sara, "What is ptpc?"

"It's PTSD," replies Nelly, "It stands for post trauma stress disorder. It's a disorder, a sickness you'll have after a very bad thing, or accident or anything that causes you trauma because of stress. It's a sickness. It's a syndrome that occurs after witnessing or experiencing an accident. It can result into death or something horrible, like suicide. I was in fear all the time. I felt restless, helpless. I had terrible dreams if I could sleep for a few hours. I dreamt the same thing was happening to me. The same guy, the same location. I had become very aggressive. I hated everyone. Even my own parents, siblings and relatives. I had established hatred for everyone, especially men. I couldn't even look at my own father. Because he's a man after all. I felt what happened to me was my own fault. I felt guilty always. I was ashamed of being a girl. Nothing excited or made me happy. Not even for a slightest moment. I was a total mess. About studying? Forget about it. It was gone. I felt I had forgotten all what I had learnt up to that point. I tried so hard to study at home while I was in the capital for a year and a half. But it didn't work. I had a therapy session at least twice or three times a week. The doctor spoke to me, I spoke to him, I took meds and I was under therapy. With the time passing, I could slowly feel the effect of my medication. My aunt, however, her health condition deteriorated gradually. Taking care of her kept my mind busy for a while. With days going, by I became better a little bit. But I thought about all factors resulting in that guy attacking me all the time. I was searching for an answer. Now, remember, I told you that I had some questions about religions, believes and cultures and all this shit. Anyhow, my mind had become busy again with those questions. I was eager to find an answer to. Oh, I had not realized. I had many questions. But I had so much free time too. So, one day I decided to think about it, looked at what happened to me and saw it from a third person's eye, figuring what caused him to choose me, stalk me and attack me? This part is important guys. Look. Here is called Syria.

It's a Muslim country. Our Christians actually are considered minority. Isn't it? Our Christians constitute a very small percentage of Syria. Islam is the dominant culture. I mean Syrian culture, which is in fact somehow Islamic culture also. Having this in mind, I remember personally that even when I was studying in the middle school or any grade, all students were Muslim students. Even me and some of my Christian school mates though, were expected to act as per Islamic values and believes. Like for example, if in a school, the culture dictated all girl students had to wear scarf, we Christians had to wear scarf and cover our hair too, while covering our hair has no meaning for us whatsoever. I'm sure you can both remember similar incidents in the school proving what I mean to say. When I was in the school, nothing could, I mean there was nothing that indicated I was a Christian girl. School administration, teachers and generally officials did what they did on a daily basis. They treated all students the same, regardless of their religion, beliefs, faith and culture. They treated all as Muslims. It's a Muslim majority country. I remember any moral they taught us from the time I began going to school to the last day, whatever they taught me were as per Islamic beliefs, culture and religion. Syria being a Muslim country."

Both Sara and Hanieh nod. Nelly Continues:

"Now, because of the beliefs, norms, rules and social regulations and the people's religion, which are obviously based on religious books and guidelines they follow, the relation between men and women, boys and girls is haram and against Islamic laws and beliefs before they become officially lawful, or as we say halal, to one another. They have taught us having an intimate or other sort of relation with a male is not allowed, unless we become lawful and Halal to each other somehow. Like getting married, whether temporality or permanently. Well, when I think more about it, I figure all these norms, rules and regulations, laws, sharia or whatever you want to call them have created something in this and many Islamic countries called limitations. Limitation is when they tell you having a normal innocent friendship with a boy at your age even is a sin, Haram, against the norm. Even if the country's law is not against it, the society itself would be against it. People, specially elders, totally reject such a relationship. They absolutely ban such thing. Like I said, this is what I call limitation. I mean to say all Muslim countries administration, which truly implement Islamic laws, have also implemented limitation in

one way or another. And wherever you see limitations, you can also witness younger boys and girls specially become more avid and curious in general and their young boys and girls in particular. People would like to try what's having a relation so called illegal? How is it? How does it feel? We want to know why they say having a relation with a guy is considered a sin? We want to experience it. Drinking alcohol is another example. Like us girls, and guys who are actually do not abide by religious rules and regulations, would definitely want to find out for ourselves what is and how is having a relationship with the opposite sex like? We would be eager to try it. We would like to experience how does it feel or taste like? Why? Because we have been taught and told having a relationship with opposite sex is Haram and against Islamic laws, orders and instructions, well of course if we have not become legally Halal and lawful to one another, Isn't it? We've been told it's not religiously legal to have an even normal relationship with the opposite sex. We'll be sent to hell if we do so. That's why we would be even more curious and eager to know why? It's human nature to my poor opinion. Drinking alcohol is yet another example. Drinking alcohol is against Islamic guidelines and rules. Alcohol has been declared Haram ever since. But particularly because we've been told not to drink, we would drink alcohol to feel the taste, the feeling it gives us and its effect. We want to find out why has it been declared Haram? Because they have limited people in drinking it. Limitation brings curiosity and quirkiness with it. Now you think about anything of similar nature. Whatever that is known to be Haram, aside from boys and girls relationship and drinking alcohol. The animal rapist who allows himself to stalk girls and attack them when he finds them alone and vulnerable with the aim of sexually assaulting them, would want to satisfy his needs as a man. But why using such stupid method? Why crime? Because he has been facing limitations when it comes to satisfying his natural needs. The society limits him having a relation with a girl, unless he gets married, whether temporarily or permanently, which both are expensive and have their issues in them. He can't freely have a girlfriend and have a relationship. People would see him as a norm breaker. As a person who does things against society norms. The guy is dying to know how does touching a girl feel like? He wants to know how it feels having sex. But he does not have any solution to that. On the other hand, if social norms, values and regulations are not founded and set based on religious instructions and values, and if there are no limitations and restrictions, many of these norm breakings, violence and



crimes that are being committed constantly would be stopped. One another thing also, besides all what I said, I personally, firmly believe that religious beliefs and guidelines create fanaticism, and fanaticism creates violence, violence creates crime and so on if you have noticed, Muslim man use prejudice and fanaticism as an excuse to put restraints or limitations for women of their family only. Such as their own sisters, fiancé, wife, wife's sister, etc. They are not like that when it comes to stranger sexy young and beautiful girls. They forget all about Islamic values, norms, rules, regulations and instructions. They allow themselves to break in people's houses after stalking a girl. They attack the girl and God knows they have nothing else in mind except sexually assaulting the girl. Guys, when Isis rapes an eight or a nine or a ten-year innocent girl, Islamic and religious beliefs are the last thing they may even consider for a single second. But if they even hear someone has a plan to do some similar thing to their own sister or wife, you will see how they react. Muslim men are violent, aggressive offenders, sex minded, etc. You read the damn history for heaven's sake, anywhere in the world you see violence and war and rape and execution and even all of the above altogether, somehow Muslims or Islam have been involved. I'm thinking from the time a religion appeared called Islam. Look at Isis. Are they not Muslims? Why do they behead men? Why do they make sex slaves of women and why do they drink, use drugs and do many acts that even I, as a Christian, know are totally against Islam. Maybe if Muslim men are really Muslims and do exactly what Quran say, things would be better than they are now in the whole world. Having said these all, I know there are a few good real Muslim amongst them, but they are invisible or are not being noticed within a huge crowd of bad ones I just told you about. There are good and bad everywhere."

What Nelly argues, make Sara and Hanieh pondering deeply. They agree almost with all what Nelly said. They agree with her logic and give her the right to think the way she thinks about many Muslim men, and it looks like they believe in what Nelly says about them. As if they had thought about what Nelly said and had reached the same conclusion themselves, even before Nelly mentioned them. What Nelly said about Muslim men, hurt both Sara's and Hanieh's feelings, particularly because of the fact they know what she says is true. The only disagreement they have with Nelly's overall arguments is that she generalizes Muslim men's repulsive characteristics such as violence, fanaticism, prejudice, mental decay and

intellectual backwardness. They do not agree all Muslim men are like that. They do not agree such an insight and logic.

Nelly glances at her wrist watch once again when she finishes talking. She looks out the window.

"Didn't I say it is going to take long?" says Nelly smiling, "And you'll have a headache after I was done talking? Here we go. It's twilight, getting darker by minute and I have totally forgotten about my guitar class as I enjoy being with you beautiful, lovely and kind girls. I even forgot I had a guitar lesson. now, I'll have to call dad to pick us up. Huh Hanieh? What do you think? Shall we go already?"

Nelly looks at Sara and smiles again

"Girls. I hope I have not offended you friends by what I said I believed. I never meant to offend anyone; I swear. I just said what I believed. These are my opinion. I could not find easier and safer words to use describing some Muslim men. Anyways, forgive me if I've offended any of you. I really did not mean to."

"Oh, come on Nelly," replies Sara in a kind tone, "Why do we have to feel offended? Unfortunately, you are right. I agree with you. And I'm absolutely certain Hanieh too agrees with you. Because with the way I know Hanieh and the way she listened and nodded while you were talking, I'm sure she did agree with you. I cannot, under any circumstances, allow myself to get angry or offended by my friend, particularly because of how she thinks, let alone now, that I admit I agree with you. I never argue with the truth, my dear Nelly. Unfortunately, it's like you said. I wish it wasn't, but it is. There's only one point I want to tell you about my opinion. That's I agree with you ninety five percent. I just want to say we can't generalize people. People are different everywhere. Anywhere in the world you go you would find both good and at the same time bad people, vice versa. Like I said, I agree with everything you said, except all Muslim men do not have or do not share the same mentality, beliefs and particularities in general. What I say, has nothing to do with Sammy and I'm not talking about him. I'm saying in general; people are different. Look, my fiancé for example, he sits and drinks alcohol with Sammy, his cousin, and Robert of course. Both Amer and Sammy are Muslims. But they drink alcohol, which is a big no with a capital N in Islam. I mean they drink. According to Islam, eating pork is prohibited, is

Haram, like alcohol, but they love pork stake. I can swear, I can confidently promise you none of them have even gone into a mosque in their lives. I mean willingly and for praying in particular. They are not only not fanatic to me, but I can call them even none Muslims. I'm serious Nelly. I have never heard my fiancé ever talk about anything related to Islam with me and anyone else. Why? Because they simply have no interest in discussing religion or things of similar nature. Not him and not his family members, relatives, including the same Sammy, are into covering their hair or suggesting me to cover my hair as a Muslim wife. Nothing of the same sort. They shake ladies' hand when they see and introduce themselves. What I mean to say is, they are called Muslims too. But I'm sure you can understand what I'm trying to express. The thing is Amer and Sammy have nothing in them in particular indicating they are Muslims. The only thing that can prove they are Muslims is what is written in their birth certificates, which they had no say in it. There is nothing in their behavior, ways, mentality or action that says they are Muslims. No sign of Islam in them whatsoever. I know Nelly, Hanieh too knows there are a lot of men who give you goosebumps when they stare at us in the streets. There are a lot of them I know. I'm a girl too. Hanieh too experienced the same, going to the streets for shopping for example. There are many. It's a Muslim country after all. But I'm convinced how people, how men behave in the society, depends on how they have been raised, their upbringing. How hard their parents tried to plant civility and politeness and modern thinking in the soil of their brains. Not because of what's written in their birth certificate in religion box. Whether it's written Muslim, Christian, Buddhist or Jew, etc., people you are referring to as Muslim men are actually a lot in the society. There are sadly so many of them. That's not in Syria alone, there are in most Islamic countries. But they are not all the same just because they are all Muslims. I mean to say there are modern Muslims who share the same hatred as you do towards the other fanatic Muslims. I know Muslim men who do actually know what being a real true human is. That's what in fact connected Amer and I those first days. We both truly believe, aside from being a good religious person, we have to be a real human. That's all-what matters."

Hanieh can no longer keep his mouth shut. She apologizes and interrupts Sara

"Exactly," says Hanieh, "She's absolutely right. Look my new boyfriend, Robert is a Christian like you. But I swear his religion doesn't matter to me at all. Why? Because he is nice,

polite, a true gentleman. That's why I got to like him, and I don't care actually what his religious beliefs are. Actually, you know what? I say being a good human is not being measured by like, for example, which mosque you go to for Friday midday prayers or which church you go on Sunday to attend mass? Like what Sara said, all what you said is true and we both agree with you. But I also firmly believe not all Muslim men are the same. I know also at the same time that you have a problem with men in general, and not with their religion. But our friend Sara is right as well. Let say Sammy for example. He is our neighbor. His family's house is next to ours. Not Sammy's and not my parents attended, celebrated or got involved in a single religious ceremony or activity. Never in my life I remember they did. The same, Sammy and Amer are cousins. You know now also. Sara will approve with what I'm saying. They go to party, gamble, drink, eat pork and any other activity or thing which is considered Haram according to Islam. My mom, Sara's mom, Sammy's mom, do you ever remember any of them covering their hair, having Hijab when you visited our houses? We used to be at each other's house. I'm sure you remember that? Did you ever see them wearing Hijab? Men are also the same. Women do not cover their hair with Hijab and go against Islamic instructions and men go against Islam's instructions in many other different ways."

Nelly listens very carefully to all that Sara and Hanieh explain and express. She talks in a slow, calm and patient tone, being careful of what she says next, sugar coats her words after addressing both Hanieh and Sara.

"Yes, of course," replies Nelly, "I also agree not all men, being Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Jew, Zoroastrian, etc. are the same and have their differences with others one way or another. When I spoke about Muslim men, I meant those men I have come across in my life. I didn't mean to generalize men at all. I meant those Muslim men I have met or heard about, or what I figured by watching TV, news, listening at radio, reading in a newspapers or internet articles of course. I know, five fingers in a hand are not the same, like a Persian proverb says. But if you put yourself in my shoes for a moment, you would realize I have never had a relationship with a man, especially with a Muslim man, to know there are Muslim men who drink alcohol, like Sammy and Amer do, or they do not care at all about what does their religions dictates. Like Sammy who wants to have a modern relationship with a girl like me, regardless of it being against his religion. I

mean I've never seen men like that. How can I say which category of a Muslim man Mr. Sammy for instance is? Is he a broad-minded man with intellectual thought and beliefs, or respects Islamic standards and instructions? So, instead of getting into a relationship with him in any level to experience how having a relation with a Muslim man is, I would avoid Muslim men from the beginning and like you said and you are right, I cannot have any man in my life now, be it a Muslim, Christian or any other man having any religion, at all it does not really matter. Otherwise, yes, I agree with you both, people are different from each other. But having said that, I also know the fact that what has been like planted in one's heart strings from childhood, cannot be washed with a bottle of whisky or red wine."

Nelly's cell-phone ringtone interrupts her finishing the rest of what she wants to say. She picks her phone immediately and sees her father's name on it. Daniel, called to let her know he is outside their house to buy some food stuff her mom had asked him to buy, and he has visited a supermarket close to Sara's house. Daniel says he can in fact pick her and Hanieh up, if they were done at Sara's. Nelly asks her dad to hold on the phone for a second, she looks at Hanieh:

"It's my dad," says Nelly, "He says he's close by. Should he pick us up already? What do you think? We have been imposing for a long time. We've gotten poor Sara tired of hosting us, I guess. I'm kidding Sara. But really Hanieh. Let's go."

It looks like Hanieh is ready to leave. She nods and Nelly begins talking to her father again. She says he can come to pick them up already. Daniel says he is going to arrive at Sara's house within next three to four minutes, and his conversation with Nelly ends. Hanieh and Nelly prepare to leave. They get up, thank Sara for her hospitality and walk out. Sara escorts them until they arrive the gate. Both Nelly and Hanieh are looking if they can see Sara's mother so they would thank her too for having them since she had come to greet them when they'd arrived. But they ask Sara to thank her mom on their behalf and say goodbye to her too.

Daniel is seated in his vehicle outside Sara's house. He is looking at Hanieh, Sara and Nelly kissing each other goodbye. He can hear the girls fixing their next gathering date. Hanieh, Sara and Nelly are standing outside Sara's yard in the side walk.

"Girls," says Hanieh, "I'll have to go for my exhibition. I mean the photos I have taken to be displayed at the exhibition, so I'll be a bit busy tomorrow."

She gets her head closer to Sara and Nelly's head to avoid Daniel hearing her and continues:

"I've got a date with Robert." Whispers Hanieh into their ears.

She moves her head back and her voice gets back to normal and continues:

"Yeah, I'm busy tomorrow you know why? But I will wait for both of you from the day after tomorrow afternoon onwards. I will see you at my place. Next it will be Nelly's place."

Sara nods, Nelly too promises she'll go. Hearing Nelly promising she is going to go to Hanieh's house, Daniel is shocked. He is shocked and he gets ecstatic. He is excited for his daughter. He is about to burst into tears of joy seeing his daughter is becoming the same sweet happy girl again. Daniel cannot wait to tell that to Eva and Ezra.

\* \* \*

Sammy, Amer and Robert are on their way back home. They have watched a movie in a theatre and picked up Sammy's modified tuxedo and are on their way back home. Sammy is at the back seat as usual, laying relaxed. He is telling Amer and Robert the story of the movie they had all watched together. Actually, Amer and Robert do the same. They analyze the movie and how special effect were done so thoroughly that probably even the movie director cannot analyze and explain it for the cast and crew. Sammy is laughing at some of Amer and Robert's feedbacks about certain sequences of the movie. But he is thinking about all occurrences of that day, all what had happened since they have arrived Al Thawrah deep inside. He thinks of their visit to the hospital, Bibi Sama, Hassan and Hussein, her son's, who are in fact Robin's best friends and comrades, what he had bought himself and the movie they had watched and every other thing that has happened since that morning. He remembers the will Robin had written again. He touches his pocket to make sure the envelope is still there. Sammy's curiosity has not let him focus on anything else since he has given the possession of it. He doesn't know why? But it feels something of high importance to him. Something

encourages him to open the envelope and read its contents. But at the same time, his conscience is stopping him from breaching his friend's trust.

Sammy has his eyelids closed thinking when he suddenly notices the vehicle stopped. Amer and Robert exit the vehicle exactly when he decides to open his eyes and asks them why they have stopped or where they are going. He follows them by his eyes and sees them entering a bakery near Al Darrah. He wants to get out too. But he changes his mind. He figures they are coming back before he gets out and joins them. Amer and Robert come back immediately, holding some boxes which look like pizza boxes. Sammy asks them what is in the boxes and they say they have bought some manakish for dinner.

Manakish is a kind of Arabic pizza mainly done by Arabic bakeries. Manakish normally contains one particular filling, whether being cheese, minced meat mixed with ground onions and spices, or vegetable and oil called zaatar. Manakish bakeries flatten the dough, and poured the minced meat marinate on it, just like a pizza and place it in their oven. The heat cooks both dough and the minced meat together and it becomes a very delicious Arabic pizza. Manakish is known as the best and healthiest fast food to foreigners. Robert and Amer have bought three different manakish with different toppings, as they know well, they are going to feel hungry soon after they arrive home. Amer starts driving. It isn't long before Sammy and Amer notice Robert is quiet. They know he gets quiet when he is sad or has something in his mind that bothers him. Amer is the one who asks him the reason. Robert has gotten upset, remembering occurrences of that same morning at the hospital. Both Amer and Sammy give him the right to be upset. They console him for a few minutes and calm him down as much as they can. At the end, Amer reminds everyone that as per their agreement, no one is allowed to bring up Robin and his will. Robert glances at Amer, smiles and sighs. He probably decides to act as if he has been convinced by Sammy and Amer's consultations. Amer parks the car below Sammy's building in the parking lot. The three of them get out.

"Oh, my fucking God," says Robert in a miserable tone, "We'll have to take the whole five fucking floors by stairs again? Just like mountain goats. What kind of building manager, manages this building anyway?"

Robert is right. The elevator is not working as usual, and there is a note stuck to its door saying:

"Sorry. This lift is out of order."

Amer is angry too. He reads the note loudly

"Repair the damn thing for God's sake," says Amer angrily, "Temporarily out of service? Really? We are coming to this damned building for ages and it is always written the same shit. Temporarily out of order. Why the hell do they write temporarily? I don't understand."

Amer gets a pen out of his bag immediately, crosses the term "temporarily" and writes "permanently" under it.

"Well done," says Sammy laughing and patting on Robert's shoulder, "Probably they would now understand and realize residents are unhappy with their services. The shit elevator it is. Let's get the damn stairs. Let's go."

The three of them take the stairs. They are going up the stairs and panting. Sammy is behind as usual. Because he limps. He hears Robert asking Amer questions

"Today Sammy's happy because of what he has bought," says Robert sarcastically, "That's why he completely forgot of his daily normal routine. The two most important routines."

"Routine," asks Amer, "What do you mean by daily routine? He has done his shopping, resized and fitted his tuxedo, trousers' leg and jacket sleeves. What do you mean? Has he forgotten anything? What are the two most important routines you talking about dude?"

"Dude," replies Robert, "I'm not talking about running errands outside the house, man. Things he does at home every day I mean. What does he do when he's at home? What does he do no matter what?"

Amer smiles, "aha," he says and pants

"I know what you mean," replies Amer, "Dude. I know. One of his routines is he machines the rifle's metal part and the other one is that he searches for the girl using his binoculars every afternoon. Right?"

They both laugh after Robert confirms Amer has gotten what he meant to say. Sammy on the other hand begins pondering after he hears Amer and Robert's point. They are right, Sammy thinks.



"You assholes," says Sammy, "I can hear you morons you know. For your information, I thought about missing my two routines, like you idiots say, while I was looking for t-shirts while you good friends were having cappuccino relaxed in a coffee shop. I realized we had to wait for my tuxedo to be cut and fitted anyways, so we could not get back home even if we wanted to. Besides, I knew Hanieh and Nelly are going to Miss Sara's house paying her a visit. Therefore, I realized Nelly could surely not attend both Sara's house and her guitar class at the same time. So, her guitar class was certainly off. Knowing girls talkativeness, especially when their number increases to three, I knew she was for sure going to miss her guitar class, that's why, I was not going to appear at the windows looking for her using my binocular. About the rifle's part, I mean machining it, I have to let you know that it's almost done. It probably needs an hour more of machining only and maybe sanding to soften its edges a little bit. That's all. Now I have a question for you two freaks. Don't you two have anything else to do except focusing on what I do all day? Really, instead of watching me, ask yourselves what does Sammy do at what time? You both are like old women, meddling in your friend's affairs."

Amer and Robert burst into laughter while panting already. They arrive the fifth floor and open the door and enter Sammy's apartment. They all go and change to their pajamas without saying a word. Amer runs towards the toilet before Sammy and Robert even think of using it. Sammy takes what he has shopped out of their cases and packs. He takes picture of each and every piece of clothes he has bought. He sends the photos to his mother for her to see what he has bought to give her opinion. Sammy calls her moments later to ask what she thinks of his shopping. Sammy's mom who does not know what Sammy is talking about, asks him what does he mean and about what is he asking her opinion? So, Sammy explains he has sent her pictures of what he has bought and now wants to know what she thinks? But she says she hasn't received any pictures. Sammy knows his mother is still not quite fluent in using new smart-phones, instructs her step-by-step instruction on how to enter receive images on her phone. So, she hangs up the phone to try whether she can use Sammy's instructions and open images he has sent her.

Robert takes a seat on the couch. He is struggling with indecision whether to contact Hanieh or not. He switches the television on, and starts playing with his phone, giving it from one hand to another while staring at the TV screen. It

clearly shows his eyes look at the screen, but his mind has travelled to Hanieh's land. Moments pass. Sammy's cell-phone rings. It is his mom telling him she has already seen what Sammy has bought. She congratulates Sammy and she begins wishing to see his marriage party, her grandchildren afterwards, like she does every now and then.

Robert's cell-phone makes a text message sound as soon as Sammy's conversation ends with his mom over the phone. He opens his text message. It is from Hanieh of course:

"Hi. I hope you have enjoyed your day. Like I promised you before, we can meet tomorrow. We can go to Al Thawrah in the morning and visit the agency I've left my photographs to be enlarged for exhibition. That's if you are still interested to see my work. Because I'll have to visit the agency anyways to clear-up some matters with them. I'm sorry I've sent you a text instead of calling you. We have visitors in the house, and I thought it was best to send you a text instead. I don't want our visitors get curious and investigative. I hope you understand. I'll tell you about what Nelly said also tomorrow if you decide to come. So, please be at the newspaper kiosk around the roundabout tomorrow at 8:30 A.M., so we would go to Al Thawrah together. I'll go anyways like I said. I'll come. If you are there, we will go together, otherwise, that means you couldn't make it. Maybe another time. Have a good night. Hanieh."

Robert is so excited that he cannot even sit still. He is so happy and enthusiastic you can hear his heart beat. Amer who has exited the washroom and is drying his hands and face with his towel, sees him dancing with the TV music, jumping and spinning around. He asks Robert why he is so excited. Sammy who has also heard the TV's music and Amer's question gets out of his room to find out what happened. Robert tells Amer and Sammy about Hanieh's text and says he is going to meet her the following day. Sammy and Amer congratulate him. They become ecstatic for him. Sammy asks how is he going to take Hanieh to Al Thawrah in the morning? Robert wants to reply. He says he is going to hire a cab when Amer cuts in, interrupts him and says that Robert is going to use his car. Robert looks at Amer like he has not understood what he said

"You are going to wake up tomorrow a bit earlier in the morning, take me to where I should meet Sara, which I'm not sure where would that be yet, go to pick Hanieh and take her to the city. You don't need to take a cab. We have a car. I'm

going to call Sara now and find out where we'll have to meet. I'll tell you, so we know where you should take me first in the morning."

Robert pauses for a moment. He glances at Sammy to see what his reaction is to Amer's suggestion.

"Yap," says Sammy looking back at Robert, "He's right. Take Amer's car to your date. Amer will take a cab if he needs to go somewhere. Al Darrah is not a big city. Cabs can take you from one end of the town to another in a matter of minutes. Amer and Sara can walk, if where they need to go is not that far. But you on the other hand, you have forty-five minutes to an hour, just to reach your destination, let alone going places after arriving Al Thawrah."

Robert is convinced, but he seems a bit shy to accept Amer's offer.

"But are you sure?" asks Robert, "What about you?"

"Yeah, I'm sure," replies Amer' "Look. Just take the car and have fun. We'll be fine. Really. Don't worry about us. Like Sammy said, we'll be okay."

Robert accepts Amer's offer happily and Thanks him.

"Now go and send her a text, tell her you will pick her up from her house," suggests Amer, "So she'll not walk to the roundabout in the morning. Go."

Robert sits down and begins writing Hanieh a text:

"Hello and good evening to you too, nice, beautiful and kind lady. Of course, I'm still interested to see your work. Hell yeah. But I would like to see you more than anything else to be honest. Please do not exit your house. I'll be driving Amer's car tomorrow. He's been kind enough to let me use his car for tomorrow. Wait for me. see you. Good night and sweet dreams."

Hanieh replies in less than a minute by sending a smiling emoji. She tells Robert he cannot pick her up from her parents' house and they better meet at the newspaper kiosk, because she doesn't want her parents to see her getting into a stranger's car.

Robert lays on the couch, happy and excited, thinking about meeting Hanieh the following day. Sammy has begins hanging his new clothes in his room's closet when h suddenly remembers Robin's letter. He remembers he has thrown the clothes he was wearing that day into the washing machine to be washed clean for the following morning. So, he jumps and goes to the washing machine and takes the envelope out of his pocket. He has Robin's will in his hand now and curiosity has not let go of him though. He is so eager to read it and find out what has been written in it. Sammy knows he can't do that. But still curiosity is tickling him. After arranging his clothes, Sammy goes to his work bench and picks the rifle's metal piece from the machine. He looks at the piece for a while, turns it and examines it from different angles. He suddenly notices someone standing behind him. He sees Robert when he turns his head. He gives a deep and patient look at Robert. He is waiting for Robert to say something. Robert takes the metal piece from Sammy.

"Finished huh?" asks Robert, "Today you didn't do any work on it though."

"Yeah, it's almost finished," replies Sammy, "Like I said, a little more machining, some sanding and I guess it's going to be done. Nothing anymore though. But I will assemble it on the body of the rifle to see whether it even fits and works. But still, I guess I still need to machine it for half an hour or an hour at the most."

"You've done a lot for this piece. I mean the rifle in general. May God bless your late dad's soul. He would have been super proud of you if he was still alive, I'm sure. You completed their unfinished project. You did it. I'm sure it's going to be one hell of a sniper rifle. I don't know how, but I know it will."

Robert returns the metal piece back to Sammy. He takes a long look at the piece, nods and installs it back on the machine so it would be ready to be machined tomorrow. Robert is standing at the door of Sammy's room when his stomach suddenly begins growling.

"Ladies and gentlemen," announces Robert loudly, "Lend me your ears as I will have to say something important. Please beware that if I die tonight, it's not because of my old age or I did not just die of natural causes. It's because I was hungry, craved for manakish and no one, not even my very own

best friends got up and hit the damn manakish so we could eat."

Sammy glances at Robert with a neutral look on his face, as if he is not impressed by Robert's joke and performance. Sammy finds it corny and cliché.

"So, if you crave for the damn manakish, why don't you get yourself a piece and eat?" asks Sammy.

Sammy asks Amer shouting if he is hungry too. Cutting his nails, Amer ponders for a moment.

"I guess so," replies Amer shouting back, "I mean we better eat already guys. Because I don't think it's healthy to eat a late dinner, or we will have nightmares like general Sammy here.

"He's right," replies Robert fed up already, "I'll heat them now, and I don't give a flying fuck if any of you morons want to eat or not."

Robert bursts into laughter. He's amused by his own asshole way of talking.

"What an asshole." Murmurs Robert addressing himself while going towards the kitchen. Now Sammy exits his room and looks at Amer cutting his nails. Amer is leaned against the wall. Amer notices Sammy is standing and smiling at him. He looks back at Sammy while picking pieces of his nails from the carpet.

"You see how happy he is?" says Amer, "Look at him. He's happier than a dog with two dicks, because of meeting Hanieh in the morning. Thanks to Hanieh."

Amer stands up and gets himself as close to Sammy as possible: "If Hanieh had not happened to him," whispers Amer, "he would have become crazy or severely depressed because of so much thinking about his missing brother you know. He would have made us crazy too. We were very worried about Robin ourselves actually. But he would have driven us crazy for sure."

Sammy nods and ponders for a moment. Amer is right Sammy thinks. Robert has changed dramatically since meeting Hanieh and beginning a relationship with her. Sammy walks back into his room murmuring, "And when will my turn of happiness come?"

He envies Robert and Amer, thinking his best friends have gotten the girls they want. He thinks it's only him who is left without certainty about what would happen between him and Nelly. Sammy is happy for both Robert and Amer of course. He is never jealous of them in a negative way, but he truly wishes he was at least in a better situation in terms of having a real relationship with the girl of his dreams. Or at least have something to hope for and look forward too. Sammy doesn't want to begin thinking about mishaps of his life. He has to go to bed in a short while, and if he allows his thoughts to keep on bothering him, he cannot sleep for a long time for sure.

\* \* \*

Daniel stops his vehicle in front of Hanieh's house. Hanieh exits the vehicle after thanking Daniel for dropping her. Nelly too gets out of her dad's car to say goodbye. Hanieh and she kiss each other goodbye and coordinate their visit to Hanieh's house for the day after tomorrow. Nelly assures Hanieh again that she is going to visit Hanieh's house as planned after she reminds Nelly over and over again. Nelly goes back inside the car and Daniel drives away.

Nelly is quiet. But Daniel notices she has a special kind of smile he has not seen for a very long time. He does not want to stop staring at his daughter's smile. Daniel is thinking a miracle has happened. His daughter has become perfectly cured and acted normal, and both Hanieh and Sara are God's sent angels, sent to earth, particularly to cure his daughter. It is very important for Daniel that his daughter has enjoyed her friend's company again, like she did before. Daniel thinks Nelly should have really enjoyed her time with her friends to agree going to Hanieh's house and be with her friends once again. Nelly has also agreed to be the next person to host at her friends next. Daniel asks his daughter if she enjoyed her visit to Sara's house. She replies yes and says she felt quite comfortable knowing there were only Sara and her mother at the house. Nelly says the other thing she was comfortable with, was the fact that both her friends were aware of what happened to her and she didn't actually have to answer any questions and clarify anything further.

Daniel is very optimistic about Nelly's immediate future. She's showing signs of being a normal girl, doing normal young girls stuff with her friends. He tells Nelly he can drop her

at Hanieh's place the day after tomorrow if she wants. But Nelly says she might feel like walking to Hanieh's house. If not, she is definitely going to ask her father's ride.

Daniel's vehicle enters Al Darrah's main street and they face a heavy traffic jam. An unknown factor has caused the jam. But cars are lined up waiting for the car in front to move. Daniel reduces speed and stops behind the last car in the traffic. The traffic is compact. Cars move a few yards every thirty seconds. Daniel notices Nelly is quiet again. He glances at her every now and then to see whether he can figure if she is okay. Nelly, on the other hand, notices his dad's concerned look at her, and says she is actually glad she has re-united with her old friends and has resumed her relationship with them. She says she is being reminded of her good old days she had with them.

To pass the time and since her dad and she are bored waiting for the traffic jam to open, Nelly brings up one of the topics she has discussed with Hanieh and Sara while she was there. She tells her father about what she believes and how she feels about Muslim people's negative characteristics, especially Muslim men and boys. Of course, she has told her dad what she thought of Muslim guys many times, but she sounds as though she needs her father to tell her otherwise this time. Once again, she mentions how she feels BOUT Muslim men again and waits for her father to give his opinion on the matter. Curious why did three girls have to discuss such sensitive subject; Daniel asks her the reason they even discussed such topic. Nelly says in response that they were in fact speaking about something else, but their conversation had led to Muslim men and tells Daniel what she said she thought Muslim guys were like. Despite Daniel having heard his daughter's opinion in this regard on many occasions, he still talks to her about it.

"Look honey," replies Daniel calmly, "I don't know what led your conversation with your friends to discussing Muslim guys. But I sincerely hope you have not gone too far with your outspokenness, especially expressing yourself about Muslims the way you do to me. I hope you've not hurt their feelings. You know they are both Muslims sweetheart. Because like I've told times and again, religion is a very delicate subject. You probably know it better than I do, having read all those religion related books when you were back at your aunt's in Damascus. Like I said, your friends are both Muslims honey. Look. We live in an Islamic country. We've lived here longer than your age and we are going to live here in an

Islamic country. We've lived here and have a good life. I guess that's fair to say we have had a good life too. We have never had any problem, not with our friends, neighbors, not at work in the office with the staffs and not anywhere and with anyone else, who are almost ninety eight percent Muslims. The subject of being a Muslim or Christian has never come up between us for anyone to throw his or her opinion about it. Knowing all that, you have established a strong hatred for Muslim men, thinking they all think and act like Isis, since they claim to be real Muslims. No sweet heart. It's not like what you believe. I get to meet hundreds of different people since I come out of our house every morning, until the time I come back home in the evening. People I do neither know nor have seen them before, but I know for sure they're Muslims. All of them. You can say from their Islamic names. I also agree with you in the fact that Isis does crimes under the name of Islam, terrorizing people, raping, executing, etc. But honey, they are different Muslims than these nice people we live amongst. Isis members are totally different kind of people. Isis members are a number of uneducated, low life, low class, unsuccessful, deflected, misled and lost people who have been brainwashed and convinced they are doing exactly as God and their profits have instructed them to when they rape, execute, behead people who are against them. They consider those opposing them as infidels and Satan. They really believe it by doing what they do, and we consider them crime against humanity. They believe they will be martyrs, go to heaven and there, beautiful women are waiting for them at a beautiful garden with a honey river and all sorts of edibles available. Yes. As crazy as that. They have been promised whatever they can never achieve in this world, to be freely waiting and abundantly available for them in the next world if they get killed for what they believe. And they believe what they've been promised, particularly because they are a bunch of uneducated, underachievers like I said. They use drugs and get high so they can easily execute people the way they do. I mean sawing soldier's heads off, rape, cutting people open while they are still alive, etc. They use drugs to execute infidels, unbelievers, their God and profits' enemies easier, without facing their own conscience. But like I said, those animals are different than this harmless nice Muslim people in the town, who live an honest life and eat an honest food. I say a man, should be a real human. There are Christians capable of committing crimes, which can only be committed by people like Isis and there are Muslim men also who have never done anything wrong, committed smallest crime in their whole life. Being a criminal, capability of



committing a crime, doing other's wrong and going against human law, is inside people's soul and mind, not based on or connected to their religions and spiritual beliefs. Besides, you should know, like I do, all religions in this universe, from the very first one, right through the last, they all talk of one single entity responsible for creating the world and us, we know as God. All religions pray to one God. A God, is God of all religions. Our Muslim neighbors prays to the very same God you and I pray. So, we both pray the same God. Therefore, we all have a common belief. We automatically share the same God hence have the same belief. There's one God and one God only. At least, that's how I put it. The only difference between human in religion is that we only have different ways or methods of thanking our God, praying to him or asking help from him. That's all. Having said all that, I do not expect you to think like me, because I'm your dad. But I want you as your father, to reconsider the way you think about Muslims, both men and women. You would find good and evil everywhere Nelly. Everywhere. No matter what their religion is, there are always good people and bad people wherever you go. Never allow your mind to categorize people's goodness and evil based on what their religion is, my daughter. Keep on telling yourself, convince your mind that everyone is good, unless proven otherwise.

Nelly listens carefully to what her father says. She looks happy. As though she wanted her dad to say all those good things about Muslims. Especially after she got to find out a guy called Sammy, whom she met for a few seconds in the cemetery, is a Muslim and has a crush on her. Nelly notices the traffic had opened seconds ago. Actually, Nelly recalls crossing by two cars that had bumped to each other. She knows now what caused the jam. But they were deep in conversation. None of them realized there was actually a traffic jam like what always caused the traffic jam at Al Darrah's main street. Other drivers slowed down to watch what was happening to the two cars which crashed into each other and their passengers, and this caused a traffic jam. That was the reason.

Nelly brought up that subject to pass the time while waiting in the car for the jam to open. Nelly is quiet. She's pondering after what her dad explained to her. She looks satisfied. She is now quite astonished herself for the fact that she is even thinking about the guy, Sammy. She thinks she was not supposed to like the opposite sex, specially Muslims. But now she has begun thinking about what Hanieh and Sara told her. She is trying hard to remember their exact

words about Sammy having a crush on her. Nelly tries hard to stop thinking about this subject. But she has instead ended up asking her dad's opinion, knowing he was going to talk highly and nicely about Muslims. Daniel, on the other hand, is thinking maybe what he explained in response to his daughter's question, may have not completely changed her mind about Muslim guys, but he was at least happy he had said any logical sane father would in response to such question coming from a daughter. He is happy now that he had at least tried to convince his daughter to accept all people in her heart regardless of what their spiritual or religious beliefs are.

\* \* \*

Robert's father is in front of the TV watching his favorite show in animal planet channel. The nice smell of cooking food can be smelt in the whole house. Ellen is arranging plates, spoons and forks on the top of the dining table. Helen is on standby, next to her mother, waiting for her to serve the dinner. Helen lays a tray on the stone counter besides the stove and her mother begins transferring the Arabic meat and rice from the pot to the tray. Ellen calls her dad to invite her father to the table after she finishes setting it up. The father who seems very hungry, gets up immediately and goes to the table. Helen places the Arabic meat and rice over the table. She goes towards the counter and inserts a CD into the CD player. She plays a music. A nice calm music begins playing. Helen tries reaching for the rice immediately when everyone takes their seat, when she is stopped by her mother's voice asking her dad to say the grace.

They all hold hands and he prays the lord, "Dear lord, thank you for this food on our table, the roof over our heads and everyone's heath. We miss Robin and Robert. Dear lord, we beg you to provide the same blessings for them wherever they are. Lord, please keep an eye on them both. We leave them into your kind and protective hands." He says amen for the food and prays for their son's safe return. The mother glances at Robert and Robin's empty spaces at the table. A lump form in her throat. She swallows, gulps and does her best not to ruin everyone's dinner by letting out her tears. Everyone begins eating their supper.

\* \* \*

Hanieh has been thinking about Nelly and what she said about Muslim men since her father has dropped her home. She is

figuring out a way by which she can tell Robert about what Nelly has and how reacted after Sara and she told Nelly about Sammy having a crush on her. She has to tell Robert, somehow, that Nelly is not letting any man in her heart. Not for Sammy and not for any other man. She knows both Robert and Amer have to tell him that as soon as possible, so he would not keep on imagining he has a slightest chance with Nelly. In this way, he would forget about Nelly and look for someone else in case he has decided to get married.

Hanieh is at the same time asking herself, is there any reason for Amer and Robert to mention anything to Sammy that Nelly is particularly against getting involved with Muslim guys? She cannot see a reason to mention that to Sammy the more she analyzes it in her mind. Hanieh decides to call:

"Hey, how are you doing?" asks Hanieh, "Thanks for all your hospitality by the way."

"Oh, come on. What did I do? Good you called. I wanted to call you myself."

"Oh? About nelly?"

"Yap. But tell me first. What did you want to discuss? "

"No. I just thought to call you and figure out what to tell Amer and Robert, so we both say the same thing. In this way, they wouldn't suspect we're hiding or censoring any parts."

"Yeah. I know. True."

"I mean let's tell them the part Nelly said she couldn't be with any man at all, because of what happened to her, but she's working on it to get better and feel different probably. But I don't see any point mentioning she dislikes Muslim men in particular. I mean she hates them or something."

"Hmm. The thing is that if we just say Nelly does not want to start any relation with a man at the moment, Sammy may say he would wait until Nelly gets better. She may change and have a different idea later. He's in love remember. People in love have no logic and they barely take a "No" as an answer. They want to twist things around in hope something changes. I say let's ask them to tell Sammy the whole thing once and for all to forget about her. So, he would be thinking of someone else completely. I mean let's give him a curt negative reply already, so he'll not have his hopes high."

Hanieh pauses for a moment. She is hesitant a bit. But Hanieh thinks at the same time Sara is right. Hanieh is pondering. There is a moment of silence between the two of them. Until Sara calls Hanieh's name, thinking the line was disconnected.

"I have your voice," replies Hanieh finally, "I'm thinking actually. I'm here. You are right though. We should do it. So, Sammy would completely forget about her. How else does she have to say it? She's our friend too. What I'm saying is, it's going to be better for them both like this."

"Yeah, I know? I say let's ask Robert and Amer to tell Sammy exactly what Nelly said. Nothing less and nothing more. Let them decide what to tell or how to tell him. The thing is I pity him also. But I give Nelly the right too. Sammy has fallen for her deeply. I don't know. I pity him."

"I know. I do too. I swear I do. But we did all what we could, didn't we? Maybe they're not destined to be with each other. I don't know really."

"Yeah," says Sara, "Tell Robert everything as it is, I guess. I'll do the same with Amer. Let them do it themselves. Poor Sammy fell in love once in his life. He felt for the wrong girl."

"True. True. No other choice really. Ok. Go. Leave me alone."

Both Hanieh and Sara burst into laughter after what Hanieh says. Hanieh hears her parents inviting some of her relatives in the house. Apparently, they are expected visitors.

"Oh my god. Damn," says Hanieh, "I guess we have company. OMG. I am not in the mood for guests at all. I totally wanted to chat with Robert. Shit."

"Just go, say hi and go to your room and chat with him.

"Yeah right."

"Why? You can't?"

"I wish it was as easy as it sounds. I can't do such thing with Gestapo boss around. Don't you know my mom? She'll wait for the guests to leave. Then, she'll come to me. I know what'll happen and what she'll say "Can't you tolerate an hour? Even for your parent's sake? Even for our names and honor? Can't you leave that shit phone for ten minutes? Now they'll go and talk behind our back, your back and say you were on the phone with a man the entire time. Their daughter does not even bother to offer her mom assistant, let alone greeting us. Bluh, bluh, bluh."

Hanieh makes Sara laugh imitating her own mother. But she knows she is probably going to piss Sara off even more, if she laughed at her situation, anger and misery.

Both Hanieh and Sara hear a quick beep over the phone suddenly. Sara glances at her cell-phone screen. Hanieh does the same and notices her cell-phone battery is finished and her phone is going to die any second. She tells Sara the beep sound was the sound of her battery notification, indicating she needs to re-charge her phone. Before their conversation ends and Hanieh's phone goes off automatically, she tells Sara she is going to contact her and share with her how their discussion about Sammy and Nelly went. They immediately say goodbye to one another and hang up their phones.

Since Hanieh has visitors and knows her mom expects her to assist her, and she knows she is not going to have any chances to talk to Robert that time, Hanieh decides to text Robert, reconfirm their appointment and tell him she is not going to be able to chat with him that night as they have guests and she obviously has to help her mom. But she has to change and get ready to appear at the presence of their guests, spends a few minutes with them, help her mom a bit, and only then she can text Robert. So, she changes quickly, exits her room and joins everyone at the guests room.

\* \* \*

Sammy, Amer and Robert speak about occurrences of that particular day, all what had happened that day since morning. A kind of worry and sadness bother them all that none of them wants to unload. Every single one of them keeps their feelings to themselves, prevents themselves to divulge it to others, so they would keep a high spirit and keep on having hope or try to forget that day's distressing awkward happenings. They are there for each other and every one of them makes absolutely sure the other two are aware or know that. None of them is actually in the mood to watch TV or listen to music. But having nothing else to do, Robert is the only one who lays down on the couch in front of the TV and keeps on changing channels. It is apparent he is really not looking for a particular TV channel or TV program. He changes the channels out of impatience. He seems he is in front of the TV, thinking about something else. His eyes are directed at the TV, but his mind has travelled elsewhere. Amer goes to the balcony after he finishes having dinner and sits on a small chair. His mind too is reviewing all what happened in Al Thawrah.

They have spoken about all what happened at the dinner table and everyone has expressed himself clearly and said how he feels. But Amer is not only thinking about what has happened the whole day, he also thinks of solutions for challenges he and his best friends have ahead of them and they have to overcome them. Sammy, however, is in the habit of getting his mind busy with something or anything except challenges or problems he and his best friends have to overcome. He believes human has two methods of thinking. One is positive procreator and the other is negative destructive. He firmly believes people waste their time often by letting negative destructive thoughts having them busy. They often allow themselves and their mind to engage with negative and destructive thoughts which according to him does people no good and is waste of everything. He believes he has to redirect his thoughts to something else anytime negative destructive thoughts try entering his mind. With time passing, negative thoughts would slowly and automatically disappear and only he can invite positive procreator thoughts in. Believing such thing, Sammy tries getting his mind towards the rifle and its needed metal part. He examines the rifle's drawing for one last time. A few minutes later, everyone feels exhausted and sleepy. They go to bed. They fall asleep soon after they say good night to each other.

\* \* \*

Nelly is laid on her bed, relaxes and watches photos and clips posted on some social networks on her tablet. Apparently, everyone else has fallen asleep already. She is the only one still awake. Nelly's red night light has colored every object in her room red. She opens her social network accounts and watches viral videos and photos. She does this almost every night. Her doctor, the psychotherapist, had also suggested her to read a few pages of a book every night before she falls asleep. Her therapist had said that she should keep her mind busy with good things and would help in forgetting what happened to her. So, that's what she does every night. She checks social networks on her tablet and reads latest news, watches viral videos as soon as she goes to bed, reads a few pages of her favorite books, until her eyes can no longer stay open. She then stops reading and falls asleep.

Nelly is watching a video. There is a couple, arguing over something in the bus. The man is angry why his wife had not asked for his permission before exiting their house earlier that morning. The poor woman is trying to tell her husband

she had not gone out of the house alone and her brother was with her when she did. But the husband gets angrier and more agitated every second goes by. The husband is evidently a Muslim, having Arabic Thobe on and shows he's much older than his wife. The husband keeps on repeating his question why had she gone out of the house alone without asking for his permission. To put an end to her getting so embarrassed in the presence of other passengers, the wife has no other choice but to apologize. Even if she did never go out of their house alone. But the husband hits slaps half covered face twice and punches her at her head several times the way her hijab is out of her head. The poor wife is already bleeding at her mouth. The interesting part of the video is that all other bus passengers do nothing, but to whether watch or record them with their smart-phones. People record the incident secretly, but no one bothers to stop the man. The wife keeps on yelling she is sorry and she is never leaving the house with or without company. But the husband is angrier than listening to logic. When the husband beats his wife in public, humiliates her and makes her cry while she wipes blood off her lips, he yells at his wife commanding her saying: "Never forget what I said. You are not allowed to leave the house, even going to house's yard without my permission or else, you know what would happen to you next. When I say you are not allowed outside the house I mean not alone, not with your brother not with your fucked-up family members. Do you understand?"

The woman who is completely in black has covered her whole face except two little holes which are designed for women's nostrils to be open so they can breathe and other opening is for them to see. The woman has no choice but to keep her mouth shut, in hopes her idiot husband calms down and stops humiliating her in the public. It is quite apparent from her red eyes which are wetted by her tears, that the woman has hidden a world of sadness and grief behind her teary red eyes. It is quite apparent also that it is not the first time she is being treated that way by her husband in the public. The husband who in fact has to keep his wife safe, is responsible for her well-being and happiness. Nelly throws her tablet on her mattress faced down angrily after she watches the clip, sighs and ponders for a moment. She has become in rage and remembers her conversation with Sara and Hanieh about Muslim men particularly. She picks her tablet again and writes a comment under the video clip she has just watched:

"A prominent example of a Muslim men. You may know by a handful the whole sack."

She forwards the video clip both to Hanieh and Sara.

\* \* \*

Amer is still at the balcony. He gets up quietly and closes the balcony's door slowly, so Robert and Sammy would not notice it. He wants to call and speak to Sara in private. Amer dials Sara, her phone rings a few times before she answers, and he begins talking quietly. Not aware of Amer's reason for speaking quietly, Sara automatically begins talking quietly too. Sara asks why does Amer speak in a low voice, and Amer says in response that he is at the balcony and wants to talk to her about Sammy and Nelly. He says he doesn't possibly want to wake them up. He says both Robert and Sammy are in bed surfing the net and he does not want any of them to hear his conversation. Amer asks Sara the same question. He asks why is she talking quietly? She replies she feels it is somewhat contagious and has begun talking quietly after hearing Amer talking quietly."

Amer explains all what they had gone through since early that morning to Sara. They speak for a while and fix their meeting point for the following day once again. Amer says he is going to see her whether by walk or taking a taxi as Robert is going to use his car tomorrow, because Hanieh and Robert are going to meet in the morning and go to an advertisement agency in Al Thawrah together. So, he has figured it was best if Robert uses his car as he has to go a long way with Hanieh. Amer says he is going to ask Robert to drop him at the marriage office the following morning. Sara seems happy she has a kind-hearted gentleman of a fiancé. It is very generous of Amer she thinks. She tells Amer he has done the right thing letting his friend use his car. Amer asks about Nelly and what has gone on. Sara explains all what happened, all that Nelly had said about men and Muslim men in general:

"Well, Hanieh and I had made arrangements and have our own scenario on how to inform Nelly about the way Sammy feels for her, I mean Sammy's crush on her somehow. Fortunately, everything fell in place automatically and all incentives got provided in their own way for us to bring up Sammy's case with her. Actually, it all started when we were talking about the banquet. We showed her banquet pictures and all. Nelly insisted she had seen Sammy somewhere after we first showed her Sammy's picture. She has met Sammy for a brief moment at the cemetery of course. Hanieh and I seized the opportunity



and told her in a very discrete way that we know where she has met Sammy. She was shocked, poor girl. Obviously, she wanted to know if we knew? That's when Hanieh and I reminded her that she had seen Sammy for a short moment in the cemetery. When she heard us telling her that, her curiosity level went very high. Now she wanted to know how the hell did we know that, after she remembered she actually saw Sammy. That's when we came clean and told her everything. We revealed the mystery. I'll tell you how Hanieh and I introduced Sammy to begin with. First, before telling her anything of course, we kept on saying many good stuffs about him. We spoke quite highly of Sammy. We were actually getting Nelly interested curious and ready. We began by showing her more of Sammy's pictures. We were talking about the banquet and showing Sammy's pictures one after another. I asked Hanieh, after blinking to her, why did she not bring Nelly to the banquet along? Hanieh, being smart and clever, understood what I meant by blinking and kept on saying how enjoyable the banquet was. So, Nelly got more and more curious to hear about the banquet, why it was held, where it was held, etc. we told her everything in brief and that's when we got the window of opportunity to introduce Sammy. But let me tell you. She's a smart girl that Nelly. She was beginning to suspect why did Hanieh and myself spoke so highly of Sammy anytime we had a chance and found it relevant? Only we showed her more photos of Sammy and she said she knows she has met him somewhere before and the rest I told you already. That was when we figured it is the best moment, we could reveal Sammy's mystery to her. So, I told you until she asked how did Hanieh and I know she had met Sammy at the cemetery? We told her the three of you, I mean you, Sammy and Robert are the three musketeers, you guys are 3 best friends. I told her your relation with Sammy, that you are cousins, and Robert, who has just started having a relationship with our friend Hanieh."

Now Amer's sense of curiosity has been messed with. Now he is dying to hear what happened next. He is impatiently waiting to hear about what Hanieh and Sara told Nelly. He keeps on saying, aha, so Sara would get to the point and he can therefore hear what happened at the end. Sara calms him down a bit and asks him to be patient as she is already getting to it:

"Anyhow," continues Sara, "We told her everything actually. We told her Sammy has fallen hard for her since he met her at the cemetery. We said Sammy hasn't stopped thinking about her, not even for a lousy moment since he has seen her. Of

course, Hanieh and I were using our own language, I mean girls' language, to reveal all these. Anyways, we said Sammy has mentioned meeting you in the cemetery to you and Robert. You and Robert wanted to eagerly find out who is the girl doing that to their best friend's heart. Until last night, which Hanieh and Robert got to speak to each other, and Hanieh said she knew Nelly that she was our old friend. We have been best friends before, to cut the story short, we said everything and waited for her to show us a reaction, say something, or at least let her opinion be heard. But she gave us her clear-cut negative reply."

Hearing what Sara said, Amer who had been standing on the balcony so far, suddenly sits on the same little chair at the balcony, saddened and hopeless, waits to hear the rest.

"Anyways," continues Sara, "She said she could not be with any man. Not Sammy and no other men at all. I mean she said she could even not imagine having a relationship with an opposite sex. Oh, besides, let me tell you the most critical part. She said not only she couldn't accept having anything to do with any man, but even if she did and felt differently one day and decided to have a relation, she was definitely not going to have a Muslim man in her life."

"What is this?" asks Amer, "What does she mean? What are we Muslims to her? What does she think we are? What's wrong with us for example?"

"Oh, chill out darling," replies Sara, "Stop. Don't even judge her. Specially not for what she thinks or believes. Listen my love, the poor girl was about to be sexually assaulted a few years ago. She was naked, alone at home, about to enter the shower when a man posed as water department agent or someone else, and Nelly let him in as they usually did, even we do it. Lo and behold, the guy was a rapist and stalker, stalking her until she was left at home alone and vulnerable. He rang the bell. Nelly answers the intercom and asked who was it? The guy said he was from water and electricity department or something. Anyhow, she opened the door as they all did in her house all the time when some agent rang the doorbell introducing himself as the water agent, thinking the guy would register the meter and leave the house closing the door behind him. Nelly entered the shower and the guy closed the entrance door behind him after entering Nelly's courtyard. He went upstairs and found her at the shower, attacked her with the intent of sexual assault. He apparently touched Nelly's body

holding her a knife to her throat despite her screaming her lungs out. The man began getting naked himself apparently when Nelly's mother arrived home from the supermarket. She too screamed for help. Neighbors rushed to the scene to help them. They took the knife from the guy's hand and beat the shit out of him. They broke several of his ribs, a few of his teeth, his jaw and shoulder bone. Police arrived too at that time, arrested the guy and never mind the rest. Nelly is soft and beautiful like a rose. She is happy, fresh, kind. I remember her well. How she was, I mean. She's too beautiful. She developed a mental issue later on that she calls PTSD. She started hating men since then. Yeah. This is what your cousin's chance is. Poor Sammy."

Amer is quiet. He does not know what to say really. He has gotten extremely upset for what happened to the poor girl. Amer cannot believe such stupid asshole criminals exist. He pities a Nelly for what she has experienced from one hand, and from the other hand, he has become very concerned if Sammy hears what he has just heard himself. Amer is pondering deeply when he comes to, after hearing his fiancé calling his name from the other end of the line.

"And of course, the rapist happened to be a Muslim in this story," says Amer after a long pause, "Is that why? Is that why she want to have nothing to do with Muslims?"

"She said it herself," replies Sara, "She said she could not deny the effect of that incident on how she feels about Muslim men. But yeah. The guy was a Muslim. She had many other justifications and explanations for it too. For instance, she is particularly totally hating Isis. She had so much of free time after her parents sent her to her aunt. Apparently, she has used her free time in the capital to study, research and conclude the fact that all wars, not all, most of the wars and executions and mass executions and other barbaric acts that have ever happened since, like for thousands of years, for decades and centuries, all have been created, triggered by none other than Muslims.

"But let me tell you honey, she was not saying all these because she has guessed them, or saying they are what she felt personally, created in her mind based on unfounded baseless rumors. She sounded as though she had done her homework already. She was not just like Muslims are violent people without presenting any argument for it or presenting any logic behind what she thinks or says. She's very well-read girl. Apparently, she had so much of free time when she

was in capital staying with her late aunt who had fallen ill. She has done her research; I mean to say. I'm sure she could even convince you if you were there. I guess what I'm trying to say is, she sounded like she was not just saying that was her personal opinion. I was convinced she had gotten to conclude what she said about Muslims, after researching history's facts and figures. Anyhow, Nelly's problem is not particularly to have an issue with Sammy because he is a Muslim mind you. It's simply because Sammy is a man too. He is a guy and that's according to her exactly the reason. Because like I said, she cannot have anything to do with opposite sex. She has established a sort of hatred for men in general. That's all Amer. But like I said, she is totally right about Muslim men. She meant radical ones of course. She generalizes Muslims at some point which I corrected her, and she is logical enough to accept what I said correcting her. Her arguments are solid, good and presentable. But I told her she cannot say all Muslim men are exactly like how she described them. For instance, I give you as an example. I said that you, my fiancé, are a Muslim man, but you drink alcohol, you gamble playing poker, you and your buddies party all night long and do many other stuffs which all are considered forbidden in Islam. Like I said, you never go to a mosque for prayers, hell, you don't even pray. She agrees with me with the fact all Muslims are not alike. Like I said, she's a very logical thinker. I told her for me for example, as a girl, one of the most important characteristics of a man I go out with, is him being a real human. I don't honestly care about his religion and spiritual beliefs. Hanieh too told her about herself and Robert. She said Robert was a Christian for example. But she does really frankly not care at all. Why? Because she has realized Robert is a good kind man. Anyways darling, she was quite pissed off with Muslim men. She meant a huge percentage of them. Those violent ones. What she said and argued were all correct, you see. I was ashamed myself as a Muslim girl, for the fact that I could not defend Muslims at all. Her logic, explanations, arguments and examples she presented were so strong and substantial that one could barely convince the listeners otherwise if she said what she had told us in an official speech. Besides, I could only defend Muslim men whom I know and I am certain are totally different from the category she was referring too. But about the rest of Muslim men, she was absolutely right. We spoke for a quite a while about this. But her final verdict was that she is not yet ready to being any kind of a relation with any man. And that's simply the effect of what that incident has had on her mentally. She was saying she cannot

even think about being with a man, let alone having a long-term relationship with one. Poor girl was worried all the time she had not hurt Hanieh and my feelings by what she told us and how she expressed herself. But we told her none of what she said was any of our business. We told her we had no right to get offended or angry at her in anyways. We said all what we had told her, were just like girls' talk. That's all. However, she did something that made me curious. I'm sure it did Hanieh too. You see? after we told her about Sammy having a real major crush on her, and after she said she cannot have any relation with any guy, she asked to watch Sammy's speech again. I looked at Hanieh when she asked to watch Sammy's speech. But Hanieh was looking away. I mean if she was absolutely certain she couldn't accept any man in her heart, why did she want to see Sammy's face again? I guess it was quite obvious she was curious to see her suitor. That made me think actually, suspected let's say, whether Nelly was completely sincere in what she told us about not being able to accept any man. Anyhow, her dad came, picked her and Hanieh. Nelly's dad dropped Hanieh home. Hanieh called me when she got home and we spoke about it. We got very concerned about how poor Sammy would handle this of course. Once in his lifetime he fell in love, and with the wrong girl. Baby, we seriously pity him. We are worried for him. Now it's up to you how to explain it to him or whether you even want to tell him anything about what I just told you. It's up to you and Robert darling."

Amer is so close to bursting into tears. He is just quiet. Not a word. Sara asks him to say something.

"He spent a big amount of money today," says Amer after a long pause, "He bought himself an Italian tuxedo. He said he planned to wear it for our wedding ceremony. But he will wear it in our engagement party too, since Nelly is going to attend too. He bought the very expensive tuxedo, so he'll be presentable when he meets Nelly again. He bought t-shirts, bowtie, ties and some other clothes as well. We waited in Al Thawrah until this evening, so the tailor would cut his tuxedo's sleeves and trousers leg to fit him. It has been a dramatic revolution occurred in him since he found out Hanieh knew Nelly and had promised to bring her along to our ceremony. Sammy's spirit has really gone high. I don't know if I've mentioned this to you, but Sammy lacks self-confidence because of his limp, especially when it comes to facing opposite sex. He has had it since his accident and he still has this lack of self-esteem. Robert and I have spoken and

consoled him about this in many occasions. Actually, it was Robert who convinced him to forget about his limp for a day and talk to Nelly face to face at our engagement ceremony and express how he feels about her directly. That's because he had apparently decided to write her a letter and hand it to her somehow. But Robert dissuaded him of doing so. He convinced Sammy he has to overcome his fear of rejection, face Nelly and tell her directly how he feels about her. Now, OMG, it's a fucked up total mess now. He'll badly break. It will destroy him. The thing is you sweetheart don't know how much he has imagined being with Nelly and practiced what he would tell her. Oh shit. What the hell should I do now? What to and how to tell him? I pity him, Hun. I do very much. He's not only my best friend, but he's my cousin too. He's family for heaven's sake. We grew up together and I know him better than he knows himself, I guess. He will break. His heart will shatter into pieces. I know that. The thing is, Sammy is over sensitive. Once before he got to like a girl this seriously. Look at what life did to him and his leg, losing his dad in a terrorist attack, and now, his emotions are being shattered. I don't know what to do my love. I really don't. let me lay down and maybe think if can come up with a solution."

Sara can hear a sad vibration in Amer's voice. She calms him for a moment and encourages him to prevent negative thoughts entering his mind. She reminds him that he is not getting anywhere by getting angry and disappointed. She asks him where Sammy is? He says he has last seen both Sammy and Robert were laying on their beds. But since they had a quite hectic day, he is sure they have already fallen asleep while he has been on the phone with her. Amer clarifies the reason he is still awake is the fact he wanted to hear Sara's voice first and inquire about Nelly and if she and Hanieh had brought up Sammy with her, which he got the answer already. Once again, Sara asks her fiancé not to get himself upset or worried. She comforts Amer for a while until he says he is exhausted, needs to go to bed and sleeps. He tells Sara he is going to think of ways by which he and Robert can tell Sammy about Nelly, how she thinks about men and Muslims. Sara and Amer decide they are going to discuss this matter further when they meet in the morning. They reschedule their meeting spot one last time before hanging up the phone.

Amer slides the balcony's door open quietly and sneaks inside. He closes the door behind him slowly so he wouldn't wake Sammy or Robert. He removes his pajamas and goes to bed. Amer was right. Both Sammy and Robert have fallen asleep. He can hear

their longer than usual inhales and exhales. Robert is snoring as usual, but a very distinct sound of his snoring can be heard. Thought of what Sara said about the way Nelly felt and believed about Muslim men, has been keeping him awake, preventing him to sink into sleep. Amer thinks hard to figure out how he and Robert can break the news to Sammy. But no strategy comes to his mind. Amer is already too tired. He knows he lacks enough energy and presence of mind to do so. So, he finally decides to discuss what happened with Robert the next day and together figure out how to dissuade Sammy of pursuing Nelly for good.

It is past midnight. Sammy, Amer and Robert are all in deep asleep. Sammy is dreaming he is wearing his apron while standing and facing his workbench and industrial machines, when he hears someone's moaning. He looks around his room, turning his head at all directions. But he can't see anyone. The moaning sound can still be heard. Ignoring the sound after he can't find the source, Sammy picks the metal rifle's piece from his workbench to install it on the machine so he would start machining it. But he notices there is an envelope under the metal part on his work bench. He picks the metal piece and the envelope. He turns the envelope and only then he realizes it is in fact Robin's last will and testament. Even he thinks of reading Robin's will in his dream. He is on the verge of opening the envelope when he notices the moaning sound gets louder. Sammy hears someone calling his name too dissolving into the sound of moaning. Sammy wakes up suddenly, while his right hand's fingers have formed a fist, and sits on his bed immediately. It takes him a while to figure out he has been dreaming. He ponders about his dream a bit. He remembers Robin's will. Sammy twists his ankles like he always does when he wants to relax and go to sleep. He lays down on the bed again trying to fall back into sleep, but thought of what Robin has written as his last will and testament is not letting go of his mind. Moments go by and he is still awake thinking about Robin's will. Amer's long and deep breathing, Robert's low sound of snoring and tik tak sound of the wall clock and stray dog's barking. Every sound he can hear are signs indicating Al Darrah town is asleep. He changes his position on the bed, turning from his right side to his left and vice versa, but it isn't working. He can simply not go back to sleep. He is very curious. He has to know what the contents of that envelope are. He knows well he is sooner or later going to end up opening the envelope and read Robin's last will and testaments.

Sammy gets up. He has already made up his mind. He has decided he would open the envelope's cover very carefully and accurately and would take it to the balcony along with a flash light, would read the will from beginning through the end, would place the contents back inside the envelope, would glue the cover and keep it back to where it belongs. Sammy can say no one is going to find out what he has done. Robert and Amer wouldn't wake up since he would not be switching any lights on inside the house as he would be at the balcony. He rubs the palm of his right hand over his forehead. He feels he has a fever. He leaves his noisy screeching bed as quietly as possible. He tip toes towards his trousers and finds the envelope gropingly in its pocket. He is lucky there is the moonlight shining inside his room and has made objects in the room a bit more visible. But still, it is dark.

Sammy tip toes back to his bed. He has opened an envelope before and knows how to open one without roaring it. Sammy takes a seat on his bed's edge. He tears a piece of tissue and inserts it inside the glass of water he sees on his night stand. He moist the envelope's glued part with the wet tissue until the glue gets loosens up. It's almost done he thinks to himself. Sammy waits a whole minute for the glue to loosen up completely. He tries to open the cover by slowly pulling the envelope cover. It works. The envelope begins to uncover. The only problem is the paper is too noisy, since everyone is asleep and even the smallest sound can be clearly heard.

Sammy decides to execute his plan. He gets up and tip toes towards the balcony door again, slides the door open centimeter by centimeter not to produce any unwanted noise. He finally enters the balcony and closes the door behind him using the same percussions as sliding it open. The moon light can now be felt as though it is stronger. Therefore, Sammy can read the will clearer. Despite Sammy being at the balcony already, he is still very careful not to wake Robert and Amer up by producing an unwanted sound. The envelope's cover is completely soaked now and its glue has been loosened up totally. Sammy pulls the cover from one corner of it through the other end. Yes, he says. It is open. He gets the will out of his pocket. He places the envelope on balcony's little chair and sits on it so the wind would not blow it away by any chance. He takes his cell-phone out of his shirt's pocket and switches its flash light's app. Sammy shines the light on the paper now. He suddenly hears footsteps coming from the parking lot below his building. The sound seems as though it's coming from somewhere farther, down below his building.



somewhere in the parking lot. But he initially doesn't think much of it since the neighboring buildings are still on construction being completed. There are still construction workers pass by his building's parking lot every now and then. Sammy pays his undivided attention towards reading and understanding the will. Sammy begins murmuring, reading the letter quietly:

To my dearest parents, and siblings,  
Hello everyone. How are you all? I hope you receive this letter in complete health and happiness, exempt from all sadness and evil in the world. It's one forty-seven A.M. on a Wednesday. I have no idea what's the exact date as I've lost track of time I've been here. It doesn't actually matter anymore. What is important is that I can, I mean I have the chance to write you this letter, will or anything else you want to name it. I've never imagined I would be in the position to sit and write you this. At least not for a very long time. But at the same time, I know there's an end to everyone's existence story, and this looks like to be mine. I happened to see things happening in front of me, that if I did not see them, there would be no way in heaven and hell I believed them. And I see people, both our side or soldiers and the enemy soldiers, meaning Isis members, do things that you cannot even begin to imagine a human being is capable of doing. Things that I cannot digest when I see them done by a human being. From cutting a screaming man open with a dagger to separating human parts by a chainsaw. I don't want to get more graphic, knowing none of you are a soldier. I want to admit now that the world has become a cruel place, a dirty place. There are no more sympathy and empathy between its people. We have not only destroyed humanity and spirituality. We have also lost our faiths and religion.

Anyhow, we'll be heading towards the front line tonight. We'll all be involved in making an important military operation as we were told an hour ago in the briefing. Almost everyone is writing at the moment. I'm seated leaning on a partly destroyed building's wall, which was apparently a gym once upon a time. My comrades are here with me too. They're also writing to their families. We ate around 45 minutes ago. It's me here, Hamid, Hessam, Eman, Abed, Marzouq and of course my best friends and comrades in my life, Mr. Hassan and Hussein Soury.

We had dinner already. If you can call that a dinner. It was zucchini and eggplant peals, boiled in water and some tomato

paste, with some stone hard army bread. Everyone is bidding their farewells, crying and asking each other for forgiveness in case they have hurt each other's feeling unintentionally.

It is funny really. Some soldiers have no appetite and cannot eat because of fear of what fate has in store for them. Whereas on the other hand, there are those who eat so much, no matter what, because they are simply nervous and nervous people do nervous eating. Yeah. Like I said, leaning against this demolished building's wall, waiting for a truck to come and gives us a ride to our destiny. We are waiting to be transported from here to our eternity. Tomorrow is the weekend though.

I remember I have always loved weekends. Remember? Anyways, forget I said that. Let's stick to the point. Well, it's obvious, I guess. Kidding aside, if you are reading this letter, what it means is quite obvious. I'm no longer with you guys, and you have to accept that as a fact, whether you like it or not. Please keep calm and quiet. Please keep your voices down while crying and mourning. I don't want neighbors to be disturbed and woken up because of me. Especially if you happen to read this after the midnight. Actually, I want to ask you all to kindly not mourn my death, because I've been thinking a lot, especially during past few days, and came to conclusion that I have had a nice life with you all. I mean it and I'm not saying this for you to accept my death easier. I sincerely mean it and I am serious. I have spent all my great life time with you my loved ones, and I want every single one of you to be thankful to our lord Jesus Christ for blessing you with such comfortable life, living with people who love you and care about you, no matter how you are or what's your behavior towards them and how you treat them. That to me, is a gift not everyone in the world has the luxury of having. I began realizing how blessed I've been in my life, when I saw a family had to offer their thirteen-year-old son to Isis for the rest of their family members to be left alone. Hell, left alive. I know a man and his wife fooling the man's mother, telling her he is going to come back for her and take her away, whereas they had left the old woman's fate into hands of Isis, because she was old and slow. Because she would have slowed them down running from Isis. I realized how lucky I've been in my life, after seeing a little girl in the hospital, saying she was sold to Isis for a very low price, to be their salves, doing their house work for them. But she was saved by soldiers of another Syrian army forces. Ah, and many other things that I will not tell you about, as it's not

why I'm writing you this letter. All what I mean to say is that I know for a fact, that I was lucky and blessed having such a loving family in my life.

Memories don't lie, you know. Dad has always worked hard. He has always been the provider in the house, working in cold and heat, in rain and snow, in health and sickness, to put bread in our table. He worked hard and honest. That's why we always had food to eat. All of us. Talking about dad's work and being a real strong one, is nothing but explaining what everyone already is aware of.

Mom, the factory of love, affection, happiness and forgiveness. in the house. Mom worked too. She worked as a twenty-four-hour service provider, cook, nurse, mate, diplomat and many other jobs, by which a house can become a house like ours, filled with love and peace.

And my loving sisters whom despite the constant fights we had, despite all unpleasant words exchanged between us, we could not tolerate one another's absence ever, and finally my brother, purest and the most honest brother and a friend one can ask for. Please do not think I say these because I want you guys to mourn less or to make the process of letting me go easier for you. No. I mean every single word of what I'm writing you. It all comes from depth of my heart. We all know both you guys and I, that no matter what I write in my letter, no matter how hard I try to use soothing words or say write things, I can't stop your grief and shock. All what I want to do now is to let you know how I really truly feel about you.

Those first days I joined service, I began asking myself do all those soldiers' parents and siblings love them like mine love me and care about me? I don't think so though. You gave me love every second of my life being with your words, actions, thoughts or behavior. And I thank you for that and I thank lord for having lived such a beautiful life with such loving family members. I'm happy for the fact that I am loved when my life ended, specially by my family whom I love to death.

Please forgive me for all the pain and annoyance I've caused you. Each one of you that is. I'm sorry I raised my voice sometimes at home, forgive me. I thought I had grown up and demanded respect for that. What an idiot I was sometimes. I felt ashamed of myself when I remember with what anger and

resent, I spoke to mom in the presence of my friends. I am sorry mom. Please forgive me.

I shake out of shame when I remember I stole some of the money dad saved to pay off his loan without his consent and I feel like laughing at how stupid was what I did. So sorry dad. I'm sorry and apologize to my sisters because I hid their stuff, so they gave me some of the little pocket money they took from our parents. How stupid and asshole of me when my brother offered me alcoholic drinks and I told him I did not like alcohol and drunk with the guy he hated, the same night he had offered me to drink with him. What an asshole low life piece of shit, ha?

Some people deserve dying soon. I think mourning and grief for such an asshole guy is a stupid thing to do. You all told me to sit and study instead of enrolling for service. Did I listen? No. So, now I deserve to be among 500 soldiers who are all more stupid than myself, writing you a letter, before being sent into the heart of Isis, like I said, undeserving assholes like myself, deserve to die like this. Idiots like me are made to be killed. People like me are created to set an example for others to know how to live their lives. People should look at me as an example, so they'll be honest with their families, who love them by the way, and do not keep them in dark.

My dear dad and mom, I have no doubt you are more experienced than many other men and women of your age, knowing what you've been through until getting where you now are. And I have no doubt there was always this question bothering your minds, asking yourselves or even each other, why Robin's relation with girls didn't last long? You probably justified it by thinking I had differences with any girl I was with for a while, or told yourselves that all girls and guys break-up all the time. Or maybe you thought I was unlucky with girls at times. But there's actually a reality or truth involved. I realized I was different with my classmates, schoolmates, neighbor's kids and relative's kids of the same age, long ago, long before I was even a teenager, probably since the time I figured what were differences between men and women, both physically and spiritually. Yes. I, Robin Shaffi, realized I was different. I realized I couldn't show that roughness all men did. I couldn't show that strength I was supposed to from myself. It was simply not in me. I lacked meanness. I used to pity bullies in our school. I sympathized with my enemies even, or probably I feared them, but I

justified it as sympathy. I'm not sure. I grew older and tried my best to find myself a girlfriend, so other guys would not laugh and make fun of me. But soon after I got to know any girl, I was told I could be their best friend instead of their boyfriend.

It surprised me every time and of course I know now, those girls could not see that imposing presence and dignity they were looking for in me as a boyfriend. I now know they had realized how I actually was. Mom, dad, I've always wanted to exit the closet. But I didn't. I was a coward, I guess. I'm sorry for that too. A coward to hide the fact that the real reason behind me and Shirin's break-up was not differencing between our mentalities. It was not how different we saw life and marriage and family. I never told you that Shirin and I separated in a very peaceful diplomatic way particularly because she knew, she had understood the fact that I, her future husband and possibly father of her children, was not what she had imagined. She found out I was not so eager to get myself sexually engaged with her. She had figured I acted differently than a real man, a real husband. I was emotionally quite sensitive. So, she spoke to me and I opened up to her. You never realized we had become very good friends also, after we broke-up and called our engagement off. She took all the blame, so I would keep my secret and image. Therefore, I could hide how I really was. I am sorry mom and dad, but I swear this was not what I thought I would become throughout years growing up. I was born this way. But I figured it only when I grew up, looking like a male but feeling like a female.

Shirin told everyone she had changed her mind about marrying me, because she did not really love me. But that wasn't true. She did it to save me from being exposed in front of both our parents, despite the fact you had agreed with all conditions her parents set. You see, things like this, made me realize I really did not deserve your love and care. I lied to you indirectly, because to me, not saying what you have to tell your loved ones is equal to telling them something you really are not. I now wish I had told you, so you would stop waiting for me to give you grandchildren. I wish I had told you, so you would not hope falsely. Please forgive me. I was wrong. You have supported me all the time, no matter how deep I was in trouble. You have the right to know whom your son has turned out to be. I feel relieved now. Even a few minutes or hours left of my life. I did not want you to hear this from a stranger. I feel obliged to reveal my secrets to you personally. I mean I guess I always knew this was going to be

my destiny and the funny part is that I have always thought that I deserved such an ending.

I'm now left with a few minutes to deploy, a number of soldiers, a world of memories and of course, a world of remorse. I know it's already the end. It's late. It feels like we are heading towards the hell entrance and face the evil himself. Believe it or not, I've been praying to be killed like a soldier instead of getting captured by Isis as a prisoner. We soldiers here, have all decided to turn our rifle's towards our own heads and pull the trigger if we figured we were about to be captured prisoners by them. Many say they'll put their tongues between their teeth and hit their jaws hard to the ground if they run out of ammunition. If they want to shoot themselves, this will cut the tongue into half and the tongue bleeds till the guy is gone. I'm sorry. I don't know why I had to tell you that. Probably because I need you to know, so you'll not worry that I may fall into hands of Isis and get tortured every day. Anyhow, becoming an Isis prisoner is not an option. It just won't happen. It's out of question. If you are reading this letter, that simply means it is the end for me. But before I finish, I want you all my parents and siblings to know that I lived last days of my life every second of it. With your memories, loving and thinking about you all, wishing I was a better son to my parents and a better brother to my siblings. People understand stuff much later than they should sometimes.

I have some requests at the end that I'll be happy to know them being taken care of. 1- Please do not grief and mourn, for people think of our family as an uneducated family who its members cannot get themselves together in cases of tragedy. 2- Please give the amount you want to spend for my very expensive funeral and service to an orphanage instead. They would need to eat, find shelter and survive, so please donate instead of spending thousands on a single funeral service. 3- I want Robert to invite some of our common friends to our room, where we grew up together, and drink, instead of spending on other pointless expenses and say "cheers to Robin" each time you want to raise a glass. 4- Simply forgive me for all that I've done to upset you somehow. 5- Forgive me again. I was not a very honest person, especially with you guys. I will see you if there's another life after death, like what religious books claim. Or maybe I will be reincarnate and come back in a different form completely after my body decomposed. Or that would simply be the end and we can't do shit about it. I want you to know I will continue thinking,

praying and loving you, until the last breath I take, and I apologize for causing you any trouble from the time I began walking and talking to the present time. I kiss you all. God be with you. Goodbye. Your son and brother, Robin.

Sammy wipes his tears off with the palm of his hand when he finishes reading Robin's letter. He's crying uncontrollably. Sammy gets quiet affected and saddened by what he has read. He has become both distraught and worried, alarmed and upset. He is very sorry for what had Robin gone through and worried what would his fellow-citizens fate become if Isis makes its way to Al Darrah. Sammy remembers Robin. Those days he, Robert and Robin studied at the same school together. Sammy remembers well how secluded Robin was when they were kids and how he avoided being part of their gatherings, teams or gangs. He remembers Robin isolated himself from others. He was aloof. But he was a good and studious student. He lost his childish innocence and pureness with him growing older. Sammy also remembers Robert and Robin's parents expressing their concern, asking Robin why his personality had changed suddenly and he has become so quiet. When Sammy was at their house, seated at their dinner table, even Robert and sisters were concerned, even at that age.

Sammy, Robert and Robin and Amer went to the same school for a few years after Robert's family moved to Al Darrah temporarily. That's when Robert and Sammy and Amer's friendship began. But Robin isolated himself from the rest of the students in the school. It took him around a year and a half to finally find himself a friend, who also shared the same characteristics. Sammy remembers their school teachers, administration and consultants had contacted Robin and Robert's parents, had invited them to the school and had told them about Robin isolating himself from the rest of the students. They were convinced Robin was extra shy or could not start getting along with other students. Sammy now finds out that Robin's problem was not him being shy or anything like that. And Robin's aloofness and seclusion had a totally different reason behind that ever since. But Robin is now considered missing and untraceable in service, while Sammy, Amer and even Robert himself know there is no hope finding him alive anymore.

What surprises Sammy is that he is not feeling sleepy at all. He has become so sad and is pondering. He gets up the little balcony chair and picks the empty envelope from under his butt. He folds the letter on its fold markings and places it

right back inside the envelope like it originally was. He moistens the edge of the envelope's cover using his tongue and glues it back to its original state, when he suddenly hears a noise again coming from below the building. The sound is closer this time. Sammy begins hearing footsteps getting closer and closer. It is apparent there are more than one person approaching the building. He listens very carefully. He has pricked up his ears. Suddenly, Sammy enters the defense mode, thinking they might be some of Isis spies approaching for some unknown reason, probably with the aim of gathering intelligence and destruction or attack accordingly. He asks himself, what do Isis want near his building even if Isis has sent some people, spies for intelligence and destruction, specially at that time of midnight? Sammy's apartment is situated far from other local traditional ones or maximum two-story buildings of the town. Sammy lives in one of the three buildings in the town, which are more than five-story and considered high-rise in north eastern part of Al Darrah.

Sammy thinks of several different possibilities and scenarios. He decides to go back inside. So, he slides the balcony door open very quietly. But he hears another sound as soon as he wants to step inside the apartment. It sounds like someone is moaning. It is the same moaning sound he had heard a while ago when he was in bed, because his room's window was open. Sammy's eyes have bulged out still wondering. He doubts for a moment Sammy thinks whether he is still dreaming or awake? But no. He hears the moaning sound once again. However, this time, the moaning sound was mixed with someone else's voice, as though someone else is trying to comfort and console the one moaning. He figures it does no longer matter if someone is actually moaning. Because he thinks there should be someone else who can take care of the moaning man, no matter what his problem is. So, he decides to get back into the apartment and go to bed. But again, he hears another moaning sound. This time the moaning sound gets mixed with someone else's voice talking in English:

"I know you're in pain. But please keep quiet. Let us think. We don't know anyone here. You know that."

Sammy changes his mind. He steps back in the balcony. What makes him change his mind this time, is in fact because what he heard the person said, was not in Arabic. The guy is speaking in English, which Sammy can almost fluently speak himself. Sammy steps back in the balcony and looks below the building curiously. It is too dark for him to see anything, specially from the fifth floor. There is only a single lamp



installed at the building entrance which is almost always off and has a problem like building's elevator has all the time. Sammy begins thinking what to do? Something tells him to follow the voice and see what's happening really? Fear at the other hand prevents him to get himself involved. He struggles with himself for a moment before he comes to his final decision. He would have ignored it if what he only had heard were two men speaking in English. But someone moans and the other person who speaks in English sounds desperate for help. Sammy's curiosity takes a hold of him. So, he inserts the envelope in his trousers' pocket, enters the apartment, picks his keys and his cane, opens the door, gets out of the apartment and takes the stairs going down. Each floor's out switch light is getting switched on by detecting Sammy's reaching each floor. Sammy who has difficulty walking, finally makes it to the ground floor. He opens the building's entrance door and exits the building, holding the door, helping it close, so it will not get shut hard and make a big sound. Sammy presses the tip of his cane to the ground slowly. He takes his steps carefully and quietly and follows the moaning sound. He pauses for a moment to make sure he is going to the right direction following the sound. That's when he hears the man who speaks in English again saying:

"I know it's difficult to stand the pain. But I need you to. At least until sunrise. I promise you I'll find you some pain killers and antibiotics at least. But please. Listen to me. you cannot produce sound. You'll attract people's attention to us. You'll wake people up. They might even call the cops. You know what our situation is. Keep it down."

The sound can be heard coming from the parking lot. It apparently comes from between the cars. Sammy approaches the moaning slowly and quietly. Sammy stops every few steps he takes, pauses and relaxes for a short moment and continues walking immediately after that. Sammy goes further a bit more, when he hears someone says also in English:

"Hush. Quiet. Someone's coming. Shut up for God's sake. Oh my god."

The sound is too close this time. Sammy can already say the sound is actually coming from between two white colored vehicles. Both sounds are cut off after the guy said his last sentence in English. It seems like the one who moaned has listened to his companions. He has shut his mouth so no one would notice where they've been hiding. No moaning and no talking can be heard. Sammy has almost reached the headlights

of the white vehicle. He stops one last time. He stops, bends and peeks at the empty space between the two vehicles. He sees three men in traditional Arabic attire, two of them are blond. The three of them are crumpled with two of them face the one probably the same person who moaned. One of them has leaned against one of the vehicles, hugging his knees, looking at the guy who looks unwell. He has a cap on but in the same traditional Arabic Thobe like the other two. The other guy is on the ground. He has his legs wide open and the third person is between his legs while he has hugged him.

Sammy cannot see how injured the third person is, considering moonlight's shadow of vehicles casted on them all. What Sammy realizes only, is that the third person is not in a good shape at all. Moonlight has casted on his forehead and Sammy can see he was soaked in sweat. He has leaned his head against his friend's shoulder, looking ahead and moaning. His friend is comforting him. Sammy does not know what to think or what to do? Does he have to show himself? Does he have to ignore what he has witnessed and go back? He does not know really. It is not humane to leave them in that state and go. It is not how he's been brought up. He does not know anything about those three men. Who are they? Why are they there hiding between cars while one of them is apparently, badly injured? Sammy has to take a decision and stick to it. The torture of the injured man is enough itself for a kind-hearted person like Sammy to offer help. Sammy is fearful initially. But now that he has seen them and realized the condition they are in; fear has changed place with hesitance. The injured man gathers all his energy, calls his friend and says:

"Al. Al."

Al, the guy who has him in his arms responds after placing palm of his hand on his friend's mouth:

"I'm right here," replies Al quietly, "I'm right here, Tom. Freddy is right here with us too. Just quiet please."

Freddy looks desperate. He holds his head between his hands and shakes his head in anxiety.

Al looks at Tom first. He looks around and suddenly notices Sammy's head peaking at them. Sammy wants to hide. But Al has seen Sammy's head already. He jolts and wants to stand up immediately. Freddy too shakes for a moment. But Sammy takes one step ahead before they do and shows himself. He has his hands up, so they'll see he is not armed or a police man or military. He takes one more step with his cane.

"Wait. Wait Please," says Sammy with a convincing tone, "Don't worry. Please. Sit down if you don't want anyone else to notice you are hiding here. Relax please. I just want to help. I promise you. I'm no threat. Just tell me how can I help you?"

Al, Freddy and Tom look scared and suspicious. Sammy can figure they have gone through a lot from their behavior. They seem very concerned about attracting people's attention towards themselves. The guy whom Sammy has already found out is called Tom, moans again while trying to say something:

"Tom, water. Please. I need to drink water."

"Ok, ok," replies Sammy quietly, "Do you need anything else for me to bring you?"

Al who is now staring at Tom, ponders a moment. He turns his head towards Sammy.

"No, thanks," replies Al with some sort of hesitation.

Sammy has noticed Al's uncertain response. He is absolutely sure Al is ashamed or embarrassed to ask him what they really need. Or maybe he is still not sure whether to trust Sammy and become friendlier with him, or impose to Sammy.

Sammy pauses after hearing Al's answer. He brings his shoulders up meaning it is up to them, turns back and begins limping towards the building's entrance door to bring Tom and others some water. There are so many thoughts circulating in Sammy's mind while he is going back to the building. He really pities Al, Tom and Freddy. Or he probably feels it is him who was chosen by the universe to help those three guys. Tom is not in a good shape and Sammy has not offered any kind of help, except accepting to bring drinking water for Tom, because he has asked for it. Sammy feels like he has a responsibility towards those guys. He has not even asked how Tom has gotten injured. His mind is wrapped around who they are, where they have come from and why Tom was injured to begin with. But he feels, regardless of what are answers to his initial questions, he knows he has to offer them help, especially considering Tom's condition. Sammy feels it is his duty as a human to help a fellow-human when in desperate need. Besides, he is very confident and bragged he can identify and differentiate good people from evil ones just by looking at them and now, he can swear Al, Freddy and Tom showed no sign

of evil in them and nothing that indicates they have any bad intention, not towards him and not towards people of Al Darrah.

Sammy is right about his sixth sense. He can actually say whether someone is positive and nice, or evil and criminal-minded. "It's none of my business who they are," Sammy thinks to himself, "I don't care where they are coming from, where they're headed, why is one of them injured and in such condition. I need to help them." Sammy has made up his mind already. He decides to help them first and ask them whatever he is curious to know when the right moment came. Sammy is busy thinking about all those things. He pauses for a moment when he finds himself facing the building's entrance. He remembers his father had turned half of their storage room to a little workshop when he used to work on projects with uncle Khalfan. Sammy's father had carpeted the other half and furnished it with home appliances they no longer used.

Sammy's father had turned the storage room into a very small furnished apartment So he and his friends would have everything available at their reach. Also, he would not be forced to go up 5 stories to get something he needed. There are a few used couches, a small used coffee table, a few small wooden stools, like what he has at his balcony upstairs, used electric kettle, some few blankets, pillows, cutlery and dishes, plates, etc.

Basically, whatever Sammy's mom was tired of using, was taken to the storage whether it still worked or not. She bought a new one and replaced it. Sammy's dad had everything needed for a few people to live comfortably at the storage. His mom had not made any major changes to the storage since his dad was killed. So, he thinks it is best to offer Al, Tom and Freddy the furnished storage as a shelter, at least until they figure out what they want to do next or at least until Tom is in a better physical condition. So, he turns back towards Al, Tom and Freddy. Noticing Sammy coming back from the entrance without bringing them water, Al is surprised and probably even alarmed. Sammy reaches them:

"Ok, get up," says Sammy, "Follow me guys. The storage is completely carpeted. It's better than this dusty parking lot, especially with your friend's condition. You will sleep there tonight. We'll figure out what to do tomorrow when you've rested well and are fresh. We'll get to know each other better tomorrow. Hearing Sammy's proposal, Freddy's face shows a

relief. He gets up immediately. Al, however, is a bit hesitant. Not because he thinks he cannot still trust Sammy, but he does not want to impose or create any sort of hassle for Sammy. Having a second thought, Freddy moves his body slowly and takes two steps towards Al. They both lift up Tom and stand him up while constantly asking him to shut his mouth. Sammy turns towards his building's entrance when Al calls his attention quietly:

"Are you sure it's ok?" asks Al quietly, "We have nowhere to go, but we don't want to impose neither."

Sammy stops and turns his head back towards Al. "Hell, yeah I'm sure," replies Sammy quietly with a confident tone so Al, Tom and Freddy would feel comfortable taking shelter at his storage.

Sammy then lifts his cane and shows it to Al and Freddy who are helping Tom.

"I wish I could help too. But I've got my own disability," continues Sammy, "Look guys, you wait a few seconds until I reach the building's entrance, you start bringing your friend then. Because that stupid entrance door closes automatically. I'll have to get in and hold it so you can bring him in quickly before any of the neighbors notice you. I mean, when you see me get in, bring your friend to the entrance and get him inside directly. Don't stop at the entrance."

Freddy nods. Al too. Sammy limps towards the building entrance quietly. He cannot run, but he does his best to walk as quickly as possible, until he reaches the entrance. He looks back at Al and Freddy, waves his cane, meaning they can now come. Al and Freddy who are holding Tom's both arms start walking towards Sammy and the building's entrance. Sammy holds the door open like he said and the three of them enter the building. Sammy peaks at his right and left. He closes the door behind them and asks them to follow him.

They take the four stairs going down until they reach a corridor. Sammy stops by one of four doors in the corridor, inserts the key into the door's lock and opens the storage room. Freddy and Al enter while carrying Tom from both sides. There is a little red lamp on at the storage on at all times, so Sammy's mother can see when she needs to take something from the storage.

The storage room is a dark and rectangular-shaped room which nothing can be really seen in it at night time after the

sunset, even with sharpest eyes. But it is different during the day, from sunrise to sunset, as the sunlight casts inside from a little window which is located opposite the entrance on the longest wall and makes things way more visible. When Sammy and others enter the storage, Sammy switches its light on and only he realizes the severity of Tom's condition. Tom definitely needs to go to a hospital Sammy thinks. Almost half of Tom's body is totally soaked in his blood. Sammy is shocked. He can't believe his eyes. He asks Al and Freddy stammering what happened to Tom? Al and Freddy give a meaning full glance at each other. They pause and Al replies after a moment and says he is probably going to tell him later. However, they need to help save his life first. Sammy tells them his best friends are sleeping upstairs on fifth floor at his place. He says one of them has a car. He can wake Amer up and ask him to take Tom to the hospital. Hearing the word hospital, Al, Tom and Freddy's face change. That's when Al says immediately that there is no need for hospital. He continues by saying that he can take care of Tom's wounds himself if only Sammy can provide him with wound dressing materials, some antibiotics, pain killers and some multi-vitamins if possible and there is no need to involve hospital.

Luckily Sammy has all what Al has asked upstairs when he thinks about it. Al, Freddy and Tom can now see the storage room's facilities. Al sighs after taking a look around and makes sure the storage room has everything they need. It is a relief. Al and Freddy sit Tom on a sofa. Al draws a cross on his chest and thanks God for making such a shelter available to them. Sammy and his mom have not made any major changes to the storage since his father passed away. Almost everything is as when Sammy's father was still alive. He had converted his storage room to a little apartment workshop, so he could make changes he needed to the rifle. Sammy and his mom have obviously added so many items to the storage room since, but not as much to change the way his father had decorated it. They placed any item or appliances they did no longer needed to a cardboard box. After entering the storage, visitors would see boxes, laid on each other quite neatly at the left side. More than half of the storage room is covered with carpet. There is a few sofas and a couch, old but still usable, old plates, cutlery, pots, etc. At the far end of the storage on the left, there is a little shower, toilet and hand wash basin, so visitors are not forced to take 5 floors up, just to urinate.

There is a single sofa, exactly beneath the window, behind which there are some bed sheets, blankets, pillows, and pillow cases, that are not visible as soon as entering the storage. They are neatly arranged behind the sofa. Traces of mini-industrial machinery can still be seen on the naked part of the storage room, which is in fact at far end on the left. At the far-right side, there is a little kitchen with a little sink, at the side of which there is an old microwave, which in fact still works. Plus, a little fridge, which more looks like hotel's little refrigerators.

Sammy is beginning to feel pain in his left leg already. He offers Freddy and Al to help themselves and take water or other drinks from the refrigerator and give Tom too. Sammy takes a seat on the opposite sofa, takes a deep breath, sighs and begins stretching his leg. Freddy goes towards the refrigerator, opens the door of it and takes out two family size coca cola, two single bottle of water and a few cans of different juices. Freddy takes one of the family size coca colas out. He goes to the kitchen, picks four cups from the cabinet, pours everyone cola and offers everyone. They lay Tom on the couch. Sammy shows Al and Freddy where bed sheets, pillows and blankets are. What is not enough is blanket, which Sammy says whether Al or Freddy should follow him to the fifth floor so Sammy can give them. He has to send the medicine box and wound dressing materials down too. Al volunteers to company Sammy to the fifth floor and take everything from Al is hesitant. Sammy asks if they are hungry. Al doesn't still know what to answer.

"Yeah. No one had anything since yesterday early morning, like around 5:30 AM. Everything was stolen from us. Everything. We only have some cash thanks God. We couldn't go anywhere or do anything with the way we looked. I'll tell you all about it later.

Sammy is thinking what to offer them to eat. He remembers his mother had bought him so much food, stored in fridge and the cabinet before he and Robert come back from china

"There are a few cans of cooked beans, corns, tuna and a few loafs of bread upstairs," says Sammy, "I'll give them to you, so you can eat something tonight. I'll order you some good foods tomorrow, so you'll regain your strength."

Al and Freddy seem thankful. They smile while Tom moaning again. Sammy pauses staring at Tom, who is in pain, laying on

the couch. Moments later, he suddenly notices Al is standing and staring at him. Freddy is staring at him as well. It is evident Al is just waiting for him to move. Sammy gets up, limps out the storage and takes the stairs up, while Al follows him. They notice Freddy is following them too. Sammy asks Al and Freddy not to talk to each other and keep quiet while waiting for him to get the stuff, because he does not want to wake his best friends up as he has still not decided whether to share occurrences of that night with them yet.

Sammy chatters away saying to Al and Freddy that the building's elevator had always been out of order, and in a very low and quiet way. He explains to them briefly that neighbors barely use or visit their storage room, unless they have to, in order to get what they need. He tells them it is best if they use the red light in the storage mostly at night time. Because a light shining out of his storage room is without a question going to raise suspicion of neighbors. Al and Freddy chatter they understood and are never going to produce any noise or let the neighbors suspect something is going on in there.

Heavily breathing, Sammy, Al and Freddy reach the fifth floor and in front of Sammy's apartment. Al and Freddy are quiet while Sammy enters the apartment. Sammy removes his flip-flops outside the apartment, so his footsteps would not awake Amer or Robert. He tip toes to the kitchen first, leans his cane against the wall as the sound of his cane hitting kitchen's wooden floor too may have waken his buddies up. He opens the cabinet and takes out first aid box and places it on the kitchen's table slowly and closes the cabinet and opens the other one. Next, he decides to open the first aid box and picks only what Al has asked for. But he changes his mind, however, and decides to give Al the whole box as he thinks the crouching sound of medicine sheets may wake his friends up. Besides, Sammy thinks it is best to give Al the whole medicine box, so in case he or Tom need any other medicine, tablets or pills, he can search the contents of the box, maybe he would find it. Sammy hands over the first aid box to Al first at the door, returns to the kitchen, tip toes again, opens another cabinet and takes out slowly some canned food he has been telling Al and Freddy about. His next mission is to pick bread's pack, which its plastic packing is too noisy. Sammy takes the corner of the package and suddenly pulls it, and the crackling sound is heard followed by Robert coughing. Sammy freezes where he is. He doesn't make smallest move. He



is just waiting to begin hearing Robert's deep breathing sound.

Robert changes position on his bed and goes back to sleep. Sammy pauses for a moment. He pulls the corner of the bread plastic package again. Bread package is finally in Sammy's hand. He has the canned foods in his other hand. He gives the bread case to his other hand, so he would be able to hold and use his cane going towards the door. Freddy is the one who receives canned foods and the bread from Sammy at the door this time. The only thing left is the blankets now. Sammy tip toes towards his mom's bedroom. Extra blankets and bed sheets are stored in her closet. Sammy opens the closet quietly and takes two blankets and sheets. Al and Freddy takes the blankets from him also. Since they do not want to talk and produce any unnecessary noise, Freddy thanks Sammy by nodding and saying thank you without sound and by liping only. Freddy smiles and takes a few stairs down. He stops, looks at Al and makes him realize he is waiting for him to go with him. Both Al and Freddy give an appreciating look at Sammy. "I don't really have any way of thanking you now," whispers Al, "but I can say thank you and remember you in my prayers my friend. Thank you, Mr.?"

Al waits there expecting Sammy to finally introduce himself. Sammy takes a step towards Al, gets his mouth close to his ear, "Sammy," whispers Sammy, "My name is Sammy." Al nods smiling and goes downstairs with Freddy while murmuring, "Nice to meet you my friend," which Sammy hears and smiles.

Al and Freddy reach the storage room downstairs. Tom's eyes are closed, so they decide to sit with a distance from him. Al takes the gauze, all other wound dressing products and first aid kit out of its case. Everything that is needed to dress a wound such as Tom's wounds is already inside. Freddy places all he has, on a single sofa. He sits next to Al and examines the kits one by one to figure out which one can be used to treat Tom. Al takes a thorough look at each pill and tablet sheet and separates those he thinks may help Tom. He pushes the pill box aside and tells Freddy to return it back to Sammy the next time he comes down to pay them a visit downstairs.

Tom is suffering from his pain. He moans and yells out of pain again, calling Al and Freddy begging them to take his

pain away. Al appears over Tom as soon as he hears him crying for help. He reaches Tom so quickly the way Freddy is amazed. Freddy too follows and appears over Tom after Al does.

"Where are we Oh my God," Asks Tom, "What is this pain? Oh God. I'm in so much pain God. Help me. Take it away dude. Where are you guys?"

"Freddy is sitting right beside me," replies Al, "We are in a storage room at the basement of a nice guy we were lucky to get to know. Don't worry about a thing. We're in a safe place."

Tom asks for water again. Freddy runs towards the half full plastic bottle which is on the kitchen's counter. Al asks Freddy to bring him the pills he separated from the pill box. Freddy does that and gets him all he needs. He asks Freddy to help him raise Tom's head and make him sit in a vertical position, so he can swallow his pills properly. Freddy pushes Tom up from his shoulder. Al too, takes his right arm which is not wounded and pulls towards himself until they are able to change his position. Al passes the pills' sheets with one hand, removes each pill from its sheet and puts it in Tom's mouth, while doing so Al is speaking:

"Yeah, get up and take these pills," says Al while feeding Tom with pills, "We no longer have so many of worries we used to have. We now have this place to stay temporarily. Thanks God. We have meds, food and wound dressing stuff with a first aid kit. One another super important thing is that we now can take a shower in that make shift shower. We'll take you to shower and clean you up me and Freddy after I've given you your meds. So, when I want to dress your wounds, you are already cleaned up. Here, this is antibiotic."

Al places the last pill in Tom's mouth. Tom drinks a big sip of water while swallowing each pill. Maybe he has been thirsty Al this time Al thinks.

"You see how lucky you are buddy," asks Freddy, "You take all pain killers, tranquilizer, fever and antibiotic pills, the guy has them all luckily. We'll now wash you up like Al said and wrap you up after you're cleaned up."

Tom is trying hard to smile:

"Thanks guys," says Tom in a deep rough voice, "Really guys. I know if it was not for you guys, I had my head separated,

laid over my shoulder while a few terrorists filming my beheading ceremony. Oh, shit I'm cold."

\* \* \*

Sammy went back to bed After Al and Freddy took the canned foods, blankets and medicines from him, but he couldn't sleep no matter how hard he tried. Insomnia has finally won. Sammy is not able to sleep. He accepts the bitter fact that he cannot go to sleep that night. So, he simply gets up and sits on the edge of his bed. Different theories play in his mind about what actually Al, Tom and Freddy are. He is curious to find out where they really come from and where they are headed. Why have they come to Al Darrah? What has brought them here? Especially those guys who sound Americans. How did Tom get injured? Why do they have traditional Arabic Thobes on? And many other questions that stop Sammy from having peace of mind and going to sleep.

Sammy is trying not to let negative thoughts bother him. He thinks to himself he is going to help them and be a perfect host as long as these three guests are not a threat to him, his friends and Al Darrah's innocent people, as long as they have no evil intentions in mind and are not part of Isis terrorists network. Just like his parents taught him, he is going to be a great host as long as his guests assure him, they are not planning anything stupid and bad. Sammy is thinking what are they now doing in his storage room? How is Tom, their injured friend doing? Sammy remembers suddenly that his guests have to sleep in the only clothes they have on. There is no soap or shampoo for them to take a shower if they want and there is no detergent in case, they want to wash their clothes. These become the actual reasons for Sammy to get up again. He tip toes to his mother's bedroom again. Sammy's mom stored detergents and washing materials in a wooden closet outside her room in the corridor. He opens the wooden closet quietly. He takes three clean towels, a shampoo and a container of shower gel. He next remembers pajamas. He takes three underwear and three new shirts he had earlier bought himself; he was given as a birthday gift and exits the apartment.

Al and Freddy are seated at both sides of Tom. He is now seated on the same couch he has been laying on. He has placed his elbows on his knees, bent forward, so it would ease his pain. The three of them are waiting for the pills to have their effect on Tom. So, when pills affect and make him have

less pain, they'll take him to shower and clean him and his wounds. Al gets up and goes towards the shower. He opens the hot water running to see whether there is heated water in the bathroom? When he notices there are no soaps or shampoos, he searches the storage and all the corners, and he is now certain there are no towels neither. He wants to tell Tom and Freddy about that when he hears someone knocking on the door. The three of them become so alarmed and worried that their faces become pale. Tom is in pain and is about to moan again. Al who is staring at the door, give a meaningful look to Freddy. Freddy covers Tom's mouth immediately.

"Open your mouth and we'll have to spend the night in the fucking streets," says Freddy whispering into Tom's ear who has already inhaled and exhaled quietly. They hear a familiar voice.

"It's Sammy," says Sammy quietly, "Don't worry, it's me. open up."

All three sigh. They take a deep breath. Al opens the door and notices what Sammy is carrying with him in his hands, or in a plastic case. Freddy takes everything from Sammy's hands. He wants to thank Sammy, but he begins talking:

"I assure you these shirts and undershirts are all brand, new and clean," says Sammy. They should fit you. They might be a bit a size or two big or small. But what's important, is they are new and clean. They're better than nothing anyways. I've brought you some detergents too in case you need to wash your clothes. I mean if you are in the mood to wash your clothes, they'll go dry by the sunrise considering the wind and the weather. There are shower gel and shampoo as well. I get you a roll of toilet paper in case. Towels were just washed by my mom recently. So, that's it, I guess. I'll leave you guys to it. Do you need anything else? Anyways, let me know if you need anything in the morning. I'll arrange for you."

Sammy gets out and takes the stairs going up. Al thanks Sammy for his hospitality. He says good night and closes the door. Al goes to Tom and Freddy after Sammy leaves. He and Freddy take Tom's under arms and lift him up. Apparently, pain killer pills had their effects on Tom already. He begins talking as soon as Al and Freddy lift him.

"Wow," says Tom, "What a decent, polite and reliable person is this guy. What is his name? Oh, aha. Sammy."

"have you guys noticed how many times the poor guy had to walk five stories and back, despite his disability and limping? That's what you call a real human. God bless him."

Al and Freddy agree with Tom's opinion about Sammy. They remove Tom's clothes. Parts of his clothes are stuck to his skin, specially at the wounded areas, because of bleeding which has dried up and stuck to his wounds. Tom is about to pass out when his friends are trying to get his clothes off. He is in so much pain. Al asks Freddy to get him some warm water. He is thinking he can moist Tom's wounds with warm water and makes his bloody clothes remove from his wounds. Freddy, however, believes it is best to get him under shower dressed. He says his clothes are going to leave Tom's skin as soon as becoming wet. He thinks they need to wash up what they were wearing anyways, why not get Tom under shower, dressed? Plus, if he begins bleeding after they separate his clothes from his body wounds, they'll be under the shower, and his bleeding would not stain the sofa or the carpet. Al has to accept Freddy's suggestion. He is right after all. Al and Freddy take Tom to the shower. Al adjust the water's temperature for Tom and helps him get inside the shower since it is too small to accommodate two people at the same time. He's holding Tom's arm though, so he would not slip or fall down. He requests Freddy to do two things while he washes Tom. First to get him a towel, a set of underwear and first aid kit ready, and the next thing, to arrange bedding for the three of them so they can go to bed after dressing Tom's wounds. They are all exhausted and need to eat something and go to sleep. Al says they would dry Tom first, dress his wounds, dress him up and get him to bed.

Freddy leaves Al and Tom. Al in the other hand, has Tom under shower. Tom's wounds begin loosening up. His clothes moist and release his wounds. He washes Tom thoroughly. Tom's wounds begin bleeding again. Al pours cold water on his wounds. He knows cold water helps stop bleeding. Freddy has everything ready as Al requested. He's waiting outside the shower until Al finishes bathing Tom.

Al and Freddy help Tom back to the couch while Freddy covers him with a towel. Al returns to and takes a quick shower himself. Tom is on the couch, relaxed with his head raised looking up. Freddy is waiting for Al to finish taking shower, so he can go next, take a shower and wash his clothes. He notices Tom is no longer moaning and complaining. He knows

medicines he gave him had begun working. Tom looks calm and quiet. He lays down on the couch while wrapped in a towel and looking at the ceiling quietly. Freddy enters to the shower next. He takes a quick shower and washes his clothes while Al dresses Tom's wounds one by one very carefully and dresses him up with the underwear Sammy brought them a while ago.

Freddy is finished with the shower. He wears one of the new underwear and begins hanging their clothes. He hangs All the clothes on the boxes which were piled up over each other in the storage room.

Al lays down on the floor next to Tom's couch. He's staring at the ceiling just like Tom. Freddy also lays beside Al. None of them speaks for a while. They are reviewing all what happened to them and brought them here at the end. Al sighs,

"I'm sure you guys are starving too," says Al looking up at the ceiling, "Give me a minute you guy. I'll get up and open two or three of those canned foods. We'll at least have a bite before falling asleep. I know. You are both very hungry." But none of Freddy and Tom say anything in response. Al lifts his head and turns, looks at Tom to say something. But he notices Tom has surprisingly fallen asleep minutes ago. So, he returns to his previous position.

"This guy is fainted already." Says Al lowering his voice. "I don't think he would get up and eat," continues Al. "even if the bestest meal is served right now. I'm sure it's the effect of those pills. We're not going to wake him up anyhow, or he'll start complaining of pain, moaning and will probably suffer the pain again, plus he'll become noisier and attract attention towards this room. Leave him. We'll get him a heavy breakfast instead. We will however eat a few bites ourselves. Do you prefer beans, corn or tuna?"

Freddy is quiet. Just like Tom. Al turns his head towards Freddy now and sees Freddy too is in deep sleep. Both Tom and Freddy have forgotten their hunger because of how exhausted they were and gone to sleep. Therefore, Al decides to close his eyes, so he would relax for a short moment, get up, eats something and go to bed again. Al, too, falls asleep while thinking about what he is going to do the following morning. He begins snoring moments later.

Al is a tall 26-year-old guy with medium body structure and long blond hair. He has a strong jaw bones and rather a bony face. Al is a reliable friend, colleague and an appreciative

son. Tom's hair is blond like Al's. He is a bit shorter than Al himself though. He looks heavier than his two friends, maybe because he is both shorter and chubbier than Al and Freddy. Freddy has brown hair with hazel eyes. Al and Tom's eyes are both blue and they have whiter skin than Freddy. He resembles Latin race. It is quite apparent the three of them are coming from good families. They are all well-educated and that shows just by hanging out with them for the shortest while. Freddy's body structure is like athletes. He looks well-trained. Al's character appears to be great in leading. He has both very good public relations and managerial skills. Plus, he knows his friends, Freddy and Tom well and is well-aware how to calm them down and handle their emotions. Probably that's what Freddy and Tom know too, so they simply listen to what he says, as they completely trust his judgment.

Al appears to be more familiar with Arabic culture than his other two friends. Sammy realized this when he took Al, Tom and Freddy to his storage room first. He noticed when Al saw the storage was carpeted, he immediately asked Freddy to take off his flip flops, removed his own shoes himself and helped remove Tom's sandals.

\* \* \*

It's the following morning and Robert is awakened by the sound of birds chirping. He opens his eyes. It takes a few minutes for his system to start. He rolls over and sees Amer is still asleep. Robert can faintly hear Sammy's snoring. Meeting Hanieh is the very first thing that comes to his mind. So, he already knows his day plan. He decides to get up quietly and go to the bathroom, take a shower and prepare himself for his date with Hanieh. That would be their first official date after the banquet night. He rolls over a few times and changes position. He feels he is still a bit lazy to get up his bed. He hears the sound of Hitler, Mr. Al Arafi's classic Volkswagen starting, which it doesn't like every other morning. That makes him laugh. Robert thinks to himself neither the building's lift nor Mr. Al Arafi's Volkswagen had worked since he has come to Al Darrah. He stops himself from laughing. He finally gets himself together, makes up his mind and gets up his bed. He goes to the bathroom slowly and closes the door locked behind him. He exits the bathroom few minutes later. Next who wakes up, is Amer. Mr. Al Arafi is trying to start Hitler and the sound of bathroom door closing woke him up. Amer peeks at Sammy's room and sees him still asleep. So, he figures Robert is already awake.

Robert and Amer have no idea what was Sammy up to last night very early in the morning. Robert is drying his hair with a towel when Amer decides he had enough of laying down. Amer gets up. First thing first, he closes Sammy's room door, so he and Robert's noisiness would not wake him up. He wants Sammy to rest as much as he needs. He gets to the kitchen and sees Robert combing his hair.

"Well Mister Robert," says Amer jokingly, "and good morning Mr. early riser. I'll now take myself into the place called shower till you wear something called clothes and make yourself ready, so we would take ourselves outside this place we call home. There's no need to boil the liquid called water sir. We'll buy something called cheese manakish on the way and devour it like some creatures called animal."

Robert is frozen staring at Amer and the weird way he talks. Amer glances at Sammy's room.

"And why is that guy still sleeping?" asks Amer now in a normal way, "It's not like him. He usually wakes up earlier than us or at least with us. But that's when he feels exhausted."

"No idea." Responds Robert brushing it off. "He's into a deep sleep. I was thinking of the same thing sir Amer. Maybe he had a sleepless night!"

"Never mind him. Fuck it. Let him sleep. He doesn't really have anything to do and he shouldn't go anywhere. Let's keep it down though, so he would sleep as much as he wants."

Amer takes all his clothes off right there at the kitchen. He places his dirty clothes on the top of the washing machine. So, he would wash them when He's free. He goes to the bathroom. Robert dresses up. He is just waiting for Amer to get out of the shower so they would leave. He decides to write Sammy a note while waiting for Amer. He writes a note and sticks it to fridge's door. Amer gets out of shower moments later, he dries himself immediately, dresses up and stands next to Robert to read the note he wrote Sammy.

The note is written on a rectangular piece of paper and reads: "Hello and of course good morning. We woke up like normal people do, took shower, dressed up and left just like normal people do. You, on the other hand, were sleeping like a polar



bear. Just to let you know or FYI, we are going to have a super day. Robert, the most handsome one.”

Amer is staring at Robert after reading what he had written. Robert is staring at Amer too, having the vilest smile on his face. Amer can no longer pretend what Robert wrote Sammy isn't funny. He bursts into laughter and cusses at Robert. They are both laughing quietly while getting out the apartment. They reach the ground floor a short while later and see Mr. Al Arafi is coming into grips with his classic Volkswagen car AKA Hitler. Mr. Al Arafi who is about twenty to thirty yards away, begins waving hand after seeing them exiting the building. Amer and Robert yell hello and wave hands to him too.

“Run Forest, Run,” says Amer after yelling hello to Mr. Al Arafi, “Run, if he catches us, he'll be talking for at least half an hour. Just run and sit inside the car.”

Amer throws his car key at Robert and Robert grabs it on the air. He presses the remote and opens the car doors. They both enters and sit inside the car immediately. Robert puts the key into the ignition, switches the car on and drives away. He honks for Mr. Al Arafi when they are crossing him. He waves again for Amer and Robert once again.

Amer is quiet, thinking whether to bring up Sara being visited by Hanieh and Nelly, so he would accordingly talk about Nelly, her opinions about men and how she feels about Muslim men specially. But he figures it is better to have breakfast, as he believes they both can digest things better with a satisfied stomach. Robert drives and takes any road Amer tells him to take. Amer is directing Robert to Al Darrah's main bakery. Amer opens his seat belt as soon as Robert stops the vehicle in front of the bakery. He gets out and asks Robert to wait for him for a second. Amer doesn't want to waste any time. He wants to go to the bakery, buy the manakish they want and comes back quickly. He returns a few short minutes later, while carrying two cheese hot manakish in his hand. He asks Robert to drive as soon as he sits inside the car. Amer begins unwrapping the manakish and begins talking at the same time:

“Remember yesterday?” asks Amer, “When we spoke about Sammy, Nelly and what if Nelly didn't like Sammy for any reason? You said we'll talk about it later? Because she hasn't said no to Sammy yet blah blah blah? Remember?”

Amer places a manakish on Robert's lap now. Robert reduces speed since he feels he is about to hear a disappointing news. He gives a curious look to Amer, waiting for him to continue: "So?" replies Robert, "I remember. Then?"

"Exactly what we were worried might be happening, did happen. What we hated to happen occurred. That Nelly, she has completely refused Sammy. She has told Hanieh and Sara. They are both so much worried for Sammy when he finds out."

Robert's facial expressions change. He loses color and becomes pale faced out of disappointment and worry for Sammy.

"I'm sure Hanieh will tell you everything today," continues Amer, "I told you, so you know already. We will talk about it in details later. I told you so you don't look very shocked in your first date with her. So, she would think Sammy's news is more important than her being with you. You should act very carefully I tell you. Be careful how you respond and act. Girls are extra sensitive to shit like this. Act normal if she mentions anything about it. Tell her today. Tell her you'll discuss this with me later and don't bring it up again. no matter how sad you've become."

Robert is deep in his thoughts. He has no idea how experienced and good Amer is in relationship-related matters and opposite sex psychology. He appreciates and praises Amer's ability. How calculated and proper is Amer asking him to act, Robert thinks. Robert pats on Amer's shoulder and thanks him honestly for his wise instructions and suggestions. This is the first time Robert can figure Amer's abilities in handling relationship matters that well. It has never happened something like that for Robert to realize how good and experienced Amer is.

Robert and Amer reach the town's roundabout. The roundabout is almost the point both Amer and Robert have to meet Sara and Hanieh. The notary and marriage registry office where Sara and Amer have to meet at, is located at the west side of the roundabout, and the newspaper kiosk where Robert and Hanieh have said they would meet at, is located at the southern side of it. They can both see the newspaper stand kiosk and the marriage registry offices from where their vehicle is parked. It isn't long before Amer sees his fiancé is walking towards the roundabout slowly coming from a far distance. Robert suddenly notices Hanieh too appears near the kiosk, which is much closer to the car than Sara.

Amer points at Sara and shows Robert from which side she is approaching and gets off the car. Robert asks him to wait inside the car, as he believes Sara is still going to take a while before she arrives at the car. Amer, however, believes there is no reason for Robert and Hanieh also to wait for Sara to arrive. He tells Robert to go ahead, leaves him there to wait for Sara and picks Hanieh and heads towards Al Thawrah, as they have a long drive ahead of them, the road will become busier and traffic will become heavier by minute.

Amer gets off the car, says hello and greets Hanieh. Robert opens the door for her, acting like a true gentleman. But Hanieh asks him not to bother himself. Hanieh and Robert sit inside the car at the same time. They follow Amer who is going to the other side of the roundabout with their eyes. When he and Sara met at one point, they turn their heads towards the car and wave hand for Robert and Hanieh. Amer asks Robert to move already using his body language and hand gesture. Robert does what Amer wants. He begins driving, getting farther from town's roundabout.

Amer and Sara head towards the Sheikh's marriage office after they meet. They are still yards away from the marriage office when they notice the office door looks locked. Both they glance at one another. They had an appointment, but the marriage office is closed.

"Now why the hell is this damn office closed?" asks Sara in a miserable tone, "We'll have to find the damn Sheikh under any circumstances. I'm afraid he would disappear on the exact day of our engagement ceremony. What are we going to do if he decides he is not in the mood to marry us that day for example."

Amer is frowning. He is quiet, imagining what Sara anticipated might come true on the engagement day. He nods after a long pause and shows he agrees with what exactly concerns Sara. Sara approaches office's glass entrance to find out whether there is any note stuck to the door explaining the reason why Sheikh's office is closed? But there is no note. There is nothing there to indicate whether the office is still going to open later on. Sara and Amer seem disappointed, angry and concerned. They are both so concern and this is quite apparent from their angry comments and furious words. They decide to take a walk around and come back in few minutes, hoping someone would finally open the office.

The main reason they have to show up at Sheikh's marriage registry office, is that they have to fill-up certain forms, so everything would be ready for their engagement ceremony, by which they are announced as husband and wife according to religious laws of Islam. After the ceremony performed by the Sheikh, they have an engagement party on the same evening, which is the classical or ceremonial way of getting engaged.

Amer and Sara decide to spend their waiting time to pay their engagement party venue a visit to make sure everything is okay and everyone is on track. Their engagement party venue is called Al Majed garden and while Sara and Amer walk towards Al Majed garden, Robert and Hanieh have already reached the main road and are heading towards Al Thawrah city. They are both a bit nervous and shy as it is their first official date ever. Robert has planned ahead and decided he is going to let Hanieh do most of the talking. Hanieh begins talking. She says about her exhibition and the impact its cancellation had on her reputation as an artist and photographer. She talks about some of sweet memories she had when she was studying photography. She tells Robert about herself, her family, likes and dislikes, etc. while Robert drives and looks at the road ahead and smiles listening to Hanieh's amazing way of telling stories. She talks about her childhood, when she and her family resided next to Sammy's parents. They were neighbors and how much funny she was pulling Sammy's leg.

Hanieh tells Robert about the passion she had established for collecting postal stamps. She talks about the time she was student and when her biggest hobby was to listen to the music with her Walkman, which was a sexy tool for those had it, as it made people look cool listening to music coming from a little box, which could be fixed to your belt and all that. Hanieh is talkative, but with a good humor. She is simply a sociable girl whose words are entertaining Robert well. She talks and talks. She talks about her interest in movies and theatre, photography and painting, and art in general. Talking about any subject reminds her of a whole new topic of conversation, speaking of her love for movies reminds her of the fact that people used to watch the movie they desired in a mechanical tool called the movie projector or cinematograph, if they wanted to watch outside a movie house, and VHS videos came to the market after technology improved. She remembers and reminds Robert the period people were being considered rich if they had a VHS video player. Hanieh and Robert laugh at people's perception in old times. Robert truly enjoys Hanieh's company. He thinks of her as a beautiful girl

who has a great sense of humor, funny and kind, and that is what Robert was exactly looking for in his life.

Robert and Hanieh speak a lot about their childhood and tell stories about past. They laugh and talk, enjoy every second of each other's company. It is not what they say about the past, but how they actually say it. It's apparent that they are extremely attracted to each other. They show their attraction towards each other by laughing at each other's jokes, listening to each other carefully and showing the same emotion towards what's being said. They have both noticed they get more and more attracted to one another by any moment passing by and enjoy each other's company more and more. Robert turns his head every now and then, glances at Hanieh's face, thinking how attractive Hanieh actually is. Hanieh has noticed Robert's long stares at her. She knows it is simply because he is attracted to her. She is happy, because she is mutually attracted to him too. That's why it doesn't bothers her that Robert stares at her. She even seems to like what Robert does. She too stares at Robert's face whenever she is sure he is looking away at the road and is not going to notice her staring at him. However, she does it in a very discrete way. So, Robert would not notice being stared at.

Hanieh keeps on talking, going on and on since she knows Robert enjoys her words. As a sociable guy, Robert knows attraction sometimes is built throughout time. That a boy and a girl do not usually have much to say to each other. He knows it is only after the second or the third date a man and a woman begin opening up to each other and the ice between them melts. He believes a relationship beginning this way would end soon. However, he thinks it is totally different in his case with Hanieh. He feels he has known her for ages. They had separated, because one of them had to travel and now they meet again and simply want to catch-up. Hanieh talks about her own family a bit. Talks about her mom, dad, relatives, neighbors and others. She cleverly points the arrow towards Robert though,

"Wow," says Hanieh, "I'm tired of talking. We're lucky we did not meet an accident, because of me talking like a machine-gun to the driver. It's now your turn though. Tell me sir, who's Mr. Robert?"

She pauses for a second and continues:

"I want you to tell me about What happened to your brother? I really love to know the story."

But she feels she has messed up. She suddenly realizes something and says:

"Shit. What an idiot girl I am, huh?" asks Hanieh, "Please forgive me. I know I've not asked you a nice thing. But I swear, what I meant is I want to get to know your family as well. Imagine. On our first date, I'm asking you to explain things that I'm now sure, I realize would screw your mood just thinking about them, let alone talking about it. It was not a thoughtful request. Please forgive me Robert."

Robert initially responds by simply smiling. He pauses for a moment and smiles:

"Don't worry about it," replies Robert, "You don't have to apologize. You did not ask me anything wrong. I would have told you about Robin even if you hadn't asked. I'm not that type of a guy. Really. Don't you worry. I would have become curious myself if I were you."

"I know you say that to save me the embarrassment," replies Hanieh interrupting Robert, "I understand if you don't want to talk about it. I mean it. Really."

"It was around eight months back when my brother, Robin, enrolled for service. He wanted to get that compulsory military service done with, once and for all. It's a must for any young man you know, in this country I mean. It's whether college or military service. If he went to the college and studied, which I assure you he was not the studious type, still he had to go and finish his military service after graduating. The only advantage educated young men enjoy in the service is that they would have a higher rank than normal soldiers. But still, they'll be in service for twenty-four months. We, Syrian younger males I mean, have no purchasing ability legally if we have not completed our military training and service. What I mean by purchasing, is not like going to the grocery and buy a pack of cigarettes. I mean property for example, I mean we will not be able to officially own any property, land, vehicle, house, apartment, etc. We cannot apply for a passport unless we show our completed military service certificate. We are not recognized as eligible to get married neither, unless we've been dismissed for some reason, like if we are our family's breadwinner, if our father has passed away and we are the only son, and hence, breadwinner of our family. If I am married for example, before finishing my service and my wife gets pregnant, they'll not issue my child a birth certificate, unless they make sure I will finish

your service or have already finished it. Now, you may ask how Sammy and I, for example, are given a passport and allowed to exit the country. That's because the federation requested the government to issue us a temporary travel passport, so we would participate in Beijing's tournament. Also, because we are both students too. Sammy and I should also complete our service. But Sammy is dismissed because of his limp. Yeah. I forgot that. Anyways, everyone spoke to my brother and advised him not to go to service as it's not the best time, considering it is the Isis war and civil war, etc. Everyone reminded him the country's security situation and the fact if he does not go to service and studies in a college instead first, he is going to experience an easy and fair service as he would attend his service as a ranked soldier. Ranked soldiers face a much easier service than regular guys without higher education. He did not listen to anyone though. My poor mom begged him to stop his madness and tried her best to dissuade him from registering as a soldier. She cried, begged him hundreds of times before he left home for service. She asked him to at least wait until the country is in a more stable situation in terms of security. He had a way out of it if he really wanted not to go, you see? He could study, like Sammy, like myself, to go to a college or university, pass the entrance exams and become a student. That way no one could touch him until he graduated. No matter how many people, or who spoke to him, it simply did not work. He did not want to listen. He had become the most hard-headed person I've ever seen in my life. But he listened from one ear and flew out from the other. My dad was the last person, I guess, who spoke to him. He talked to my brother one whole night. I'm serious. Literally the whole night until sunrise to convince him he was making a mistake, to dissuade him from committing that mistake. But he didn't listen, not to my mom, not to my dad, not to any of our sisters and of course, not to me. He is stubborn like a goddamned mule."

"Wait wait wait," says Hanieh interrupting Robert, "I'm sorry I'm interrupting you. But why? Like he wanted to buy a piece of property or he wanted to get married? I mean why that much insistence to finish his service?"

"I was about to tell you why," replies Robert after shaking his head remembering what every member of his family had gone through, "Anyhow, no matter how much we insisted to dissuade him, it didn't work. Until one day, I saw him coming back home, holding an envelope in his hand. My dad had gotten what was happening, now that I think about it. Because he just shook his head in quite meaningful manner, like he could

really say what the destiny had in store for his family. My mother was the first who asked him where he was since early that morning and why it had taken him that long to come back home? Because Robin used to go for running. He went to gym every other day too. But that day it was a bit different. My mom asked him to come and sat at the kitchen's table, so she would give him his lunch. Curious and worried, we all gathered around him to be there, when he told mom where he had been. He was hungry. So, he ate a heavy meal and when he finished eating, he said he had to show up at a camp to begin his service, starting the fourteen of that months. I clearly remember it as clear as a day, it was ninth. My mom went to denial immediately. She was shocked. No one expected him to go and do such stupid thing. My sisters kept on begging him to admit he was kidding and wanted to make a stupid joke. But no. He had already registered himself and there was nothing anyone could do about that anymore. That was one of the worse days of our family's life, I guess. It was a bad day."

"What did you tell him?" asks Hanieh.

"I kept on cursing at him of course. I was angry. Very mad at him. It was a very selfish shit to do. Don't you think? I left home angry. My fingers were shaking because of stress. The thing is, I was more worried for my parents than getting worried what would happen to him during his service. Miss Hanieh, it's Syria here. There are 2-3 factions fighting each other. What I mean to say is, people are getting killed in a blink out there. I guess what I mean to say is that nowadays getting killed is one of the easiest things to do here in this country."

Hanieh interrupts Robert once again after saying sorry and asks him to address her Hanieh only. She means to ask Robert to put formalities aside and calls her Hanieh simply. She says because when Robert addresses her as miss Hanieh, she feels it makes their relation a bit sound like more official than being friendly and intimate. And that of course is not what she likes or has in mind according to her. What Hanieh says in regards to how she prefers Robert to address her, makes him very much pleased. So, he simply says he is going to definitely obey her wishes.

"You know Hanieh," continues Robert, "the thing is we now have a huge number of people who oppose the president Bashar Al Assad, we have Isis at the other hand, government supporters from another angle are there and so on. We were



worried because we had no idea where they were going to deploy Robin after his hundred days military training. Who would he fight for and with? That's what worried us most. He knew and still knows Army's first alternative is to send soldiers to the Iraqi border into the heart of Isis after they finished their first 3 months of service, which would only be training. This government doesn't care for the fate of old mothers and father's sons. They don't care what is going to happen to them. They are soldiers and according to them, soldiers are trained whether to kill or be killed defending the soil of their country, their home. Robin had to show up at the training camp on 14th. It was a few days after Robin and I began talking. Because after the day he came home and revealed he had registered himself as a soldier and I cursed at him and yelled at him, we stopped talking to each other for a few days. Anyhow, we had begun talking to each other again. I thought he had lost his mind that he decided to go and finish his service. I thought I would sit and talk to him. I asked him to tell me why? What's the main reason behind him being such insistent in attending to his compulsory service? Believe it or not, I didn't actually intend to get information out of him and share it with my parents. It was done deal. It was too late for that. I was simply very curious. I asked him anyways. I really wanted to know, because he tried to dodge answering. He wanted to elude I was sure. He began giving me cliché reasons most men tell their families. He did not tell me the real reason though. He said things like he wanted to start learning to live independently, he said he had to go anyways, why not now that his country needed him and some other patriotic shit. However, he was not letting out the real reason and I knew he was hiding it. So, I told him not me and not anyone else in our family had no problem with him actually going to service. We all knew he had to do it one way or another. I told him our problem with him was why did he have to go, now? Why not next year? Or in six months? Why now in such a shitty war situation does he have to go to service, which is really what made us all curious? He figured I was not going to let go of him that easily. So, he finally gave up. Hanieh, I want you to remember all what I've told you about Robin, because in order for you to get the whole picture I need to take you back. I figured Robin was not interested and showed no interest in opposite sex since we were around fourteen to fifteen years old. It was getting quite evident to everyone that Robin showed no interest in females, whereas I, on the other hand, always whether had a crush on a particular girl or had a girlfriend. But he isolated himself from engaging, involving himself with any

girl. I had figured it out. However, since Robin himself did not feel comfortable enough to come out of closet, or at least talk to me, his brother about that, I mention anything neither. So, what I did was I protected him. I lied to relatives, family friends, neighbors and even to our own parents. I covered for him and said I saw him with a girl or he had a date or a crush on a girl. So, no one would watch him under the microscope and tried to figure out why he didn't have a girlfriend, etc. I didn't want anyone to suspect his gender, being straight or gay. He's my brother and I love him of course, no matter what. Even if he hadn't still felt he could trust and share his secret with me. But I had decided to keep on covering for him in hopes he would one day open up to me and finally talks to me. I'm sure my parents, my dad specially, had suspected though. Maybe even my mother. But the thing with our mom is, she goes into denial as soon as she's informed of an unpleasant news or she's told a bad news. Especially concerning her family members. Maybe she also suspected, but since it was not what she had pictured Robin's life would be, she had taken herself into denial. You should also know that even if my parents, we generally, are not Muslim, but my parents are of those strict Christian who are totally against intimate men's relation with other men. They are much more conservative than many Muslims I know. I'm sure you can imagine how they were and still are. That is probably the main reason why Robin was not coming out of the closet, until I asked him, confronted him about him going to service. That was the breaking point. That's when he finally opened up to me, after he figured I was not going to let him dodge the question. First, he said he guessed I knew the reason. He said he knew that I knew he was gay. He had apparently gotten to see, know and like an Italian gay on face book or one of these social media networks in the net. They had established an interest towards each other and that interest grew until it was more than a simple interest. They had fallen in love with each other. The Italian man, had apparently asked Robin to go to Italy and stay there together. I'm sure he said it was the Italian gay's idea to strengthen their bond and begin a life together. Robin sounded like he was too in love with the guy. His name, the Italian one, was called Alfredo. Anyways, they had spoken and figured everything out, where they would live what they do would do together. It looks like Alfredo had already found Robin a job in Italy also. So, he would work as soon as he arrived Italy. But there was only one problem. Robin had no passport. And in order to obtain one, he had to present his military service completion card. Let's face it my dear Hanieh. Here, we live in an Islamic

country. We, Christians, not only are considered the minority, but society wouldn't accept such a thing as bisexual or homosexual despite so many of them who are Muslims, right there in the capital. Anyway, Robin had fallen in love with Italian Alfredo and had to register himself and go to service simply to be eligible to apply for a passport, so he would fly to Italy and live with Alfredo happily ever after. He accepted the pressures and dangers involved in becoming a soldier, particularly because of love. I understand him of course and give him the right. Don't you? considering he's in love?"

Hanieh is focused, carefully listening to the tale Robert tells her. She frowns out of concentration on the subject.

"Of course," replies Hanieh nodding and sympathizing with Robert and his brother, "Obviously. Of course, I give him the right too. He's in fact such a lucky guy having a brother like you. And bravo to you. You've been a very understanding and open minded individual in this real story. I pity him now that you've told me his story. Oh my God. You are right. Your brother could not come out, especially considering the fact our society is not yet ready for things of this nature. Have you heard what have some people done to a number of gays somewhere in Damascus? Poor guys. It's not their fault for the way they are and feel. You are like I said right. People don't care much for gays in this country. Society denies people with bisexual issues. I don't know how to say that. Gays are not getting the social recognition they deserve. What I want to ask you is, can't your brother seek asylum in Italy? Like so many others, who are actually even gay, they get themselves to Europe and seek asylum, lying even, saying they are gay? Can't he do like so many others do? Can't he go to Italy illegally via sea, like many would through Greece or somewhere, get himself to Europe? Like find a smuggler or human trafficker or whatever it's called to take him to Europe? Even if it's illegal, but so many people do that, especially younger ones who search for better lives and a new start? I mean did he really have to choose service? Or it didn't even cross his mind?"

"I asked him the same questions," replies Robert, "He said he was scared risking his life getting to Italy. He said there was no guarantee he even reached Europe, let alone getting to Italy. And he's right mind you. Do you have any idea how many young men and women have drawn in the same sea water you're talking about? Just because of boatmen's greed? Because they lead 50 people in a 20 people boat? So, they'll earn almost

triple with going one trip? People fall down into the water because they just hang on to something rather than sitting in a normal and secure way. Do you think that a boatman stops for whomever falls in the water? No. He has already been paid. Besides, what he does, is illegal. So, he won't even stop. Because he fears the coastguards catch up to him and arrest him, so he will not stop. He goes until he reaches wherever he has promised those unfortunate passengers. So, Robin went to service and made me promise him not to tell our parents his real reason for registering for military service. It was crystal clear I was the only one he told about that. He admitted he told me because I always walked on his nerves asking him why. And I promised him of course never mention anything about it to our parents. Anyhow, 14<sup>th</sup>. came and my isolated quiet brother left home for service. Well, he was obviously trained for 3 months and we knew his whereabouts and after his training, he and so many others, were deployed to different areas, where there was unrest. We were all in touch with him in the beginning, whether via email, text, phone calls or internet apps and we knew how, where and when he was. He used to send us pictures, which he looked okay in all of them. He looked he had adjusted already. He sent voice messages, etc., until everything stopped abruptly. It was still fine for a few days, even if we had gotten used to know his whereabouts. We didn't think much of that in the beginning days. We figured he was a soldier. He was not a free man to be able to get in touch with us anytime he liked. But our worries grew and being unaware of his whereabouts raised concerns gradually. That's when we began investigating where he was? I specially started one day. I said enough is enough. I started seriously looking for him. When I found no sign of him anywhere, I decided I had to visit compulsory military service headquarters and take it from there. But they told me I had to follow up from where my brother was deployed. When I pushed for further info, I was given the name Al Namar base, which I'm sure you know where it is. So, that's one of the reasons I'm here in Al Darrah, enjoying your company, aside from having to be here as one of Amer's best men in his engagement ceremony."

"Are you talking about Al Namar here in Al Darrah?" asks Hanieh.

"Yes ma'am," replies Robert, "That's the one. My dad's friend's son is a high ranking official in that base. He's a major. My dad's friend asked his Major son to help me find Robin. I had to pay him a visit, which I did. Major is kind,

he's a gentleman with a big heart. But he couldn't really help me find my brother. It was with his help that I found out my brother has two best friends and comrade though, a twin brother called Hassan and Hussein Soury he spent almost all his time with. Again, with Major's help, I found out that I could only ask the twins about Robin's whereabouts, which they turned out to be hospitalized as they were severely wounded in the battlefield. They were under care at Al thawrah hospital, the same city we are on our way to. Sammy, myself and Amer went to visit the twins in the hospital. They were unfortunately in such a bad shape they could not breathe on their own and were alive only with the help of life support, let alone telling me my brother's whereabouts. One of them was already considered dead as per the doctors. They literally had no hope to save the poor guy. The other one, however, is still in coma. We're waiting for him to come to, so we can ask him what happened to my brother."

Robert's facial expressions become very sad without him noticing it himself. He pauses for a moment. He begins talking again with a deep scratchy sad tone.

"You know, the hardest part was, when we went to visit the twins, their mother took a letter out of one of their uniform's pockets. It turned out the letter was in fact Robin's last will and testament. She took it out right in front of us."

Robert pauses again. He's about to burst into tears. Hanieh sympathizes with him. She pities him. She touches Robert's right hand which is on the gear, holds his hand for a moment to calm him down. Robert is still quiet, staring at the horizon on the end of the road ahead. He is focused on driving and at the same time thinking of all what he has gone through when he suddenly feels warmth of Hanieh's hand on his. He feels something warmed his heart at the same time. He turns his head towards her for a moment. He and Hanieh gaze at each other's eyes for a brief moment. He turns his hand and holds Hanieh's hand. Their fingers tie to one another. Robert feels for the first time Hanieh's long, thin and smooth fingers on the palm of his hand. They squeeze each other's hand for a few seconds.

Hanieh's hand has given Robert an indescribable feeling that he is experiencing for the very first time in his life. Robert reduces the car speed gradually. He uses the vehicle's indicator and pulls over further down. He turns his upper

body towards Hanieh and tells her he can now gaze at her eyes for as long as he needs. Hanieh smiles looking into Robert's eyes. She holds his hand with her both hands now. Robert lays his head back still looking into Hanieh's eyes. He has a very strong urge to kiss Hanieh's lips. Robert and Hanieh's face are getting closer and closer to one another. Their noses touch while still gazing into each other's eyes.

\* \* \*

Sammy opens his eyes, glances at the clock and sees it is ten forty-eight AM. He can't believe he had been sleeping for that long. He suddenly remembers the night before and figures there is no room for laziness. He has to attend to his guests whom he is sure are definitely starving by now. He sits up on his bed and looks around to find his cane. He is developing the idea of inviting Al and Freddy upstairs to his apartment for breakfast. Sammy is certain that Tom will not even be able to move. He gets up and goes to the bathroom, washes up and gets to the kitchen to see what he has in the fridge. He has to make sure there are enough ingredients to feed four men. But he notices a note sticker to the fridge before he opens it. He bursts into laughter after reading Robert's note to him. Sammy is assured by Robert that he and Amer are not coming home for a long time. So, it is a good opportunity for him to go downstairs and invite Al, Freddy and probably Tom, upstairs. Sammy opens the fridge and sees cucumbers, tomatoes, eggs, cheese, honey and some other stuff. His mom has left him enough food, thanks God. He stops in front of the mirror by the entrance before he exits the apartment. He combs his hair, takes his keys and cane, then gets out and closes the door behind him. "Are they already awake?" Sammy asks himself.

Sammy figures he is doing the right thing by going downstairs personally and check on them. Moments later, Sammy reaches the ground floor and takes a few more stairs down until he reaches the storage door. He knocks on the door quietly twice with the tip of his finger and waits for one of them to open the door for him. He lays his ear on the storage door after no one answers. He cannot hear a thing. Sammy thinks they have probably left the storage long before he even woke up. Or, they maybe still deep in sleep. That's when he hears one of them cough and he knows they are still in there. He does not want to wake them up. So, he decides to go back to his apartment until they wake up after having enough rest. But he thinks he can even do something better. Advertisement flyers

and little catalogues are scattered all around the ground. Companies, department stores, hypermarkets, etc. are used to throwing their flyers, containing their latest offers, at each building, so the residents would see them and get encouraged to visit and do their shopping there at their stores. Sammy removes his nice-looking ball-pen from his pocket. He picks a yellow color flyer from the floor and writes Al, Tom and Freddy a note:

"Hi guys. Good morning. I came to invite you upstairs, so we will have breakfast. You were all sleeping, I guess. I'm going back up. I'll wait for you, so we will have breakfast together. I hope Tom feels better and can make it upstairs too. See you. Sammy."

Sammy slips the flyer in with its note face up from under the door and he gets back upstairs. He goes to the kitchen directly as soon as he enters his apartment. He fills the electric kettle with water and switches it on. He is placing the breakfast ingredients on the kitchen table and is waiting for his new friends to show up. Sammy takes his cane after a moment and goes to the washroom.

The kettle's water is already boiling when he gets out of the washroom. His guests, however, have not arrived yet. To keep the water from cooling off, Sammy reduces the fire power. It is important for him to have hot water ready when his guests arrive. He makes himself a cup of instant coffee and makes himself a sandwich after a while when he feels really hungry. He is drinking his coffee when he hears someone knocking on the door. He takes his cane and goes towards the entrance, opens the door and sees only Al surprisingly. He says good morning to Sammy and Sammy asks about his other two friends, thinking they'll all have breakfast together. But Al explains they have fainted after Sammy got them soaps, towels, underwear and detergents, and that they have washed Tom, their own body and clothes and obviously collapsed afterwards since the three of them were exhausted. After Al sits next to Sammy at the table, he admits to Sammy that he has intentionally come upstairs by himself to talk to him in private. Sammy is confused though. He doesn't know what to make of what Al tells him. But Al continues talking and says he has been waiting for the right moment to talk to Sammy, because he has no doubt in his mind that Sammy has many questions in his mind about thinking whom he is helping.

Al says he knows Sammy has questions and is quite curious to know more about them. Al is right. Sammy is actually really curious to know the reason they were hiding between cars parked at his building's parking lot. Sammy makes Al a cup of instant coffee, places it in front of him at the table and offers him to start having breakfast while waiting for his friends. Al looks easier than the previous night. He feels way more comfortable and closer to Sammy than the night before. That official way of talking people do first when they meet, cannot be heard in Al's tone.

Al and Sammy begin having breakfast. Al starts talking while eating by first thanking Sammy sincerely for helping them and saying how much he appreciates him being such an understanding person. Sammy smiles and replies there is no need for thanking him, because he has no doubt Al would have done the same if he had found Sammy in a similar situation. They both finishes having breakfast moments later. Sammy gets up and asks Al to follow him. He tells Al he wants to give them some clothes. Sammy could already say that Al was wondering the reason Sammy wanted him to follow him. Sammy had seen them in traditional Arabic clothes the night before and knows they have nothing else to wear except those Arabic Thobes. What Sammy offers, makes Al very happy, as if he himself was tired of wearing that traditional Arabic clothes he was forced to wear. Al and Sammy go to Sammy's room. He chooses three t-shirts and trousers which he thinks would fit them and gives them to Al. He also looks for something else. He finds the box of an old style cell-phone. He takes out an ordinary old cell-phone, a sim card, the phone's charger and gives it to Al. Al inserts the sim card into the cell-phone and switches it on. Sammy uses his own smart-phone to call the old cell-phone he gave to Al to see whether the sim card is still active. The old ordinary cell-phone rings and that means it is luckily still active. Sammy tells Al that he is having difficulty walking downstairs and upstairs to talk to Al and his friends. So, from now on, he is going to call Al in case they need to talk.

Al thanks Sammy while thinking to himself what a nice guy Sammy is. He has figured Sammy out what a generous kind person he is. Al and Sammy go back to the kitchen after Al takes the cell-phone from Sammy. Al takes a seat back at the table and keeps the t-shirts and trousers Sammy gave him on the top of next chair along with the old cell-phone. Sammy asks how is Tom doing now? Al says Tom had gone to a deep sleep since the night before, thanks to Sammy for the meds he has given them. He says Tom has been feeling better and better after they



washed him and gave him the medicines. Al explains the three of them have fallen asleep before even thinking of food Sammy had brought them, specially Tom, who had taken pain killer pills, whose wounds had been dressed after being cleaned up in the shower by him and Freddy.

Sammy makes himself and Al two more cups of coffee. He places one of the cups in front of Al and sits facing him again. He smiles and waits for Al to begin talking. Al takes a sip of his coffee:

"Aren't your friend around by the way?" asks Al, "I ask because you said your friends were upstairs last night."

"They left early in the morning," replies Sammy, "They both had a date. Amer is my cousin. Of course, he is not having a date like that, because he is getting officially engaged to the girl within the next 2-3 days. Robert though, my other friend, has just met a very nice girl. He has his first official date today. They had to go to Al thowrah together with his girlfriend. Al thowrah is a city much bigger than this town. It's around 45 minutes' drive to Al thowrah. That's why he had to leave early. My cousin, Amer, had to immediately take care of some stuff related to his engagement ceremony before his engagement day. That's why he left early, too, thinking it was best to get them done as quick as possible. Yup. Amer, Robert and I are best friends. The three of us went to school together. I mean we know each other for ages. Amer, of course, is my cousin also, but I think of him more as a best friend than a relative or cousin."

"I hope your parents are alive? Are they?"

"My mom is. But my dad, we lost him a few years ago."

"I'm sorry."

"It's ok. My mom is at her sister's for a few days, helping her prepare for his son's engagement ceremony and party. Her son, meaning Amer, the cousin I was telling you about. My mom's sister is not well. So, she really needs her sister by her side to help for preparing for the ceremony, so my mom stays at her sister. Also, because they prefer to let us bachelors enjoy our own privacy. I'm sure you get what I mean. Robert lives in Damascus. The capital. But he had to come to Al Darrah for two reasons. One is to attend our best friend, Amer's engagement ceremony as one of Amer's best men and there are some other things he had to take care of over here. His brother has gone missing. He was a soldier. Robert has been looking for him for a long time. He went missing after he was deployed to the front line. So, Robert was told he had to

follow up his brother's whereabouts from where he had last been deployed. Al Namar is a base near this town as it's where Robert's brother has been deployed from last. So, he is here to follow up where his brother's whereabouts. It was just a co-incident. He had to come to Al Darrah because of Amer's engagement ceremony, and now he can follow up his brother's last seen location while he is here. Amer and Robert are trustworthy and reliable buddies of mine. I absolutely trust them, in any and everything, 100%."

"Can I ask what you do Sammy?"

"Of course. Student. I'm a student. Both Robert and I are students. Amer wanted to enter the job market though. He preferred to start working. So, he did not continue his studies. But us, Robert and I study mechanical engineering."

"Yeah? Great. That's why I noticed those machinery when we went to your room. You study here?"

"No. Not here, back in Damascus. But we have no class now. We had to participate in a tournament in Beijing. China. It's a long story. I'm normally staying in Damascus because of college. But I don't stay at the dorm. I go to Robert's house every night. He's like a brother to me?"

Sammy takes a sip of his coffee:

"Yeah," continues Sammy, "I said these because I may be able to hide you from my mom, but not from my best friends. They would find out even if I try my best to keep it from them. They'll get pissed at me thinking to themselves why didn't I tell them? Didn't I trust them or something? You know what I mean I'm sure which they'll be right if that's what they say to me. I have to go down, come up, order you guys food, etc. My movements will raise suspicions. Besides, you guys my need certain help that I cannot offer you by myself. You can see yourself. My leg I'm talking about. My limp has taken away my mobility speed. I had an accident when I was a kid after which I limp. That's why I'm saying I'll have to tell Robert and Amer about you one way or another. I trust them as I trust my own eyes and I can vouch for their honesty and friendship. Another thing is, I never had and I'm never planning to keep you at the storage for the rest of your stay, especially considering Tom's condition."

Al, who has been paying undivided attention to all that Sammy says, looks as though he is uncertain and hesitant. Al is quiet. He's pondering. Sammy can read it from his facial expressions that he has probably become hesitant to tell him what he had originally came upstairs to tell him in the first place. Al takes the last sip of his coffee.

"Yeah, you are right," says Al after he clears his throat, "I absolutely understand your point. I know. You should tell them one way or another. I want to thank you again Sammy for helping us. Like the three of you, Freddy, Tom and I are also three best friends. You've probably figured by now that we are Americans. We've been friends since we were kids. We grew up together. Tom had to move to London 2-3 years ago. He proposed to my sister after he came back to America a year or so later and then they got married. My sister is pregnant now. Tom will soon become a father."

Like a person who regrets saying what he was saying, Al's face changes. He repositions himself on his seat and tries to find a more comfortable position.

"Look Sammy," sighs Al, "you should also give me the right not to be able to tell you everything." Continues Al in a desperate way. All my brain cells dictate to me that I need to trust you. I know I can, just by looking at you. Believe me. Something tells me I should trust you, open up to you and tell you everything. But..."

Sammy thinks he knows what makes Al uncomfortable. He knows if it had to do with Al alone, he would reveal everything to him, but he's not the only one involved. Sammy knows Al can't tell him everything, probably because of some other reason or reasons. Sammy doesn't want his guests to feel under pressure to reveal their secrets. It is quite obvious Al wants to talk. But he is hesitant. So, Sammy interrupts him:

"Al Al Al," Interrupts Sammy, "Calm down. Look at me man. I understand. Calm down and just listen to me for a second. Let's be honest from the get go. Let us feel comfortable with each other, man. I guess you came here to talk to me or probably tell me stuff that do not concern you only individually. I guess it involved your buddies too. Like I said, I'll have to share with my friends whatever you share with me now. So, what you tell me, do not involve me alone. It will automatically involve my friends too. I want you to feel easy when you are with me. There's no reason for me to know every damn thing about you. So, I guess you tell me whatever you feel safe telling me, until the part you want to tell me and how you want to tell it. And if you don't want to tell me anything, well, don't tell me. I just want you to understand what you tell or not tell me does not change a thing in me helping you. You are my guests and I will help you as much as I can no matter what. Whether I know enough

about you or not. I'M SERIOUS. As long as you guys are not terrorists, which I can already swear you are not. Believe me. let me put it this way Al. I have already made up my mind about helping you last night when I offered you to stay at my storage, and no word, nothing at all can change that. I'll be there with you right through the end. And I will not hesitate doing anything that would help you in some way. Whether you tell me anything about yourself or you don't. Actually, you know what? I don't want to know anything about you. Just tell me how can I help you guys?"

Al sighs again after hearing what Sammy said. He looks relieved as if a heavy burden has been lifted from his shoulders. Al takes a relieved breathe and decides he wants to tell Sammy everything.

"Tom's job took him to London three years ago. He was part of an organization managed by CIA. Yeah, it was around two years ago when he moved to London. We were all new Yorkers by the way. Freddy and I were in touch with him. We spoke to him all the time, over the phone, on the net, etc. We received pictures from him. What I mean to say is that we knew how he was doing. Freddy and I stayed in New York, of course we spent most of our time together. None of us had a wife or children. We were both separated from our ex's. Tom came for Christmas. It was around 9-10 months we had not seen him. We threw him a nice welcome party. That's when he got to like Kathy, my sister. He told me he was dating her. I knew it myself of course. But I loved the fact that he was such a great person and trustworthy friend to ask for my blessing anyways. I gave him my blessings of course. He left two weeks later and came back last year again, and that's when he proposed to Kathy. She said yes, they got married and he took Kathy back to London with him."

The mild smile on Al's face while talking indicates how happy he is for the fact that his best friend and his sister are married.

"Kathy left New York," continues Al, "She packed everything and went with Tom to London. It was around a bit less than four months when the organization sent Tom to Iraq for a mission. Oh. I almost forgot to mention that we found out Kathy was pregnant. They sent Tom to Iraq and..."

Al pauses once again. This time not because he is hesitant whether to tell those things or not, but because remembering

those horrible days' events bother him and have an emotional effect on him. Sammy decides to keep absolutely silent, so Al would gather his thoughts, remember exactly what he wants to say. Al asks Sammy for an aspirin moments later. Sammy takes his cane to get up, but Al stops Sammy and reminds him the medicine box is downstairs with them at the storage. So, Al tells Sammy he is fine and his headache is not that severe anyways. He says he will take one as soon as he goes down to the storage if he still feels he needs it by then.

Al rubs both sides of his forehead with his fingers,

"So. Tom left London for Iraq. Kathy called me, the rest of family and friends often. She called me one day when Tom was still in Iraq. But I don't know why I didn't hear the phone ringing this time. I guess I had my cell-phone on silence again like I did sometimes. So, she called Freddy instead and told him the worst news possible. Freddy came to me immediately and told me what Kathy had told him about Tom. Tom was on his way to an important top-secret meeting when some armed Arab guys with Arabic thobes on attacked them. Their main objective was to kidnap Tom and another British guy. Bodyguards and security forces fought back, there was an ambush and shooting and all those horrifying stuffs, but the number of kidnappers were much more, so the bodyguards and security forces couldn't protect Tom and Neil, his British counterpart. Tom and Neil got snatched by a bunch of terrorists whose job was to kidnap important people and ask for a ransom. That's one of their methods for financing their evil operations. 24 hours later, they demanded for a ransom while our guys, an expert American team were working hard to locate and save Tom and Neil, because United States would not negotiate with and pay ransom to terrorists. Anyways, the team worked hard to find Tom and the British guy, Neil."

As if watching a thriller movie, Sammy's facial expression changes as he hears Al telling him what happened. Sammy's face and neck turn red and his lips are white. His eyes bulge out and nothing at that moment can mess up his focus and concentration on the tale Al is telling.

"Tom, Freddy and I are commandos, special forces," continues Al, "I mean before all these, being a tech-savvy, Tom was invited to work for CIA and had begun serving our country in a different kind of a battlefield, despite being number one sniper, commando and everything. Tom is extremely clever and has a high IQ. He was invited by CIA to fight and find terrorists digital footprints. Freddy and I though later

became special marine forces, special tactical trainers. I have to tell you all these, so you don't get confused later in the rest of the story I'm about to tell you. As soon as Freddy and I found out a team had been formed and allocated to find and rescue Tom and the British guy, Freddy, myself and two of our colleagues who were Arab Americans and spoke Arabic well, decided to team up and join the rescue team in Iraq. Having two Arabic speaking colleagues being able to actually communicate in Arabic, was a big advantage we had. They were like Freddy and myself, well trained, very dedicated and fearless soldiers. Their Arabic, as their mother tongue, could help us in places we did not initially realize. We got the permit and recommendation letter from our commander. We pulled some strings too. To be very honest with you, we flew to Iraq in less than 48 hours. By the time we reached the search and rescue allocated base, the team had already located Tom and his British counterpart. What was going on when we joined them, was that the rescue team's commander was deciding on a strategy or tactic on how to execute the rescue mission. Anyways, Freddy and I joined them and the operation was on. We rescued Al and the British guy in that operation to cut the story short. But it costed three of our people's lives."

Al is about to burst into tears. His eyes shines and Sammy is trying to act as if he hasn't noticed that. He thinks Al may not feel good about being seen crying, like some men whose ego is of a high importance for them.

"Al, don't tell me the rest if it bothers you. A tear rolls down Al's cheek:

"But we did it," continues Al after wiping his tears and putting a satisfying smile on his face, "We rescued Tom, Kathy's husband and her future child's father. We had rescued our best friend before they sent him to neverland. We took him back from those fucking bastards. They were torturing him of course when we got there, when we found him. He had attempted to escape, but he was caught. The kidnapping terrorists had been quite pissed with Tom for trying to escape. So, they were teaching him a lesson. That explained some of the wounds and bruises on his body. Terrorists opened fire on us as soon as we got there to initiate the rescue mission. Our team members were shooting back at them, covering us, so we would enter the premises and get the two hostages out. But when we located them in the building and rescued them, they unleashed hell on us. God damn terrorists opened fire and emptied all their ammunitions on us while we were getting

away from the building escaping those bastards. We were at both sides of Tom taking him away when he was shot two more times. He couldn't walk as quick as Freddy and myself of course after the severe beatings and terrible tortures he had been through. Tom's wounds were luckily not lethal. So, we got him out. His wounds were damn painful though. They were like any deep wounds. We began dressing his wounds temporarily before we got him to a hospital or medics or something. Because we've been trained how to treat wounds before they get out of hand and become dangerous. So, they were keeping Tom and the British guy somewhere near Iraqi border. It was around an hour or 85 minutes away from the base or search and rescue headquarters. We headed back towards the HQ, when we were ambushed again, this time by some mother fuckers of Isis. We were ambushed near the border and we had no way going back to our base. We had no choice but to fight back, so we did. We lost our Arab American comrades and many others. I'm telling you the short version. We were told through walkie talkie that our base and head quarter have been compromised and attacked. We were told to save ourselves even if it took us crossing the border and entering Syria. We were instructed to head for a city called Jarabulus in case we escaped Isis and made it to Syria alive. We lost all our team members. We stayed hidden until Isis thought we had escaped. We buried all what we had, our fatigues, rifles, documents and everything else. Anyhow, we managed to walk past the border without being spotted, found some Arabic thobes, got behind a truck which brought us till here. Now, never mind what we went through before we arrived Al Darrah. That is a whole different book in itself. So, I guess I want to say thank you for your help. That's all what I can say now,"

Al raises his hand to shake Sammy's hand. He thinks it would confirm their new friendship.

"Look," continues Al, "we are not legal in your country. I think you deserve to know. But you should know that we are here to help your helpless people. Tom is wounded fighting Isis, defending Syria, your country. Your president does not like his people to live their lives in peace and secure country. I say that because I want you to at least know that we have ended up here in your storage, because we want to help Syrian people, civilians who have no arms and ammunition, to live in a peace and secure country. We need to keep ourselves from being seen and found by any security forces, like police, army and faction members. Because it's none of their business what we are here to do. We don't look Syrians

Sammy. We are blond and blue-eyed white men. Our appearances would certainly raise questions and suspicions, even for the neighbors and passerby's in case we are spotted. So, the simple solution is, not to be seen and this is one of the helps we need from you. To keep us from being seen. We both benefit from that, trust me. Attending to Tom is the next thing that concerns us. We need to have someone looks at him. A doctor, a nurse even to take a look at his wounds. Someone you absolutely trust. The last help we need from you is to arrange sending us to a city called Jarabulus. Our people will come and get us as soon as we arrive there. It's a city situated in northern Syria near Turkish border. We have lost all our documents and IDs. I actually lied to you when I said everything was stolen from us. I'm sorry for that. But I have kept some cash, which I'm going to give you now, so you can cover our expenses while we are here with you. Like hiring a doctor's visit, medicine, arranging a vehicle for transferring us to Jarabulus and other expenses. You are a student. You don't have an income. So, don't expect us to let you shoulder all our expenses."

Sammy stops Al and tells him very clearly; he is not going to accept any money from him particularly because he is helping him and his friends. He tells Al what he does then would no longer be considered a help. It would not be anything, but a transaction, which looks like a business trade more or less. Sammy explains to Al that they are considered his guests and it is totally against receiving a penny from a guest in his culture. Al, however, insists much for Sammy to accept the money. He tells Sammy his intention for helping them is what counts, not the money he receives. But he can never allow Sammy to shoulder their expenses. He says Sammy has already given them a place to stay, food to eat and clothes to wear and in his vocabulary, that is more help than ever expected to receive from anyone. Al takes out a few hundred-dollar bills from his pocket and hands them all to Sammy without even counting them. Sammy does not accept the money initially. But when he sees Al being so insistent, he figures he has no choice but to accept Al's money. He takes those bills hesitantly. They both suddenly hear someone knocking on the door. Surprised and Alerted, Al looks at Sammy and asks if he is expecting anyone. Sammy goes towards the door. He shakes his head saying no to Al's question. Sammy looks into the lens on to see who is knocking. It is Freddy who is standing outside alone. Sammy glances at Al smiling. He tells Al it's Freddy and opens the door. Sammy and Al greet Freddy as he enters the apartment. Sammy leads Freddy to the kitchen.



Freddy sits at the table and begins eating as soon as he sees the food on the table. Just like hungry dogs when they find something to eat after a long time. Sammy makes him a cup of instant coffee and places it on the table in front of him. Al asks Freddy about Tom and hears Freddy saying Tom is still in a deep sleep. He explains he has called Tom several times, but he hasn't responded. But he was snoring. So, Al says he better get back to the storage as Tom may wake up any minute now and need some help with going to the toilet. Sammy asks him to take a platter from the lower cabinet and put something for Tom, so he would eat when he wakes up. Al agrees and says it is a good idea.

Al finds the platter and fills it up with breakfast and food. He remembers the clothes Sammy gave him for the three of them. He gets out of the kitchen. He takes two pieces of clothing and goes to Sammy's room so he would change. He has the traditional Arabic thobes in his hands now. He asks Sammy what he has to do with their Arabic clothes. Sammy asks him to throw them beside the washing machine, so he would later wash them and decide how to get them ironed. Al gives Freddy a t-shirt and a pair of trousers so he would change too. He asks Freddy to throw his Arabic thobe beside the washing machine too, so Sammy would later figure out what to do with them. Al takes the platter and gets out of Sammy's apartment. But he tells Sammy he doesn't need to iron their Arabic clothes. Al says they can do it themselves if Sammy instructs him how to, since Arabic traditional male clothing are very long and ironing them requires some sort of expertise. What Al says and how he says it makes Sammy laugh. Sammy tells Al he is going to order a very delicious pizza for all of them within the next one hour or two. He whether takes the pizza downstairs to them or would ask them to come upstairs so they can all have it together.

Al leaves Sammy's apartment. Freddy is surprisingly still seated and eating. Sammy enters his room and sits on the edge of his bed. He is thinking of Rana, his cousin, since Al requested him to find a doctor or a nurse who is willing to come over and take a look at Tom. Rana is a nurse of course and trustworthy, exactly like what Al wants. But Sammy has to call and talk to her first. He is not sure whether she would agree to come home and take a look at Tom's injuries. Sammy is also thinking of someone who would agree taking Al, Freddy and Tom to Jarabulus city. But the thing which has occupied most of his thoughts, is what and how to tell Amer and Robert about his new American guests. Sammy does not really like to

let his guests stay at his storage. He does not want to entertain his guests at the storage room in the basement. He likes to have them upstairs to stay with him, Robert and Amer, as long as they stay in Al Darrah.

Sammy is pondering when Freddy knocks on his room door. He sees Freddy in a none Arabic attire for the first time. Freddy looks better in a t-shirt Sammy thinks. Sammy is glad that the clothes he gave them almost fit them. Freddy takes a step in Sammy's room and thanks him for everything. He tells Sammy he is going to clean up the breakfast table, but Sammy tells him not to bother. He says he should do it himself.

Freddy goes back downstairs to be with his friends, Al and Tom. Sammy is left alone. He has to make up his mind. He sits on his bed for a few seconds more and decides to invite Al, Freddy and Tom to stay at the apartment with them. He knows well Tom is not in a good shape. Tom's condition as well is one of Sammy's main concerns. The storage room does not contain everything for a normal regular living conditions, let alone to keep Tom, Sammy thinks. But Sammy has to share what he thinks with Amer and Robert also, before he officially invites Al, Freddy and Tom to stay at his apartment with them. He has to discuss it with them in advance and let them know what happened since the night before. He has to mentally prepare Amer and Robert first. Sammy decides getting in touch with Amer and Robert is the first thing he has to do first. He picks his cell-phone and writes them both a text with "hello, good near to afternoon guys. Please call me when you get a few second. I need to discuss something with you two. Have a good time, Sammy."

Second most important thing is to call and convince Rana to come over and have a look at Tom's wounds. He has to talk to Rana. After he is certain Rana is onboard, the last thing for Sammy is to figure out how to send his new friends to Jarabulus. But who is so trustable that Sammy can request to smuggle his guests to Jarabulus? Sammy has to think of someone trustworthy, someone with a car, courage and time to do him this particular favor. Anyone who even agrees to take Sammy's new friends to Jarabulus must be so reliable and trustworthy to keep what Sammy is asking him as a secret and not share it with anyone at all. Sammy decides to prioritize his tasks at hand, attend to the most important ones first, and think so he would finally choose and allocated someone. He picks his cane and limps back to the kitchen. He begins cleaning up the table and washing the dishes.

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Amer is exiting the marriage registry office along with Sara. They are both quite upset and disappointed when Amer received Sammy's text.

After finding the marriage office still closed, disappointed and upset, Amer and Sara visited Al Majed's garden, the venue where their engagement party is going to take place in a few days. But workers had not yet arrived and the garden's gate was closed. So, Amer and Sara walked back towards the marriage office again, hoping it was opened already. One of the office staff arrived at the office simultaneously with Amer and Sara and opened the door for business. They entered, took a seat and waited for the Sheikh to finally arrive.

Amer is wondering why Sammy sent him a text message. This is not like Sammy. Amer, Sammy and Robert would rarely use texting as a medium of communication. They call each other. Even for the most unnecessary things. That's why Amer is wondering what happened and why is he receiving a text from Sammy? He comes up with several different scenarios in his mind. Sara too has become curious to know what is going on. She asks Amer who texted him and why is he that much inquisitive. Amer shows Sara Sammy's text. Sara is relieved to find out that it was Sammy who texted her fiancé.

Agitated and disappointed for the unpleasant experience they had at the marriage office earlier, Sara asks Amer to return to Al Majed garden to find out whether everything is okay. She has a bad feeling about things today. She wants to make sure everything is going according to plan. She tells Amer they better recheck everything again now that they are at the town center and have easy access to anywhere, they need to go. So, Amer and Sara move back towards Al Majed's garden. That's when Amer dials Sammy to see what he wants to discuss.

Sammy explains everything about Al, Freddy and Tom. He tells Amer the whole story of how he had gotten to meet his American guests. Amer who is obviously curious, doesn't know Sammy's guests and hasn't met them yet, warns Sammy not to trust anyone that quickly. He is worried they get mixed up in something that cannot easily get out of. So, he warns Sammy to be careful and watch out not to get himself in trouble. He says the Americans may unwillingly involve him in something that he does not want to get involve with. Sammy, however,

explains his heart doesn't lie to him. He says he has trusted the Americans already. He says he had a good feeling about them since he first laid eyes on them. Sammy is insisting that he has a good feeling about his American guests. He explains to Amer that one of them was wounded and in desperate need of medical attention.

Sammy explains that the three Americans had nothing with them, they carried no arms or ammunition and because they were fighting Isis to help Syrian people get rid of the terrorists one of them called Tom was injured. After Sammy and Amer speak for a few minutes over the phone, Amer can say Sammy is quite determined to help them. Amer himself is not the type of person who thinks only of his own safety and comfort, not giving a damn about others. He just wants to make absolutely sure associating with Al, Freddy and Tom is not going to result in getting everyone in trouble. Amer wants to give Sammy heads up and warn him of possible consequences.

Sammy tells Amer that he wants to invite Al, Freddy and Tom to stay with them upstairs at his apartment after discussing it with him and Robert. Because the storage, as Amer knows, does not have facilities of a basic and simple life at all. Amer is glad Sammy shared with him what he is planning to do. He and Sammy conclude their discussions by Amer saying he is okay with Sammy's guests moving up to the apartment if he is absolutely certain he knows what he is doing and if Robert has no problem with it neither. Sammy asks Amer not to talk about this with anyone at all. Not at least until he can send the Americans away to Jarabulus city, and Amer assures him he will not. Amer asks Sammy not to wait for him for dinner, as he and Sara are going to take care of some unfinished business and attend to stuff before their engagement ceremony. Amer and Sammy say goodbye and their conversation ends. Sara has been listening to her fiancé's conversation carefully. Curious as always, she asks Amer what is going on and Amer explains to her briefly what was his telephone conversation about. Sara agrees with what Sammy has planned.

Sara believes there is no reason for three Americans, one of them wounded by the way, to be wondering or hiding if they were really part of Isis. She believes there is no way Americans Sammy talked about are part of Isis. She says that in response to Amer when he expresses his worries that the Americans maybe part or connections to Isis. What Sara is trying to tell Amer is that she thinks one of the Americans who is injured should have definitely been wounded fighting

anti-people factions or Isis. Otherwise, there is no Syrians hating and fighting any Americans. Amer ponders for a moment. Sara is right, he thinks. He hadn't looked at it from this angle. She is right. The only reason can an American be in Syria is to help Syrians get rid of stupid factions and extremists such as Isis since he remembers. He reminds himself the fact that American presence in Syria, if ever, has always been beneficial for Syrians one way or another.

For a moment, Amer feels ashamed of what he has been thinking and of his comments to Sammy about the Americans. He thinks the American soldiers risk their lives to free Syrians from roguish plans of extremist factions and Isis. And now that three of them need help, and one of them is badly injured, he has tried dissuading Sammy from helping them. That's instead of encouraging him to help them and not to hesitate in doing anything he can to make things easier for them. Amer feels uneasy, remorseful and ashamed of himself for being such an ass. So, he calls Sammy back and admits to him that he has been wrong after thinking it over and over again.

Amer tells Sammy he thinks he is doing the right thing helping his guests and it's best to invite them all to stay at the apartment with them as soon as possible. Sammy is trying to understand and figure what is Amer saying. Sammy heard Amer warning him about the Americans moments ago, and now he is all of a sudden supportive of his idea and is on board hundred percent. Sammy is wondering what changed Amer's mind. However, he is now even more encouraged after hearing Amer's new remarks. He tells Amer he is going to contact Rana, their cousin, and asks for her help. But he is not sure if she would agree coming home and taking a look or at least dressing Tom's wound. Amer tells Sammy in response he has to do his best to convince Rana, but if she does not agree, he should call him back to figure out what other options they have. Amer says if Sammy's effort in convincing Rana does not pay out is not successful, he will see if Sara or any of her friends have anyone in mind. Sammy thanks Amer and they say goodbye to each other once again.

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Robert and Hanieh are seated next to each other at the advertisement agency in Al thowrah city. Hanieh turns pages of a huge album and Robert shows a huge interest in each and every one of them, appreciating and praising her artistic eye and expertise in photography. Robert holds Hanieh's hand

every now and then and keeps it for a few seconds. They seem as though they know each other for ages, just like lovers whose fire of passion never extinguishes. They reached Al thowrah a while ago, went to the ad agency in charge of Hanieh's exhibition and are now looking at her artwork. Robert's cell-phone makes a text message notification sound. Robert glances at his cell-phone in front of him without reading the content. He is in a romantic state and he doesn't want to get out of it, especially while holding Hanieh's hand. Nothing is going to interrupt his moment with Hanieh. He is focused on his new relationship. He cares about no other matter at that moment. Hanieh enjoys being praised and appreciated. She loves to be noticed both as a young woman and as an artist of course.

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Sammy goes back to his room after he cleans the breakfast table and washes the dishes. He takes a seat on his bed again and pauses for a second pondering. He is not sure what he is going to hear in response, but he makes up his mind at last and dials Rana. He has to take his chances as he has no other choice. He doesn't know whether Rana is going to accept his request or not. Sammy can hear Rana's phone ringing, but she is not picking her phone up. Sammy remembers when he called Rana to ask her about Nelly, the girl he had seen going into the kindergarten when he still did not know anything about her, he had to call Rana several times and leave her a voice message. He knows Rana does not normally carry her cell-phone at work, as she is a nurse and she does not want anything distracting her. She had told Sammy sometime ago she keeps her cell-phone in her locker and checks it every now and then, to see whether she has missed any call.

Sammy calls her again and surprisingly she picks up the phone this time. He is caught off guard as he was not expecting her to pick up her phone

"Hey," says Sammy muttering, "look Rana, I want to tell you something, but I want you to be secretive about it. Please do not, I repeat, do not mention this anywhere, under no circumstances. Don't talk about it with anyone at all. Can you do that for me?"

Rana is confused. She does not know what is Sammy talking about. But she is at the same time curious to hear what Sammy is trying to make her keep as a secret. So, she says she will not, after a long pause.

"Like I said," continues Sammy, "it might create a trouble for me if anyone at all hears about this. I have someone at home who was badly injured. He's seriously wounded and I want to help him. They are actually three guys. Three American guys to be specific. One of them like I said is badly wounded and in desperate need for immediate medical attention. He got wounded helping our countrymen get rid of those stupid factions and Isis specially. It's I guess fair we help them now that they need it and we actually can. We can help them by simply having some expert looks at his wounds and take care of them, stitch them if needed and properly dressing his wounds. I know you are at work Rana. I know you are busy. I know you have to go back home to your kids after you are done at the hospital. I also know you personally. I know you are hesitant and thinking about this or looking at this ambivalently. But I beg you to come and have a look at him. Do it for me Rana."

"Can't you bring him over here?" asks Rana, "Why should I come? Why don't you bring him over? There are good doctors and nurses even more experienced than me here Sammy."

"I can't."

"Buy why?"

"It's complicated Rana. I can't explain much over the phone. Just trust me. They can't go to any hospital. They don't know anyone and don't speak our language. But they are nice guys. They are human, like you and I. To be honest, I'll have no other choice but to take a risk to put myself and them in danger, and ask someone else whom I don't know and I don't trust to help me with this. Is that what you want Rana? It's ok if you don't want to help. At least promise me you'll never talk about it anywhere and share this with anyone. But please come. The guy is not in a good shape cousin. I gave him some sleeping pills and pain killers last night, just for him to quit moaning. His friends think he is going to recover by medication only. But I know that's not true. The effect of those pills will close in a short while and he starts his pain again. Just tell me, will you come or what?"

Rana is quite. She's pondering. Sammy can only hear the ambient sounds around her instead of her voice. He is waiting for her to say something. Sammy keeps quiet until Rana begins speaking.

"Text me the answer to these questions," replies Rana while she sounds like she has made up her mind already, "Text the

answers, so I would come prepared. So, I would know what to carry with me from the hospital. Do not Sammy, do not tell anyone I'm coming to your apartment. Do you understand?"

"Of course, I do," replies Sammy, "Thanks cousin. I owe you one."

"What medicines do you have at home now?" asks Rana, "How many wounds does he have? How deep are the wounds? Where are his biggest wounds? Does he suffer any broken bone? What meds have you given him so far? How old is this guy? Is he still bleeding?"

Sammy is so thankful and excited noticing Rana has taken the matter seriously.

"I'll text you all the answers now," replies Sammy after he sighs, "Like I said, I owe you one. Thank you, Rana."

"You are welcome. I have only one favorite cousin and of course I'll help him. You should however know that I'm on my shift right to the afternoon. I'll pass by after my shift is over. Just one thing, I can't stay for long Sammy. I hope you understand."

"Yeah yeah, I do. Thanks again. God bless. I'll wait for you. Bye."

Sammy calls the number he had given Al earlier. He answers the phone after it rings 3-4 times and Sammy explains in order to take care of Tom's wounds, his cousin has asked certain questions he had no exact answer to. He asks the same questions from Al. Al asks Sammy to hold on. He speaks to Freddy quietly for a moment and gets back to Sammy. He explains Tom's wounds briefly. He says he answers the questions according to what he has witnessed the night before when taking Tom to the shower.

Sammy assures Al he is doing all in his power for someone, most probably his cousin, to come over and take a look at Tom. Their telephone conversation ends and they both hang up the phone.

Rana hangs up her phone. But Sammy begins writing answers to all her questions in a text message:



"He has so many small wounds. I guess the bullet has peeled a fist size off his left thigh and a walnut size of his near arm and shoulder part. They are not in my apartment. I've let them to stay at the storage temporarily. I spoke to his friend Just now over the phone and asked him questions you wanted to know the answer to and this is what they told me. They have no idea whether he has any bone fractures. But his friends tell me they were trained. So, they've dressed his wounds as good as they could. I guess he would have yelled while they dressed his wounds if he had any contractions. I guess his wounds are around 3-4 centimeters deep according to his friends. The problem, however, does not seem to be how deep his wounds are to us. It's the extent, how wide they are. He's around 25-30 years old, I'm not sure. I forgot to ask. Like I said before, I gave him some pain killers and sleeping pills, so he can sleep for the night, which he did. He's still bleeding despite them dressing his wounds last night. I had some pills you can find in any household and I gave the whole bottle to them last night. But I don't know whether they gave him anything else aside from pain killers and sleeping pills. I don't think they had though. Thanks a million. See you soon."

Sammy forwards the text to Rana. He feels however as if he has forgotten something important. He is thinking what he has forgotten. He suddenly remembers Robert who has not yet replied to the text message he has sent him. So, he first glances at his cell-phone to make sure his text message has successfully sent to Rana, and then he dials Robert.

\* \* \*

Hanieh is seated on the sofa alone at the advertisement agency. She and Robert are still there. But Robert's place is empty beside Hanieh. Robert is in the toilet and is rinsing his hands when his phone rings. He dries his hands quickly, takes his cell-phone out of his pocket and sees Sammy's name on his screen. He remembers Sammy had sent him a text a while ago. So, he answers his phone immediately. Sammy asks him how everything is and how his first date is especially going. After saying hello and making a little of small talk, as if he was waiting for Sammy to ask, Robert begins talking excitedly:

"How is everything going you ask?" asks Robert, "Let me put it in the simplest words. I am in love. Seriously. Hanieh stole your friends heart and mind and existence. I wish I

could describe what a sweet and pleasant moment I'm having with Hanieh. Oh my God. What a girl. I can't describe the chemistry between us dude. As if God ordered his angels to handcraft such a lovely girl particularly to be with Robert. With me, man. We have become so close in such a short time you can't believe. Praise be to God for Hanieh. Really dude. Praise be. I enjoy every second of being with her. Believe it or not, I for once have forgotten all about my problems since I met her this morning. We are now at the same ad agency she has left her enlarged photographs with. We're watching her work one by one. Oh, oh. Wait, wait, wait. I'll tell you all what happened since this morning."

But Sammy interrupts Robert and tells him he prefers to hear it when he comes back home from Al thawrah. Sammy who wants to conclude the idea of inviting Al, Freddy and Tom to stay with them at the apartment as long as they stay in Al Darrah, reminds Robert of the text message he had sent him earlier. But spending quality time with Hanieh has probably made him forget all about others. Sammy says these in a joking way of course. Robert apologizes and says he is at the washroom in the same ad agency. He asks Sammy to hold on, wait for him to exit the washroom and he would be all ears.

Sammy explains to Robert all about Al, Freddy and Tom. He says all what he has said to Amer before about the American guests. But unlike Amer, who mainly warned Sammy to be careful and not to trust them, Robert loves the idea, specially he is happy and in a great mood. Robert says he is going to be more than happy getting to know Sammy's guests. Sammy expresses to Robert that the main reason for sharing that matter with both him and Amer is that he wants them to feel comfortable at the apartment and his best friends' comfort is his priority. However, he wants to help the Americans too, considering they know no one and have no help except him. That's why it is important to him to share and ask their opinions in this regard too.

Robert entertains the idea. But he asks Sammy a few questions out of curiosity. He asks him not to share and tell this to anyone else, as he knows probable consequences. Robert is so happy and excited about his date with Hanieh that he feels an urge to just express his happiness to Sammy. At the end Robert asks Sammy not to wait for him for the dinner, because he has no idea when he and Hanieh spontaneously come up with something to do next. Sammy is thinking to himself exactly the same day he is planning to ask Al, Freddy and Tom to move

upstairs to stay with them, both of his best friends have gotten themselves busy with their girls and God knows when they are planning to come back home, so he can at least introduce them all together.

Sammy thinks there is one last thing left to do and that is finding someone who is willing to transport his American friends to Jarabulus city. He figures he needs to discuss this both with Amer and Robert later on so they would find a solution for it. He decides to wait until Amer and Robert are back home to decide together.

Sammy glances at the wall clock and figures it is about time he placed an order for a pizza he has promised they'll have for lunch. It takes around almost an hour to prepare his order and deliver it to him. Sammy picks his cane and limps towards the kitchen. He opens one of the drawers and picks one of the menus restaurants dropped at the door steps of their building. Sammy and his mother kept all the menus they've got, in one of the kitchen's cabinets, in case they need to order something. They could choose what to order from a variety of choices.

Sammy chooses menu of a popular pizza parlors close to his apartment. He wants to order an extra-large pizza when he sees an ad on the menu saying he can get a large regular pizza for a free if he orders a large supreme pizza. So, he calls the restaurant and asks about their offer. It is true. So, Sammy places an order for two pizzas, family size, soft drinks, salad, garlic bread, etc., and hangs up the phone. He calls Al and asks him to transfer Tom upstairs with Freddy's help. Al is curious to know why is Sammy quite insistent in regards to transferring Tom to his apartment? But Sammy does not want to reveal he wants them to permanently stay up at the 5<sup>th</sup> floor with him over the phone. He wants them to have their launch first, tell them he is inviting them to move up with him and his two best friends. So, he simply tells Al he prefers to have lunch with them in his apartment, and on the top of that, his cousin has agreed to come over, take a look and probably do something for Tom and he does not want to take her to the storage. So, he thinks better Tom to be at his apartment when she arrives.

Al accepts Sammy's logical explanation. Al agrees and says they are going to go up in a while. Sammy goes to his mom's room and opens the closet where she keeps extra mattresses, they give their guests to sleep on, and sheets, blankets and

pillows. He wants to decide their sleeping arrangement in advance. He figures he is going to let Tom take his bed considering his condition, let Amer and Robert to sleep in the living room where he is planning to sleep himself, and suggests Al, and Freddy to sleep in his room, so they would be close to Tom if they need to watch him. He opens the closet first to make sure of the number of usable mats, blankets, sheets and pillows. He is however thinking he has to use the machine in his room to do the final work on the rifle's metal part. So, he changes his mind. He figures he has to find Tom another suitable spot instead of his own bed if he wants to keep him away from the industrial machine he is going to work on. He decides Al, Freddy and Tom to sleep in the living room. So, he can sleep in his own room along with Amer and Robert, and he can do his work on the machine, without creating any sound pollution for Tom. He is figuring the sleeping arrangement out when he hears a knock on the door.

He picks his cane which he has laid against the wall near the closet and limps towards the door to see who it is. He looks into the door lens and opens the door immediately after seeing Al, Freddy and Tom. Al and Freddy are panting while holding Tom from both sides. Sammy moves to the side, so Al and Freddy can bring Tom inside. He tells them to let Tom laydown on his bed for now until they decide the arrangement. Hearing the word arrangement makes Al to understand what is going on in Sammy's head. He takes Tom to Sammy's room panting. Tom is awake already. But he looks too dizzy and disoriented. He moans complaining the room is spinning around his head and he has severe pain. He asks for some water. Freddy runs towards the sink, picks a glass and pours him some drinking water. They all sit right next to Sammy's bed where Tom is now laying on.

"What arrangement you said a second ago?" asks Al, "What arrangement? We are going to sleep downstairs."

"You don't really think I am going to let my new friends sleep at the storage for as long as they are in Al Darrah? While there is still so much rooms for so many more people? Really? Do you really think my best friends and I are going to allow that Al, especially with the severe condition Tom is in? You should know if I let you sleep in the storage first, because I didn't know you this much. Second, my friends were already asleep and I did not want to disturb their rest, and third, because I hadn't discussed it with my friends yet. Because they are my guests too and I want to make absolutely sure they are comfortable with the idea and on board with that. My

cousin Rana, who is a nurse, will arrive in the afternoon. She has agreed to do whatever she can for Tom. I already discussed it with my best friends and concluded we want you to move up to this apartment and stay with us.”

Al shakes his head while Sammy explains everything, meaning he disagrees with Sammy and refuses his invitation.

“My dear Sammy,” says Al after Sammy finishes talking, “You have been a life saver, even till now and we appreciate your kindness and hospitality. But I’m not going to allow you put yourself in so much trouble Sammy. It’s not about you or your dear friends I swear. We’re more comfortable down at that storage my friend. Well about Tom, you are right. Storage may not be a good spot for him and even your cousin. But Freddy and I, no. We’ll just stay down there. We feel safer and more comfortable down at the storage. Believe me. We will just stay there. Please don’t insist Sammy. I don’t want to risk your safety my dear. Imagine if we are stopped in the storage. You can deny knowing us as we are not found in your apartment. Like that, we can say we don’t even know you. We can say we broke into the storage in dark, opened the lock somehow and hid ourselves in there. I’ve been both trained and have experience in stuff like this. Don’t take away our denying excuse. Yes, we will come up to this apartment, have lunch, dinner, sit, talk, play, etc., but moving in with you guys is way too risky for you specially. We will just go down and sleep at that storage, like we did last night. We will however let Tom stay. There’s no other choice considering the situation we’re all in. Thank you for suggesting. Thanks Sammy from depth of my heart, man.”

Al glances at Freddy and notices he is gazing at the floor and pondering. Freddy notices Al is looking at him, meaning Al wants him to say no too.

“He’s right Sammy,” says Freddy, “There’s no difference. It’s just for sleeping that we go back downstairs. We’ll see you in the next morning. Thank you, man. We appreciate your hospitality. You are so kind.”

Insisting seems useless Sammy thinks. They might feel safer at the storage Sammy figures. Maybe Al is right. Maybe its best they sleep at the storage. So, Sammy can deny knowing them or having any sort of association with them whatsoever, in case they are by any chance tracked and found at the storage, freeing himself and his best friends from any possible hassle. Al and Freddy are not ready to move up from

the storage and Sammy has to respect their decision. So, he does not insist any further. However, Tom is going to stay with him and he has to accept a new kind of responsibility. "Okay." says Sammy having a disappointed and innocent look on his face, "Whatever you like. I just want you to feel at home guys. Maybe I should have initially brought you upstairs instead of letting you in the storage. But anyhow, whatever you wish."

"Do you have the slightest idea what have you done for the three of us so far?" asks Al, worried maybe Sammy is quite disappointed with him rejecting his invitation. Do you? Do you realize we were still hiding between some vehicles somewhere in some parking lot? With how Tom feels? And if not between vehicles, we were not in a place better than that? On the top of that, wouldn't we know what would have happened to Tom by now if it was not for your help and kindness? You have done a lot for us, man. You may not realize it since you have absolutely no idea what brought us here. Do you really think we are uncomfortable at your storage down stairs Sammy? Your storage is much more than what we could ask for, rather than sleeping outside in the open between cars. Your storage is simply the place for the three of us. Sammy, we have all we need at that storage of yours. Water, bedding, shower, toilet, everything we need. So, take it easy man. We're just fine. We have all we need. Besides, we are going to be staying there forever. We'll leave soon. Also. We're not far from you. We are just a few stairs apart."

"Yeah," Tom says in support to what Al said, "You have done more than enough for us so far. Remember Sammy, we won't forget your help, believe me we won't. I only want to request one thing. My bones are killing me man. My back has begun aching since they laid me on your bed. It's the mattress, I guess. I can't sleep on a bed. Can you please put something on the floor so I can sleep on? It's much better for my back. A mat, a hard bed I mean is better for my back and my spines."

Tom moves his body on Sammy's bed. He's trying to sit up. He is right. The mattress is too soft and elastic. It is string like and it's shape changes with Tom's body position. That's why Tom even has difficulty sitting upright on it. Sammy grabs his cane. He requests either Al or Freddy to follow and help him bring a floor sleeping mat for Tom from his mom's room. Freddy jumps up before Sammy finishes his sentence. Al and Tom's attentions are suddenly directed towards a white colored rifle near Sammy's pc, and another assault rifle,

which is on a glass cabinet attached to the wall. While Sammy and Freddy go to Sammy's mom's room to get Tom mattress, pillows and blanket, sheet and other stuff. Al notices Tom is gazing at the wall and follows his gaze. He is staring at the assault rifle on Sammy's wall. Just like he tells himself what a cool gun it was once upon a time.

"Do you remember Tom?" Asks Al. "No one uses it these days anymore though. I'll ask Sammy why he has displayed it over on his wall. I guess it's just for decoration purpose. Don't you think?"

"No Al, don't mention it to him," replies Tom, "We don't know Syrian culture like we think we do. Maybe they don't like anyone asking them these kinds of questions. Forget about it. I may ask him myself, later in the right time."

Freddy and Sammy return a few seconds later, while Freddy carries a mat, a sheet, two pillows and a blanket. Sammy tells Freddy where to spread Tom's bedding. Using Sammy's instructions, Freddy lays Tom's bedding near a wall at Sammy's room.

Freddy and Al lift Tom and transfer him to his floor mat bedding near Sammy's bed. Sammy takes his cane and goes to the kitchen to arrange plates, forks and knives so when their lunch arrives everything would be ready. Hearing the clinging sound of the cutlery coming from the kitchen, Al rushes to the kitchen too so he would help Sammy in arranging the table. However, Sammy tells him he is okay and really does not need any help. Al wants to help Sammy as he figures one cannot hold on to a cane at one hand and prepare the table with the other hand alone. He knows he has to help Sammy, but Sammy does not want to be considered disabled and does not want to give people around him the impression that he has any weak point and anyone to simply pity him only because he limps. But regardless of Sammy's likes or dislikes, Al wants to help. He insists and says he really likes to help. Al does not want Sammy to consider them as guests. Just as Sammy demanded from them. He wants to do exactly as Sammy requested them. That is to feel at home, do what they want to and entertain themselves the way they do back home.

Sammy and Al decide to take everything to Sammy's room, because they remember Tom can't move. He is in pain already and they don't want to cause him any additional disturbances. The doorbell suddenly rings. Al, Freddy and Tom suddenly get

quiet. The three of them are on high alert when Sammy happily yells and says:

"Finally, ladies and gentlemen, Al Darrah's special pizza has at last arrived."

As a matter of fact, Sammy notices fear and worry in Al, Freddy and Tom's faces after hearing the doorbell. He wants to ease them off, assuring them the door bell was no threat and it was only the pizza delivery guy. He exits his room and closes the door while Al, Tom and Freddy are inside. Sammy is worried his guests would be seen and raise suspicion, so he figures it is best to close the door and receive his order personally, without anyone being seen at his room.

Sammy receives packs of pizza, pays the delivery man and closes the door. He pauses for a moment for the delivery boy to get farther from hearing his voice, yells Al's name, asking him help in opening the door. But Freddy opens the door immediately and Sammy enters back to his room, this time holding two large supreme pizzas. He places pizza boxes on a little drawer next to his bed. Al is distributing plates, forks and knives to everyone. They all sit close to Tom, so he would feel included because he is wounded and in pain. Everyone takes a slice and begins eating. Hmm. Yum, yum they say and compliment the taste and how well it is done. Al says he never expected to have such a delicious pizza in a little town in north east Syria. Freddy opens the coleslaw salad pack, takes a half spoon of it and says it is exactly like coleslaw salad back in pizza hut in America. Tom is the only one who pays a full attention to eating, rather than talking about the pizza. According to Freddy, it is the first protein rich food they are having in a long time. Sammy knows they have not eaten any of the canned foods, so it is their first protein intake since he met them all. The pizza is luckily enough for all of them. It is neither less than they can eat nor more considering how hungry Sammy's guests are.

The guys speak about different pizzas and how different restaurants make them while eating. Sammy asks his guests what their favorite food is? The first is Freddy who says KFC, Kentucky fried chicken, is what he likes best. Al likes huge fatty stakes with mustard sauce, and finally Tom expresses that in fact, Arabic traditional kebab is the most delicious, the tastiest food he has ever eaten. Sammy stares at Tom smiling after he hears him talking about Arabic traditional kebab. He pauses for a moment thinking. He gets up after a



pause and crawls towards his room's closet. He takes a wooden box which has a little lock on it.

Al, Freddy and Tom are wondering what is happening, but directing all their attention towards Sammy and the box. They are waiting to hear Sammy's explanation what he has inside the box. Sammy unlocks the box cover and opens it. He takes two full bottles of scotch whisky, a half bottle of vodka and a bottle of a very nice-looking red wine. Al, Tom and Freddy look at one another shocked and in complete amazement. They can't believe their eyes. That's when Sammy announces he is going to make every one traditional Arabic kebab for dinner, because his dear wounded guest craves for it. He says they are going to drink alcohol with their dinner.

Al and Freddy are startled by Tom when he yells "Horary" after he is told they'll have kebab and alcoholic drinks for their dinner. He gives Al and Freddy a meaningful look and says in a very low voice, very quietly not to show how surprised they are, seeing those alcohol bottles in Sammy's hands. So, they pretend they are not surprised at all and simply are excited they are going to have a nice and delicious dinner along with scotch whisky, etc. Freddy asks if he can go to the balcony to smoke a cigarette after he finishes eating his lunch. Sammy responds by another smile and says they can do whatever they like, just as if Sammy's apartment is their own. Al however is not happy with what Freddy wants to do. He says he is worried someone would spot him and that him going to the balcony might put their host and themselves in trouble. But Sammy asks him to relax. He assures Al no one can see Freddy, not even for a few yards. Sammy explains they are situated at the fifth floor of town's only five story buildings. That's why no one can spot Freddy. He explains his apartment is totally separated from urban kind of town houses, and no one can see who is smoking in his balcony, even using a binocular.

Freddy stands up and goes to the balcony. He lights his cigarette and begins smoking it with a piece of mind. Sammy and Al take the dirty dishes back to the kitchen. Al goes to the sink; wears the apron he saw and begins washing the dishes. While doing so, he asks Sammy what can he do to help him to prepare dinner? But Sammy replies by asking Al to relax. He tells Al he is surely going to ask for his help when the time comes.

Freddy comes back inside the apartment after he finishes smoking. He requests Sammy to switch the TV on and let him

watch the news channel. Sammy goes to the living room while Freddy follows. He switches the television on. Sammy shows Freddy how the remotes, both TV and receiver, work. Freddy thanks him and simply waits for the news to start announcing when Al joins and sits next to him also waiting to hear the latest news.

Sammy goes back to his room to keep Tom company. Sammy notices Tom has one of his whisky bottles in his hands, staring at the table. Sammy smiles and tells Tom to relax:

"Relax my friend," says Sammy smiling, "It's original. It's been recently smuggled from Turkey."

"Of course, it is. I hope you forgive me," Says Tom, "Just curious. Are you a Muslim?" Tom continues asking Sammy.

"Well. It depends on your definition of a Muslim. That's what I've been told. I don't honestly know it myself whether I'm Muslim, Tom."

Al and Freddy lower the TV and prick up their ears. They're listening to Sammy and Tom's conversation.

Tom is surprised hearing Sammy's response to his question. He frowns curiously. He coughs and sits straight:

"No really. I'm serious," says Tom, "What do you mean you don't know? Why do you say that's what they say? That's what, who says? What are you trying to say, my friend? I really don't understand."

"I know you were shocked to see bottles of alcohol in my hands. And of course, you figured I definitely drank since I have them? Now you are questioning me in your mind, knowing Muslims do not drink alcohol. Why Sammy does? Isn't it knowing in Islam alcohol is considered Haram? I say I don't know what my religion is, because I am not the one who chose it. It has been chosen for me when I was born by my parents. Also, because my parents are both Muslims too. In Muslim countries, at least in my country I know, they mention your religion as Muslim if both your parents are Muslims. When they are issuing your parents your birth certificate, you'll be a Muslim by default when you are taken to the registry office by your parents to apply for a birth certificate. There's a section in a form that parents should write the infant's religion, and they have written Islam for me, without me being old enough to decide or without me given a chance later on to

make a research and figure out my beliefs. That's why I say I am a Muslim. So, my religion was, by default, chosen for me when I was only nine days old, my dear Tom. I am a Muslim, according to what my certificate, ID and parents belief history dictates. I never chose or had any part in choosing my religion."

Tom is deliberating while gazing into Sammy's eyes. He plays with the whisky bottle and thinking about Sammy's logical explanation. Tom likes Sammy's insight and mentality. Sammy's explanations, which have a protesting angle to them, considerably influence the way Tom sees Sammy and thinks about him. He notices Sammy attends to what he is doing after he explains about his religion. He makes his bed, folds his sheets, arranges what he has left on the floor, and takes a few little pieces of pizza crunches on the carpet.

Tom is still gazing at Sammy. He has a thousand questions from Sammy. But he prefers not to ask them right away. Once again, he apologizes to Sammy about asking about his religion.

"I just hope you forgive me asking about you drinking alcohol as a Muslim man." says Tom in a kind voice, "It was very interesting what you said. It sounded quite interesting to me, as I was under a different impression all in all. Myself for example, I don't care about people's religions. What I mean to say is, people's religion has in no way tiniest effect in my decision on whether to have a relationship with someone or not. I have good friends from different religions." Sammy smiles and tells Tom there is no need to apologize, as he is a human and one of the most important human characteristics is their sense of curiosity.

Tom's wounds have begun aching again. He yells calling Freddy and Al to come and help take him to the bathroom. They appear at Sammy's room immediately and help lift Tom, make him stand so they would hold him from both sides as usual and take him to the toilet.

Sammy now hears his phone ringing. It is Rana who wants to inform Sammy she is going to arrive at his building in less than three minutes later. Sammy becomes very happy hearing that. He thanks Rana and tells her he is going to open the building's entrance. So, she can simply walk in. Freddy and Al get Tom out of the toilet. Sammy informs them that his cousin Rana, a trained nurse, is going to arrive in the next 5 minutes according to her. Al whispers something into

Freddy's ear and tells Sammy they better go down at the storage while his cousin takes a look at Tom's wounds. He says they are going to come back upstairs when she is done working on Tom. But Sammy tells him that he trusts his cousin like he trusts his eyes and they have nothing to actually worry about.

Freddy looks like he is not okay with the idea of going down to the storage particularly because Sammy's cousin is visiting. So, he convinces Al to stay but promises they'll go down for a quick nap only after Sammy's cousin looks at Tom's wounds and leaves. Moments later everybody hears someone knocking. It is Rana of course. She enters Sammy's apartment while carrying a medical bag. Sammy introduces Al, Freddy and Tom. Rana can already see Tom in pain. Rana goes to him directly without any delay and says hello. Tom nods smiling. He thanks Rana for coming. Rana asks Sammy to take all Tom's clothes out, except his underwear.

Sammy lays his cane to the wall and sits. He helps Al and Freddy in getting Tom undressed. That's when Rana realizes the gravity of Tom's physical condition. She puts on her medical gloves and gets her fingers closer to his wound. She gets closer and takes a long look at Tom's wounds. She presses around the wounds to make sure they have not yet infected. She opens her medical purse, takes two syringe and ampoules out the purse. She asks Tom to lay sideways. She injects both ampoules to him. Al, Freddy and Sammy are seated next to Tom at his other side, witnessing what Rana does to Tom. Rana looks at her wrist watch after she does the two injections and says they should wait for the injections to begin having their effect on him in a few minutes, so she would begin dressing his wounds. Rana suggests they take Tom to the shower and clean his wounds with disinfectant while they wait for the medicines injected to him to have their ultimate effect on him. So, Al and Freddy lift Tom and help him into the. Tom only has his underwear on.

Tom is acting unsteady and wobbly. He looks like drunk people more and more every minute goes by. He almost puts all his weight on Al and Freddy. Rana tells Al and Freddy to be very careful handling him, as his injections would probably have their complete effect on him any moment and he might lose control.

Al and Freddy take Tom to the shower finally. Rana asks Sammy for a container like a jar. Sammy takes his cane and limps to

the kitchen, opens one of his cabinets and picks a plastic jar. Rana opens a little disinfectant container and drops thirty drops of disinfectant in it. She goes to the sink herself and fills the jar with warm water. She pours the disinfectant over Tom's wounds and body while Al and Freddy hold him up right. She goes back to her bag and takes a little cotton out of it, goes back to the shower and rubs the cotton over the wounds to completely sanitize them. They return Tom back to his bed after Rana approves, he was cleaned enough.

The next step is to dry Tom up, which they do. Rana now removes a small stitching kit out and begins stitching Tom while he laughs at everything like drunkards. It takes Rana around an hour and a half to stitch, dress and wrap up Tom's wounds. She asks if any of them knows how to make an injection? Al says he does. So, Rana gives him two more ampoules and instructs him to inject both of them the following day exactly on the same time. She takes out three pill containers and tells them not to give Tom any other pills except what she has in her hand. She gives the pills to Al and explains two antibiotics every eight hours, a strong pain killer every twelve hours and finally some multi-vitamins which Tom has to take once in a day. She stands up to leave. Tom, Al, Freddy thank her for taking the time, showing up and doing all what she did for Tom. Sammy escorts her to the door and says he would call and inform her how Tom is doing.

Sammy stops Rana before she goes down and thanks her once again. She says she just did her duty as a human and as a cool cousin in a joking way. They both laugh at her joke. Sammy just remembers something again. He stops Rana and asks if it is allowed for Tom to drink alcohol while on his medication, she has given him. Rana replies it is best if he doesn't, but he can only drink after 5-6 hours past his medications. Rana leaves at last. Tom actually hears Sammy's conversation with his cousin about drinking alcohol, simply because he has no problem with drinking alcoholic drinks. But when he hears how easy and normal his conversation is with his cousin about drinking alcohol, it has become quite clear to him what he has heard in media, etc. about Muslims and restrictions in Islamic countries are probably baseless and unreal. To him, the discussion Sammy has with his cousin about drinking alcohol is so normal as though they are talking about drinking a cup of tea, or they are in America or Europe. That indicates not only Rana also has nothing against drinking alcohol, but also, she is probably a drinker herself. Tom's point of view, his insight about Islamic countries and Muslims

changes suddenly. He is feeling much better now, especially minutes after Rana injected the medicines to him. He feels so relaxed and calm that he falls asleep while Al and Freddy are busy talking about the latest news, they have watched in the television earlier.

Al and Freddy too decide to take a nap when they notice their friend Tom has passed out. They lay down and decide to assist Sammy prepare dinner after they wake up. Al is whispering something into Freddy's ear. He suddenly sees Sammy heading towards the kitchen. He calls him and asks if he can use his personal computer to contact his wife. Sammy gives Al a meaningful look and once again repeats he wants them to feel at home, use anything they want and do anything they feel like doing. Sammy says he would switch his pc on after he goes back to his room and makes it ready for Al to use it for as long as he wants. Al makes an Indian like posture, places his both hands and bows slightly Namaste, smiles and says thank you to Sammy. Sammy wants to imitate what Al did, but he says Sayonara instead of Namaste. Freddy and Al burst into laughter the way he has to bite his fingers not to be heard by Tom and not to wake him up. He has turned red. He uses all it takes to laugh quietly so he would not wake his friend Tom up by any chance.

Surprised and suspicious, Sammy frowns and asks why Al and Freddy are laughing. He asks if he has done anything wrong. Speaking in broken sentences out of laughter, Freddy tells Sammy that the posture he has made and the word he has said has absolutely nothing to do with each other. Freddy explains that Al imitated Indians when he brought his hands together, and when he says Namaste, he means hi or thank you. But Sammy has made an Indian gesture and used a Japanese word which, as a matter of fact, means goodbye. Sammy thinks Freddy is making fun of him and wants to piss him off in a friendly manner. But Al approves all what Freddy says. Sammy frowns, shakes his head and continues his limp to the kitchen while murmuring something. Sammy remembers his mom telling him that she had bought all ingredients for cooking for them when he and Robert come back from Beijing a few days back. He remembers clearly, she told him she has purchased all what is needed to prepared food for three people. But Sammy has never checked, not even once, to see what his mom has bought as ingredients for them. He has only opened fridge's door whether to take what they eat for breakfast, or he has only opened the freezer once, or twice, to take his whisky and ice. Even he has not checked

what he has in the fridge and freezer since Robert and Amer stayed at the apartment with him.

Sammy prays his mom has bought enough meat so he would not be forced to leave the apartment and go for shopping. He opens the fridge door first and begins looking for meat. He finds no meat, so he opens the freezer. He finds some minced meat, some chicken and some fish. But the meat Sammy is looking for is totally different than meat packs he has in his freezer. He has to do what he is really not hopping he would do. He has to leave the apartment, go to the butcher and asks for a piece of meat which belongs to a particular part of the lamp. So, he decides to put an end to his laziness, get out, goes and buys meat before his friends wake up.

Sammy goes back to his room very quietly. He takes his clothes and turns on his computer. He is going to his mom's room to change when Al notices he is probably going somewhere. He sits up, calls Sammy quietly and asks him where he is going. Al asks if he needs any help from him. But Sammy doesn't need any help. He thanking Al. He explains he is going out for a few minutes to buy certain stuffs for the dinner. He tells Al he has already switched his personal computer on, so he can use it as he has already typed the username and the password. So, he does not need to manually connect to the internet anymore.

Sammy goes to his mom's room and changes. He picks his cane again and walks out of his apartment quietly. Sammy glances at his cell-phone's clock and realizes he has not much time left till five forty-five P.M. He has to do his shopping and get back home immediately, use his binocular and look for Nelly in the streets to see her peacocking and displaying her beauty while crossing the street, even for a single second.

While taking the stairs down, Sammy is thinking about the fact that he actually has no time that day to work on the metal piece of the rifle. But at the same time, there is not much work needs to finish making the part anyways, he thinks. Sammy reaches the ground floor at last. He exits the building and walks towards the street. He reaches the auxiliary road that leads to Al Darrah's only main street. He remembers Nelly automatically. He remembers he is going to face his fears and talk to Nelly at Amer's engagement party. Worry has overcome him. But he suddenly remembers the expensive tuxedo he had bought and he calms down a bit.

Sammy begins imagining the day he is going to talk to Nelly. He is so worried how he is going to react seeing Nelly's beautiful face for the first time after he met her at the cemetery. He is both excited and worried, both happy and anxious. He does not know why? But he is somehow mindful. As though Nelly is standing in front of him right now and he has to say something. He begins thinking how he is going to initiate his conversation with her when he hears a very loud sound of a vehicle honking for him. As if he just woke up, he looks around him to see why the driver is honking his horn for him when he surprisingly notices he has crossed the street without looking at his left and right side. The driver who has honked seems quite angry at him. He pulls his window down and yells:

"Hey, you asshole. Where the hell do you think you're going? You nearly got yourself killed."

The driver has a few kids at his back seat. Sammy waves his hand while slightly bowing before the guy's car, meaning to express he is sorry, it was his fault.

"No need for Isis to kill people like this guy." says the driver pulling his window half up, "He'll get himself killed before Isis gets here. Careless really. People have really lost it already."

The driver drives away. Sammy reaches his favorite butcher shop. But he sees the butcher packing up his equipment. There is a pick-up truck parked outside the shop, which has some of the butchery's machinery loaded on the back of it. Sammy can see hooks, what the butcher hangs the lamp or pig parts of a cow or camel on, knife set, large chopping knife, mincing machine, the little chain saw, etc. loaded on the pick-up truck. He notices the butcher however inside his shop, cutting a small piece of meat for an elderly woman. The woman is talking to the butcher when Sammy enters the shop. She is asking the butcher where his destination is and when is he leaving exactly?

The butcher who seems totally out of mood says he does not have any particular destination in mind. He tells the elderly woman he is going to get to the main road, drive and go till he runs out of petrol. The woman who is quite shocked by what the butcher replies to her, gazes at him and nods. When the butcher notices he is being stared at, just like he is a crazy guy, smiles and says he wants to get away from Al Darrah as



soon as possible and does not really care where he is going to end up. He expresses his main objective is not to let himself or any member of his dear family fall into dirty bloody hands of Isis. Because he has heard from his customers on a daily basis that they know Isis is reaching Al Darrah faster than what people may imagine. The butcher says he has approximately between forty to seventy customers every day. But now, he only gets between five to maximum ten customers as everyone has left town to safer cities or even other countries. That's why he has figured it is high time for him to get his dear family members as far away as possible from Al Darrah and Raqqa province in general.

The butcher places a piece of meat on his weighing scale and tells the old woman a number. She needs to open her purse and gives him the money. Now Sammy takes two steps towards the counter and says hello and asks for kebab soft meat from the butcher. The butcher turns to a fridge which is located right behind where he is standing at the counter, opens the fridge and takes a big fresh piece of lamb out.

"Kebab for how many people?" asks the butcher.

"Four, no, no. sorry. Five, five people."

The butcher cuts a read and nice-looking piece of meat and puts it inside a plastic case. He weighs it and tells Sammy the price. Sammy pays the man. He tells the butcher he thinks it would be probably the best piece of meat he is going to buy from him.

"Well, I guess it's the last piece of meat I'll ever buy from you, huh?" asks Sammy in a sad voice.

"It's correct." replies the butcher after he closes his eyes, pauses for a moment and becomes very emotional.

Sammy and the butcher just look at each other before Sammy leaves the shop. They are both sad for what has happened to their country and happy lives. Sammy knows the butcher for a long time. He was a teenager when his mom or dad sent him to the same butcher to buy lamb liver, heart and kidney for kebab. The butcher was not even married back then. He was thinner, had more hair and obviously had darker hair than the present.

The butcher does not look like he is in the mood for any sort of conversation. So, Sammy says goodbye, exits the shop and

walks towards his apartment. He looks around while walking. He can't believe his eyes. Almost all shops and stores in that street are shut down, closed down and left. How quiet and empty the town looks Sammy thinks. He remembers when everyone was out walking and doing their daily shopping in that street. All shop keepers, shop owners knew each other, business was good, so was people's mood. Everyone seemed happy having no trouble in life. But now, Al Darrah can be called a ghost town, quiet, empty, calm. It just looks like it is waiting for a disaster to strike. Sammy remembers there was times when there was not enough space for people walking on the sidewalks. Almost everybody has gone. They have left town. Rarely any vehicle can be seen crossing or passing by. The only few operating shops are some grocery shops, so Sammy enters a small grocery shop in the neighborhood to buy some charcoal for making traditional Arabic kebab on.

Sammy walks towards the apartment again. Once more, he remembers he has not bought anything as Mezza to taste with their drinks. He returns back to the grocery and buys some Lebanese olives, some different cheeses and some potato chips as well as some different family size soft drinks to be used as the mix. He exits the grocery again, this time carrying three heavy plastic cases. He has, however, asked the grocery keeper whom he knows, whether they can deliver what he has bought to his apartment? But the guy has replied the delivery person used to work in his grocery has escaped town like all others after apologizing to Sammy. So, he has no choice but to tolerate his knee pain and heaviness of plastic cases which contains heavy things he has bought.

Sammy has not fixed his knee strap. He hasn't even imagined what he is going to buy would become that heavy. It is usually Amer or Robert who help him fix his knee strap if his mom isn't available. But he felt shy and embarrassed asking Al, or Freddy to fix his knee strap for him. He is not going to ask them to stand up and help him with his knee strap while they had laid down and were about to take a nap anyways. But most important, Sammy does not want Al, Freddy or Tom to become too familiar with his disability. He prefers to keep them away from his weaknesses.

Sammy reaches back to the intersection near his building. He has to go straight to the three five story buildings after crossing the intersection. His mind again gets busy thinking about Nelly. Like any other time, that intersection reminds him of Nelly automatically. So, he forgets again to look at both sides of the street before crossing. He is crossing the

main street pondering when he hears another vehicle honking for him. Oh my God thinks Sammy. He gets more than scared this time though. The honking sounded so damn close that he thought for a very quick second he got hit by a heavy vehicle, tractor, trailer or something.

Sammy turns his head to give a pissed look at the driver of the vehicle. The driver has the right however Sammy thinks. Sammy had to look at this left and right before crossing. But he hadn't. So, he figures to wave hand and bow to express he knows it is his bad and he is sorry. But he notices the driver is flashing his vehicle's headlights for him before he waves hand at him. He hears someone calling his name and saying hello. The guy sounds familiar, as if Sammy knows whose voice it is. Sammy who has almost crossed the main street already, decides to return. He is curious to know who is saying hello to him. The driver too drives his vehicle to the side of the road, stops and turns his hazards on.

The driver gets out of his army vehicle and walks towards Sammy while happy and smiling. Sammy focuses his attention towards the driver. He pauses for a second to think where he has met him before. He suddenly remembers. It is Sharif, the army driver he had met at Mr. Zahir's restaurant when he has gone there for lunch with Robert. Sharif is walking towards Sammy with long steps. He hugs Sammy when he reaches him, says hello and asks how he is. Sammy is surprised and happy to see him too. He is wondering, amazed at seeing Sharif in normal clothing and not army uniform. Sharif has shaved his beard and mustache too. He has trimmed his hair a bit as well. Sharif is happily joking with Sammy, asking him why he had chosen that day to die getting run over by a car. Sharif asks Sammy if he is okay? And is everything okay? Because he seems distracted. After laughing at Sharif's joke, Sammy says he was deep into his thoughts and he hadn't even noticed he is crossing the road. Sammy explains this was his second time that day he crossed the street without paying any attention to both sides of the street and making sure there is no passing vehicles, before he pulled himself out of a serious danger. While explaining that, Sammy notices the vehicle Sharif is driving. He notices Sharif is driving a civilian vehicle. So, he asks him out of curiosity why is he driving a civilian car, while he had mentioned he is an Army driver?

Sharif explains army officers use civilian vehicles for their transportation purpose for two reasons. Recently high-ranking officers wear civilian clothes when they need to travel from

one point to another for their intercity transportations and use civilian vehicles, so their rank and the fact they are army officers would not be easily revealed to Isis spies and members, especially if they need to travel to dangerous zones like the north and northeast areas. So, that is actually the first and their main reason he use both civilian vehicles and civilian outfits. The second reason he is driving a civilian vehicle, Sharif explains, is because he has a mission to transfer a very important top-secret container to a northern city, somewhere close to Turkish border, as he is a driver and has to use a civilian vehicle for the same reason which is not to be discovered by Isis members.

Sharif explains he has to transfer a big container which he guesses is filled with top secret documents to north as it belongs to a battalion, army has transferred to protect northern cities before Isis reaches there. Sharif says he has to move towards the north, to a city called Jarabulus, the day after tomorrow and take the container with him.

Hearing the name Jarabulus, Sammy pauses for a moment. He is shocked and he turns pale. Seeing Sammy's expressions change, Sharif keeps on asking him what happened to him and he is okay. Sammy on the other hand tries to get himself together immediately, talk and act in a normal way. He insists he is okay and nothing is actually wrong. He initially says he is tired and his leg bothers him.

Jarabulus is the name of the same city Al has requested Sammy to make an arrangement transferring him, Tom and Freddy to. Sharif mentioning, he is being transferred to Jarabulus and is heading that way, is in fact the only thing Sammy thinks about. What a coincidence Sammy thinks or is it? Is it really a simple coincidence? Or is it in fact called faith? Destiny? Or anything of the same nature? Sharif is transferred to the same city Al, Freddy and Tom have to go to. Is that a coincidence? Is his crossing path with Sharif is a coincidence? Sammy knows there is a reason the universe had introduced Sharif to him in the first place. He knows there is a reason he has met him again, when he says he is going to drive to Jarabulus. All these surely seem more than a coincidence. Sammy is quiet. He's wondering and thinking when Sharif asks him to take a seat in his truck, so they would chit-chat for a while. Sammy's hands are full again after he picks plastic cases of his shopped.

Sharif opens the car's back door and asks Sammy to place his plastic cases on the back seat. Sammy does as Sharif asks, thanks him and sits on the front seat next to Sharif. Sharif drives the car and Sammy is still bewildered, thinking of games the universe plays with him. He notices Sharif is actually driving the car, whereas he is under the impression they are just sitting in the car to chat for a while. He asks Sharif the same, but Sharif says he wants to treat him for traditional ice cream. He says they would talk while having ice cream. Sammy agrees as he thinks it is Sharif's way of returning the favor Sammy and Robert had paid for his lunch and his friends at Mr. Zahir's restaurant. So, he simply sits and allows Sharif to do as he pleases. He smiles and keeps quiet. Sharif tells Sammy he is still very surprised seeing him in Al Darrah. He says he thought Sammy had already escaped Al Darrah town for a safer city. But Sammy explains that initial steps were already taken in order to leave Al Darrah. But they are only waiting for Amer, his cousin's engagement ceremony to take place. Sammy explains they have already invited guests and the engagement can definitely not get postponed. Because the place they are running towards, is quite far and not many guests would have agreed to attend a ceremony in a place they have to drive hours to reach.

Sharif stops in front of a popular ice cream shop a few minutes later. He requests Sammy to seat in the car and wait for him for a minute. Because it's now his turn to pay for what they are going to have. Sammy nods and smiles. He is right. That is Sharif's way of thanking Sammy for having paid for him and his friends' lunch that day. Sharif leaves Sammy and walks inside the ice cream shop. It does not take him longer than three minutes. He comes back towards the vehicle holding two large size ice creams. He points at the driver door when he gets closer, asking Sammy to open the car's driver side door for him as his both hands are full and he can't do it himself holding the two ice creams.

Sammy opens the door and takes one of the ice creams from Sharif's hand, so he would be able to easily sit. Sharif begins talking as soon as he sits inside the car again. Sammy asks him the reason the battalion he is part of, is transferred to Jarabulus city in north. While enjoying his ice cream, Sharif explains that as per information army's intelligence has provided, Isis is planning to attack and occupy all northern cities and provinces. He explains Isis wants to take complete control of north and central provinces of the country. Their main objective is to first capture city

of Aleppo and advance until they have the whole country under control, overthrowing Bashar Al Assad's regime. So, the army has decided to outsmart Isis by concentrating on centralizing forces in central and northern cities and provinces, preparing for Isis's arrival and attacks in advance, so they would repulse them accordingly, forcing them to immediate retreat.

Sharif pauses for a few seconds. Sammy has a feeling he is about to say something unpleasant already. Sharif stops eating his ice cream and continues. He tells Sammy with a very serious and concerned tone that according to the army intelligence, Isis has already planned to attack Al Yas and Al Darrah soon as these towns are simply happen to be on their way to west. Sharif's voice changes to a deep begging like voice. He looks into Sammy's eyes and asks him to please pay complete attention to what he is saying. Sharif asks Sammy to leave town and take all his loved ones with him before it is too late. Sharif is very particular about having Sammy hear him and takes his warnings seriously. Observing Sharif and how hard he tries to convince him and how serious he tries to make the matter sound, is raising Sammy's concern. He is getting on a serious high alert and obviously worried. Sharif starts having his ice cream again. He gets quiet for a moment and that gives Sammy an opportunity to ponder about things. If there's one person who will be able to transfer Al, Freddy and Tom to northern city of Jarabulus, it is without a doubt, Sharif himself, Sammy thinks.

Sammy is struggling on giving himself the courage and ability to tell Sharif about his American guests, their story and of course their plan to go to Jarabulus without being caught. He thinks he has really no choice but to ask Sharif's help. As far as Sammy has analyzed and gotten to know Sharif, he is an honest, fun and kind man. But Sammy knows not much about his background still and that's what initially stops him to bring up his American guests. He had spoken to Sharif for not more than an hour tops and that was surely not enough to get to know someone that well so to share stuff of that nature with. But at the same time, something keeps on telling Sammy deep in there, seeing Sharif again was the universe's work to help him, because he had asked for it. He probably has to see this as a golden opportunity and take it, Sammy thinks. He has no other solution. He does not know anyone who has a car, the courage, free time and the willingness to smuggle his American new friends to their destination, which happened to be the Jarabulus, exactly the same city Sharif is headed towards the

day after tomorrow. Sammy figures he does not know Al, Freddy and Tom that well neither. But his heart told him to help them. He does not know them any better than he knows Sharif. Why not trust Sharif like his heart says, like he helped the Americans, again like his heart said?

Sharif has already noticed something is bothering Sammy for sure. So, he insists on knowing what bothers him and if he can help in anyways after Sammy admits something actually bothers him. Sharif promises Sammy he would do all in his power to help him if there's something he thinks he can do to help. Sharif keeps on insisting until Sammy gives up. He decides to trust Sharif and share it with him. He decides to make Sharif swear not to mention what he is about to tell him anywhere, at least if he figures he cannot help or decides it is too risky to help. So, at the end, Sammy begins talking, revealing his secret.

Sharif's facial expression is like the one who is going to hear some very important secret, which is in some way like a matter of life and death for some people. He has turned pale, waiting to hear what Sammy has to at last say. He has however focused all his attention towards what Sammy is saying. He swears and promises he is going to keep whatever is as their secret, even if he decides he can't help. Sharif and Sammy shake hands and Sammy begins telling him all what had happened completely, from A to Z. Sammy, at the end of his tale, tells Sharif he has promised and really wants to help his new friends and smuggle them to Jarabulus. Sammy says he firmly believes it was initially destiny's mysterious work introducing him and Sharif to each other, and destiny is the reason why they have met again, while Sharif mentioning he is heading to exactly the same city as the Americans need to be transported to. Sharif nods. Sammy does not receive any negative vibe from Sharif's expressions. Sharif is gazing somewhere at his front while Sammy talks about destiny and universe's mysterious ways of working.

"So," says Sharif with a spiritual mood, "this was actually a reason we met at the restaurant that day. This is a pre-written scenario, written by destiny, by God and we are simply its actors, ha? Actors of God's movie."

Sharif had already decided whether to help the Americans or not when he said that.

"Ok, now," continues Sharif, "I am planning to move towards Jarabulus the morning of the day after tomorrow. But now that I'm going to smuggle them also, we best move tomorrow late at night. So, we both need to do some introductory work. I'll now tell you what. Let me think for a moment while finishing this giant ice cream though."

Sharif is pondering while biting what is remained from his ice cream. He has taken the matter quite seriously and is really thinking of the best ways he can by which smuggle the Americans to where they need to go, to Jarabulus city. Sammy knows Sharif is planning their trip and it's logistics in mind. So, he prefers to simply keep quiet and let him plan in peace.

"I want to know something." says Sharif, "The one you say is wounded, how are his wounds? I mean, can he walk? Or no? He's immobile all the time?"

"Well," replies Sammy, "he was laid down till half an hour ago when I left them at home. I don't know whether he can move and has mobility by tomorrow evening."

Sharif gazes at the point while cleaning his fingers with a tissue and says whatever comes to his mind in a quite serious way. He asks Sammy to get his American friends to the exit road going from Al Namar base to the intercity road at 11:00 PM. He says he is going to pick them up from there. Because according to him, he only drives that truck in the intercity roads after the following day onward. So, he can obviously not drive that vehicle inside the town as he would be carrying top secret document containers. Sharif makes it quite clear he is not allowed to drive to Sammy's building and pick his Americans friends up. So, he has to take them to the location he has mentioned.

Sharif says that Sammy has to make his guests wear Arabic clothes as they were before and dye their hair black as blond white guys being in a truck full of top-secret documents without a question would rise suspicions if caught, especially if reported to the intelligence by any chance. Once again Sharif emphasizes on the time he instructed and the appearance he has said specially.

Sharif tells Sammy he would tell them if they have to pose as anyone or do anything in order to be more convincing on their way. Sammy doesn't know how to thank Sharif. He tells Sharif



that he thinks of him as not only a kind hearted and understanding person, but a courageous man whom he wishes can someday pay back the favor to. Sharif smiles and tells Sammy that in fact he is the real, kind hearted and courageous person. Because he was the one who has placed a roof over the Americans' heads, fed them and now is trying to get them to safety.

Sammy pats on Sharif's shoulder thanking him once again. Sharif begins driving, taking Sammy back to his building. Sammy takes a look at his cell-phone's clock. It is five forty-five P.M. He wants to look for Nelly like every day, finds her amongst streets and people walking in it, using his binocular standing behind his window. But it is too late to go home. Nelly would have already crossed the intersection near his house by the time he makes it back to his apartment. An idea suddenly hits his mind. He asks Sharif if he can stop at the dream intersection before dropping him, because he wants to already buy the hair dye for his American guests before getting back home. His objective is of course not buying hair dye. It is a minute or two left to the time Nelly crosses dream intersection near his house and he figures he may see her from a closer distance this time.

Sharif stops the truck in front of the pharmacy two minutes later. Sammy grabs his cane and gets off the car. He walks towards the pharmacy while his eyes and head turn looking for Nelly constantly. He enters the pharmacy and buys dark brown hair dyes quickly and gets out. He does not see Nelly anywhere. He walks slow intentionally, limping so he would reach back Sharif's car with a delay. So, he might get to see Nelly. He is worried he might be wasting Sharif's time, Sharif being a military man and all that. He finds no sign of Nelly. He was not able to spot her previous day, because he knew Nelly had visited Sara's house along with Hanieh. And today also. So, he gets back inside the car, thanks Sharif for the nice ice cream and what he agreed to do for his American guests.

A minute later, Sammy is dropped at his apartment. He and Sharif speak about Sammy's American guests. Sammy describes each and every one of them for Sharif, both physically and mentally. Sharif stops his truck in front of Sammy's building and gets out before Sammy has a chance to get out using his cane. Sharif removes Sammy's plastic cases out of his truck and places them in front of the building's entrance. Sammy exits the truck, thanks him. They hug and say goodbye and Sharif leaves.

\* \* \*

It is obvious Sammy would not get to spot Nelly crossing the dream intersection that day. Because she had gone to Al Thowrah city with her parents early that morning, missing her guitar lesson for the second consecutive day. As soon as she woke up that morning, she remembered she needed to buy a new night gown for Sara's engagement ceremony. So, she asked her father before he left the house to take her to Al Thowrah, so she can see and purchase a gown she likes. She is luckily okay with window shopping and roaming around shopping malls.

Nelly had asked Daniel to take her to a street which has many stores and a few small and big shopping malls. Eva knows Nelly also needs to buy Sara an engagement present beside buying a night gown. So, she went to the city with her husband and daughter. Nelly asked Daniel to drop her where the shopping centers are mainly located. Daniel himself needed to take care of some business he had in Al Thawrah. So, he dropped Nelly and Eva where Nelly wanted and left.

When Sammy and Sharif stopped by the pharmacy near the dream intersection, looking around to see Nelly, she had just bought a beautiful night gown, exited the store with her mother, heading towards a gift shops to buy Sara and Amer a nice engagement present.

\* \* \*

Carrying those heavy plastic cases, Sammy has to again take the stairs up. He reaches the fifth floor exhausted. Freddy who has heard the plastic cases rustling sound, takes a look at the door lens and sees Sammy holding a few plastic cases. He opens the door for him immediately, takes plastic cases from his hand and takes them away to the kitchen directly.

Sammy can hear Al's voice, talking to a female on the internet. He is at the kitchen with Freddy. So, he asks if Al is talking to his wife. Freddy replies that minutes after Sammy left the apartment for shopping, they woke up by Tom asking for water. So, they had woken up and did not go back to sleep, as Al was just waiting for Tom to wake up, so he could talk to his wife.

Al used Sammy's computer and internet to talk to his wife. His wife, however, was apparently driving when Al called her the first time. So, she spoke to Al and Al did not want to

talk to her since she was driving. Al didn't want to be the cause of her meeting an accident. So, Al was waiting for Eliza, his wife, till minutes ago. He called her back and there he is. They are now talking. So, since Al decided it wasn't the right time to talk to his wife the first time, Freddy called his parents and got them out of worry. Because it was a long time, they hadn't heard of him, they were worried sick poor parents of his.

Sammy asks how is Tom doing? Freddy laughs and says Tom believes Rana was an angel, a guardian angel to be specific, who appeared to him, got him rid of all his pain and miseries.

Freddy says Sammy, "A few minutes after you left the apartment to go shopping, Tom woke up thirsty asking for water. Al and I were woken up by Tom. But we didn't go back to sleep anymore. Actually, Al was sleeping, but in fact he was waiting for Tom to wake up, so he could call Eliza, his wife over the internet. So, he gave Tom water and went to your room, sat at your computer desk and contacted his wife. He sent a text informing her he could, I mean he had the opportunity to speak to her. She replied and said she was so excited and happy hearing from Al. She said she was driving, but Al could talk to her right then. Worried that he might cause his wife an accident by calling her while she drove, Al told her it was not a good idea and he would be calling her in a bit. So, Eliza would arrive home safe and sound, they would talk with peace of mind. When I heard they couldn't talk, I figured right, I could in fact use the computer to contact my mom and dad especially, letting them know I'm fine. I spoke a few short minutes with them and comforted them. Around five minutes after I finished talking, Al figured his wife had arrived home already. So, he called her and they are talking now."

"How's Tom feeling now?" asks Sammy,

"How's Tom doing?" replies Freddy laughing, "Dude, as if a guardian angel called Rana descended from heave, appeared to our friend Tom and cured him with a blow to his wounds. After Al gave him water, he said he felt no pain whatsoever. He feels great and is only waiting for Arabic special kebab and most importantly scotch whisky."

Sammy and Freddy both burst into laughter after what Freddy says. Sammy tells Freddy he has something very important to tell them. He says he also has a sweet surprise for them three as well, which he is going to reveal after Al finishes talking

to his wife. He tells Freddy he would go to his mother's bedroom to change. But requests Freddy to take out three large size onions from the cabinet below the sink, pill and slice them while he changes to his pajamas.

Limping towards his mom's bedroom, Sammy waves hand for Tom who has actually noticed he was back. He says nothing and goes into his mother's bedroom to change. Sammy can still hear Al's shaky voice talking to his wife. He cannot obviously hear what Eliza says from the other end of the line. However, what and how Al replies to her is clear what question has been asked that required such a response from Al.

Sammy is familiar with a sad and disappointed voice, trying to sugarcoat whatever information he is providing. That's what Al is doing and Sammy knows and is familiar with sugarcoating technics, because that is what Robert in fact does when he calls home to update his parents and inform them of the progress in regards to locating his brother, Robin. Sammy pities Al deeply. He can imagine what Al's wife is going through. Al does Al he can to calm Eliza down and assures her everything is going to be fine and he is going to head back home very soon. Sammy is suddenly surprised when he hears Al mentioning his name in his conversation with his wife. Al has lowered his voice, telling Eliza about Sammy, how kind, generous and open minded he is. He tells his wife briefly what Sammy had done to help him, Freddy and Tom. Al sounds like he has no idea Sammy has come back. He is deep into conversation, he has large headphones in his ears, so it is apparent he is not able to hear ambience's sounds. Sammy changes to his pajamas and joins Freddy back in the kitchen. Freddy is still pilling onions and tears rolls down his face because of it, exactly like a person who has just heard a shocking and horrible news. Even his nose is running while pilling and slicing onions. Sammy goes to the toilet since onions are not ready yet. He wants to start cooking and does not want anything to distract him while doing so, even if he is going to the toilet.

Sammy notices t-shirt and trousers hanged to the toilet door from the inside, when he enters the toilet and closes the door behind him. He remembers Rana had asked Al and Freddy to wash Tom's wounds with sterilizers before she dressed his wounds. He remembers they undressed Tom and hanged his clothes on the bathroom door. Sammy knows for sure the t-shirt and the trousers belonged to Tom. They have stains on them. So, he decides to take Tom's clothes to the kitchen with him when

he goes out and add them to the dirty clothes, he is planning to put in the washing machine.

When he finishes in the toilet, Sammy takes the clothes from the door when he feels his fingers touch something hard. He remembers seeing something peeking out of Tom's clothes earlier. He is thinking what can that hard object be, possibly a gun? But what was in Tom's pocket was not as big and as heavy as a gun. Not even bigger and heavier than a small hand gun. Curious and shocked, Sammy closes the toilet's door and locks it immediately before any of his guests notice his weird reactions. He has to see what that round pipe shape object is? He removes it from the trousers' pocket slowly and carefully. He has no idea what it may be. So, he takes percussions and security measures too. It is a nice-looking hard leather cylindrical container or box of some sort. Sammy opens a round zipper which opens at one end of the cylinder container. He slowly and carefully opens the zipper, but the zipper sounds exactly like a zipper being opened and Sammy is worried his guests would realize what he is up to in the toilet. The toilet structure itself works as amplifying the zipper sound. So, he opens the water to hide the zipper's sound. He opens it in one go. He removes what the cylinder shape leather container contains. It is a very futuristic and weird looking rifle's scope with its covers at both sides.

Sammy has never seen any rifle scope like that. It looks very futuristic-looking with so many numbers and signs in different places of it. Sammy examines the scope for a few minutes. He tries listening carefully to figure whether his guests are still doing what they were doing minutes ago? He does not hear Al's voice. He has obviously finished talking to his wife. He hears Freddy saying loudly he is assisting supper's main chef. Hearing that, Sammy figures no one is close to the toilet. So, he continues examining the scope, he doesn't want his guests to feel their privacy has been invaded. Sammy places the scope back into its container, closes its zipper and returns it back to Tom's trousers' pocket. At the same time, it feels weird placing Tom's clothes amongst to be washed clothes, while it obviously has a big rifle scope in it. There is a small cabinet, which is always used as storage for detergents, soaps, toilet papers, extra shaving blades, etc. below toilet's mirror. Sammy removes the cylinder cover from trousers' pocket again and places it inside the mirror cabinet's little compartment. He goes out of the toilet trying to look normal. He puts all Tom's clothes inside the washing

machine. What surprises Sammy the most is that no one of his guests mentions or even looks for the lens.

"Guys," yells Sammy before turning the washing machine on, "do any of you guys have anything else that needs to be washed? I'm switching the machine on. Anyone?"

It takes everyone a while before they answer "no" to his question one after the other. So, Sammy turns the washing machine on and sees the onions sliced and chopped and ready while Freddy washes his face so his tears would stop pouring out. He asks Freddy to follow him to his room. Sammy takes out hair dyes from one of the plastic cases and Freddy follows him to his room. Sammy notices Al is gazing at a spot. He looks really shaken and depressed after talking to his wife, Eliza. Tom is obviously on the mat between laying down completely and sitting position, reading one of Sammy's books he has borrowed from his book shelf. Sammy smiles at Al and Tom and says hi as soon as he enters. Al says he used his computer and already spoke to his wife. He says his wife had said hello and sent her regards thanking him for all what he has done for them all. Al says Eliza wishes to see Sammy in America as their guest someday soon. Smiling and nodding, Sammy says how much he appreciates what Eliza had said and how she said it. Sammy continues by saying he needs to share very important news concerning them. That's how Al, Freddy and Tom's full attention are directed towards Sammy and what he wants to say. Sammy lifts the two hair dyes so the three of them can see. He looks at Al and Tom, smiles in a naughty way and says they have to dye their hair the following day.

Freddy and Tom are laughing. They are seriously under the impression Sammy is kidding. Al, however, is having a frown and serious looks on his face, taking the situation more seriously than the other two. Al gives a serious look at Freddy and Tom, asking them to give up their childish act and let Sammy finish saying what he wants to.

Sammy takes a seat on the edge of his bed and explains all about Sharif, who he is, what he does for living, from the first time he and Robert met him at the restaurant, until minutes ago, when he dropped him below the building. Sammy explains everything to Al, Freddy and Tom who are now paying uninterrupted attention to every single word coming out of Sammy's mouth. Tom and Freddy already know there is no joking involved. Al, Freddy and Tom obviously have questions they begin asking Sammy one by one. He replies to each and every

question they have one after the other, patiently and thoroughly. They want to know how sure is Sammy that it is the best and even safest way to get them to Jarabulus? They want to know how well Sammy knows Sharif and why does he trust him that much? They want to know what would happen if Sharif is stopped at the middle of the road by the police or any other security forces to be checked at check points, for example? And so many other small and big concerns they need to hear the explanation to.

Sammy gives everyone the right to be concerned about possible scenarios. So, he keeps quiet until everyone of them asks what they need to hear the answer to. He sighs and begins talking:

"Okay guys, listen. I know why are you guys concerned and worried. And I give you the right to be. These all are happening too fast and at some point, it raises questions. I got to know Sharif at a restaurant here in Al Darrah before I even met you. Even when I met him first, I was somehow certain he was a good guy. Sometime you really don't have a logical and scientific answer for things. Your sixth sense simply tells you; your heart tells you whether to trust or not to trust someone, go or not to go somewhere or do or not to do something. I admit I don't know Sharif that well. Hell. I don't know him at all now that I honestly think about it. But I never got any negative vibe from him after I first met him. I think that is my first and last time meeting him. Believe me. He was with three other soldiers who were being sent to the front line. I thought they would be leaving town, Isis will attack and destroy our little beautiful town, they would get wounded like many other soldiers or military men, injured or even die in a battlefield. I mean I had never thought I was going to see him again. But I did. Now I want to ask you guys. Why did I meet him again? You answer this question only guys. Why should Robert and I treat those soldiers for lunch, and paid for their lunch I mean, and I should see Sharif when he tells he is heading towards Jarabulus? The same city you desperately need to reach? Is that a coincidence you guys think? You really think about it. Really? I say no, it is not. I say it's your destiny to meet me, me, Sammy who can help you and arrange smuggling you to Jarabulus, and I meet Sharif who is planning to go to Jarabulus and the rest of the story you already know about. I trust my instinct guys. This is written for us all. I sincerely believe that. Besides, how the hell can I find a person who has the balls, courage, car, time and willingness

to smuggle you to Jarabulus? Do you really think that's an easy person to find? Considering all people are running from east and northeast, escaping to south and southwest. They simply don't agree to do such a thing. The town is almost evacuated my friends. Sharif said he would tell you what to do if something happens on the way. So, that tells me he knows what he's doing. Therefore, like he wants from you guys, dye your hairs so as him wanting the three of you in the same traditional Arabic thobe. I mean he could simply say "no" and free himself of any probable incident and responsibility. But he didn't. That tells me he wants to help. Why? I don't know exactly. Maybe because we once paid for their lunch. Maybe he thinks he can help his country by helping you, because I told him you guys were here to help helpless Syria as a nation. We have no other choice but to trust him, listen to him and of course pray. If you don't want to go with him, if you don't trust him, fine. I understand. I really do. But I cannot find anyone else doing that for me, not for a million dollars. So, I guess we should give ourselves to destiny's hands and see where it takes us. You dye your hair dark, wear traditional Arabic clothes and go to the pickup point is what Sharif wants. Now it's all up to you."

Al, Freddy and Tom lower their heads. No one says a single word. Freddy sighs. He gets up, goes towards Sammy, sits next to him on his bed and holds him with one arm. Tears can be seen shining in his eyes. He thanks Sammy for his help and says he is going to trust Sammy's instincts and sixth sense. Al and Tom thank him and both say they think it is best not to lose such a golden opportunity.

Sammy asks Freddy to follow him to the kitchen. He wants to give Freddy a big platter of meat and the other ingredients to bring to his room. So, Tom would see how they marinate the meat for cooking traditional Arabic kebab. Sammy wants him to see and learn how to do that, so he can do it later when he goes back home. Tom loves Sammy's idea and thanks him for it. Sammy, Al and Freddy go to the kitchen. Sammy places hair dyes inside one of the cabinets. He removes the clean washed clothes from the washing machine, so he would hang them dry. Al is wondering how he can help when Sammy requests him to prepare a mezza platter for them to have with their drinks. A few minutes later, Sammy and Freddy return to Sammy's room, each holding a big platter. Sammy places the ingredients on the floor near Tom for him to see what he is going to do with them. Freddy too places whatever Sammy has given him next to Sammy's platter and sits near Sammy himself. They begin doing some chopping and spicing and marinating. Tom enjoys watching



and learning, while Al goes to the computer, so he would show Sammy some of his family photos and play his favorite songs. While cutting the meat, Sammy cannot stop thinking about the futuristic scope he has found in Tom's pocket. He wants to bring it up and ask Tom about it. But he changes his mind and decides not to talk about it, pretends he has seen it before putting his clothes to wash, but has forgotten to say anything about it. Sammy decides not to mention anything about the scope, unless someone asks for it.

\* \* \*

After leaving a rough day and taking care of some very important business in regards to their engagement ceremony, Amer and Sara arrive at Sara's home. Sara's parents had invited Amer for dinner. Not an official invite as Amer is their son in law and is considered part of their family already. Knowing how busy Sara and her fiancé are going to be, Saboura had asked her to bring Amer over for dinner instead of dining outside. She has cooked Amer's favorite food. Both Sara and Amer keep their parents updated on the progress they haven't made in regards to their engagement ceremony and party.

Amer and Sara begin explaining to Yamen and Saboura, all that they had done and been through after everyone finishes eating. They tell Sara's family that they had been under lots of stress and have had a quite hectic day since they met in the morning to go take care of matters that needed immediate attention. Because they without a doubt wanted their engagement ceremony and party to go exactly as expected and planned. Both Sara and Amer know they have no exact wedding day anymore though, since everybody is leaving town, exactly the day after their engagement ceremony. They know their engagement ceremony is going to be the only official ceremony by which they would be pronounced as husband and wife. First, because it is at Sheikh's office on the ceremony day, that he would recognize them to be married, both legally, officially and as per Islamic regulations. So, the engagement ceremony is important as far as their marriage is concerned.

Amer and Sara are exhausted. They are extremely tired, not because they had to walk long distances so they would recheck and follow up everything. Their exhaustion is not only physical exhaustion at all. It's their minds that are tired more than their bodies. They are mentally tired. They had faced their first obstacle early that morning, when they

wanted to complete the required paperwork, officiate things and legalizing their marriage.

Aside from both man and wife's parents who should actually be witnesses and present at the Sheikh's office for him to announce them as husband and wife, Sara and Amer needed two witnesses. Two men each, to sign their engagement documents as witnesses. They had initially introduced two married men as witnesses to be present while the engagement ceremony took place. But none of the four married men required to witness and sign, were no longer in town. Like many other people and residents of Al Darrah, they had escaped town, taken refuge in a safer city somewhere. Amer had been trying their cell-phones and land-lines to contact them since the day before, but to no avail. Both man and woman's witnesses had vanished into thin air. So, Amer and Sara had no choice, but to look for them at their houses, ask them to accompany them to the Sheikh's office and sign the required witness section of their documents.

Amer and Sara had to visit both ends of Al Darrah because witnesses' residents were each at one side of the town. Only this task alone had consumed much of their energy and optimism. What pissed the young couple most, was they were not able to get hold of their witnesses despite all efforts, and they had to return back to the Sheikh's office empty handed. They had shared the news with the Sheikh who had a very important role in officiating their engagement and legal marriage.

A Sheikh is an Islamic title, a religious name. They are called local Islamic clerics. A sheikh would be the very first person who would initiate the marriage process. He would be the first step of three in Syria, in order to marry a woman and a man. The very first thing for a couple who want to get married in Syria is to go to the sheikh's office, perform ketb Al ktab, which would be the Muslim marriage text, mainly taken from Quran verses. The sheikh would read certain verses, while both man and woman's parents present. Their parents should sign a consent letter prepared by Sheikh's office in advance and then they would need witnesses. Again, from both man and woman's side. Witnesses should also be Muslims, adults and married themselves.

The second step to get married after Islamic engagement ceremony performed by sheikh is to obtain the certificate. That would be arranged by sharia judge after receiving required certificates such as a paper from the local mayor,

a document from the civil registry showing both man and wife's marital status, medical certificate from a doctor identifying any contagious diseases and finally a marriage license from the military recruitment department for the man, approving he has done his mandatory military service. The third and the final step is to register the marriage by civil status department which again would be done after receiving the marriage certificate from sharia court to be sent within ten working days from the date of marriage itself. So, Amer and Sara went back to the Sheikh, the most important character who in fact initiates their marriage, to inform him that witnesses, who are actually one of the requirements which Sheikh's office has instructed them to bring, are no longer in the town and there are nowhere to be found. This is of a high importance for Amer and Sara, as at the day of their engagement, they would be announced as husband and wife after the procedures are taken care of. It is very important for Amer and Sara, as at that day they are going to be married as per Islamic rules and regulation, even if they call it an engagement ceremony. An engagement ceremony is when a man and his wife would become legal to one another according to Islamic rules. The wedding party, however, is just a formality as every relative would not be invited for the engagement ceremony. They will all be officially invited to a wedding party which is simply a public announcement for everyone to attend to. However, a man and a woman are considered husband and wife at a ceremony like engagement ceremony which only requires both parents and their witnesses and in Amer's case, a few elders as per their custom and traditions.

The sheikh normally has a long beard and knows most of Quran by heart. The sheikh, in charge of Al Darrah's Islamic marriages, is in fact a short and bold man, with so much facial hair, considering himself as one of the highest Islamic authorities of the country. Sheikh Salim thinks the stricter and ruder he is, the more God and the profit would he please. Sheikh Salim rarely spoke and barely looked at his clients. Even while he spoke and what he said was whether out of sarcasm or ambiguousness. After running from one side of the town to the other just to find their witnesses, Sara and Amer has gone back to the very strict sheikh just to hear he couldn't do them any favor and they had to bring witnesses with them. Sara was pissed off and threw all documents she had on the air at Sheikh's office, yelling and cursing at him, asking the Sheikh what kind of religion he practiced that required him to be such a strict ass, even to marry a young couple in the situation where everyone is running from their own home.

Sara had been crying and screaming at the Sheikh, questioning his humanity. She told the Sheikh he slept in his very comfortable bed, under his AC, while people struggled to live a normal life. Sara wanted to express lazy people like Sheikh Salim didn't have the slightest idea what was happening in the outside world to poor people who had to leave everything behind and escape, to leave whatever they had worked hard for behind, just to get away from being caught by another Islamic group. She asked the Sheikh if he wanted them to find witnesses from ordinary people whom they did not even know? While Sara was yelling at the Sheikh and cursing at him, Amer was worried Sara's reaction may stir things up and make things worse. So, he held Sara's arm and pulled her out of Sheikh's office. Amer returned back inside and apologizes for how his fiancé behaved.

Amer was smart and could guess he could solve their problem with the most common method. So, he sat quite close to the Sheikh himself and told him he was going to hand over some cash to him under the table and asked if he could help do their marriage now. Sheikh Salim's facial expressions changed and looked happier now. As if this was what he waited for. A mild smile formed on his dirty face. He looked down at Amer's hand waiting for him to hand the bribe. Amer counted some money and gives it to the Sheikh quickly before any of his staff saw anything. Sheikh Salim's face changed to the same strict face again, expressing he was not happy with the amount he has received. So, Amer counted a few more Banknotes again and gave it to the Sheikh under the table.

Amer just wanted to make Sara happy and make her stop crying. He knew Sara's burst out was not merely caused by the Sheikh and his strict procedures, but also because she was hungry and when she is hungry, she would get in a bad mood. That's aside from the problem they had with the Sheikh. Sara was also angry, because when she visited Al Majed's garden, she found out that nothing had been done yet. Al Majed garden's manager and staff had to complete certain tasks and make some initial preparation for Amer and Sara's engagement ceremony. But they had done nothing at all. So, that too initiated Sara's anger episode. Amer had never seen Sara that angry. He had no idea how quickly Sara's mood could swing. He was quite surprised by Sara's behavior. But he was at the same time happy his future wife could handle her problems with people in the society. He became quite contented that his fiancé was

a fighter and was not the kind of a women who gave up that effortlessly.

It's only three days left till their engagement and nothing has been done yet, not at Sheikh's office and not at Al Majed's garden, the party venue. This ceremony is going to be Sara's one and only gathering as far as her marriage is concern. She knows no wedding ceremony is going to take place for her and Amer, considering Al Darrah's security situation. So, she wants to make the best of the only gathering she is going to have after getting legally married and that is her engagement party at Al Majed's garden. But after she and Amer arrived at the garden, asked the staff and followed up what had been done so far, none of the people working at the garden could give her a satisfying answer as to what they had done in preparation for her engagement party.

Sara asked the person in charge of tables and chairs about their guests' sitting arrangement. But she was told the man who rented out tables and chairs had run off like others, seeking refuge to a safer city. So, obviously his establishment was shut down. Amer asked the woman in charge of the flowers and decoration about what she had been doing and how had she been preparing. But he was also told no flower had been sent to Al Darrah in the past eight days despite their early order. That no one, no establishment had so far agreed delivering flowers to the northern provinces including Al Darrah. Because it was too risky and Isis might attack Al Darrah anytime. The same thing they heard about sweets, cake, food and beverages, exactly the same story as tables, chairs and flowers. So, hearing nothing had been done for her one and only marriage gathering, Sara became so disappointed and depressed, and little by little, anxiety took over and made her that angry at the Sheikh's office.

Basically, what Amer and Sara did the whole day was all what had to be done by people who had already been paid to do. But the situation Al Darrah and its remaining residents are in, is getting worse and riskier every day goes by, making Amer, Sara and both their parents remorseful for choosing such a date to have their engagement ceremony and party.

Yamen, Sara's father, has noticed Amer's stressed and hopeless looks before the dinner is served. So, he asks Amer the reason in a fatherly and kind tone. Amer does not want to mention all that made him exhausted for certain reasons. First, he doesn't want Sara's parents to think of him as a man who

is not able to handle his own problems. The other reason is, he does not want to remind his fiancé about the problems they're facing and worry her and accordingly. Sara has just calmed down and Amer does not have any desire to bring those issues up again. The third reason is that Amer knows Yamen would come up with unachievable solutions to their problems. Amer knows he is going to throw solutions on the table which cannot be executed for many reasons he has no idea about. Certainly, Amer does not want to say anything about how he convinced the Sheikh to do their documents without witnesses. So, he does not say anything about the problem they had with the Sheikh. To be polite and nice, Amer just answers Yamen by nagging at the garden's staff for not doing their jobs well.

Amer expects to hear some solutions again, but Yamen surprisingly does not say any solution. He just says everything is going to be alright. Amer does not say anything else. He does not want to talk about what he and Sara have gone through.

The fact is that Amer replaced all the staff he had hired at Al Majed garden. He fired them all, after receiving a resignation and the penalty fee from Al Majed garden's manager, and has figured the best and the fastest way is to pay the amount they received as a penalty for their resignation, to a reliable event management firm and let them handle things from then onwards. Amer and Sara contacted some people they knew who might agree to accept the responsibility. One of Amer's friends who lived in a town near Damascus, gave Amer a guy's cell-phone number. The guy who apparently runs a well-known event management firm. Amer and Sara called the number, explained their situation and he agreed to handle the catering and their engagement ceremony all in all. He agreed but Amer had to pay double what he had initially paid people at Al Majed garden.

Another reason why Amer agreed to pay such a big amount was he figured he would be washing his hands and letting the event management take over with them having enough experience in similar events and knowing how to manage crises. Mr. Jamal, the boss at the event management firm promised Amer and Sara he was going to arrive at Al Darrah, Al Majed garden the following day in the morning, along with two of his expert staff and would discuss and decide on the food, beverages, fruits, sweets and other matters right there. So, he would immediately assign people to begin outsourcing, getting prepared for the day. That actually calmed Sara and Amer a

bit, knowing they will not be made fun of by their relatives and family friends. However, Amer was on the phone, yelling at Mr. Arif, the staff manager who was supposed to handle their event. These are some of the reasons behind Amer and Sara's mental and physical exhaustion. Knowing he could not take care of everything by himself, Amer told Sara he would be taking Robert along with them as he has a fresh and good mind for such things. Amer says he is going to call Robert and request him not to get himself involved anywhere for the following day as he would be needing his help. Amer asks Sara to sit next to him. He promises Sara he is going to solve their problems and asks her not to worry as he would take care of everything tomorrow with Robert's help.

\* \* \*

Unlike Amer and Sara, time has flown for both Robert and Hanieh. Hanieh has taken Robert to the ad agency in charge of arranging her photography exhibition and has shown him her art work. After Robert received one of Hanieh's framed photographs as a present, they headed towards a restaurant Robert already planned to take Hanieh to. Since Robert did not know whether Hanieh liked sea food, he asked her what she felt like eating? After pondering for a moment, Hanieh gave Robert three cuisine choices. There could be Arabic, sea food or Italian food. Robert smiled after hearing sea food as one of Hanieh's three choices. He had found a sea food restaurant in the city called Asmak (fishes) and had decided to take Hanieh there.

Seated next to Robert in the car, Hanieh is staring at Robert. She wants to see Robert from the profile. She has turned her upper torso towards Robert and is just staring at his profile while he drives. Robert, on the other hand, can see on the corner of his eyes that she is staring at him. He has no doubt in his mind she is getting more and more interested in him and that gives him a good feeling. Robert feels warmed by Hanieh looking at him. Robert can admit to himself he has fallen for Hanieh. He thinks God has just created Hanieh to be with him. That's all. Robert parks the car at the empty parking lot next to the "fishes" sea food restaurant. He jumps out of the vehicle immediately while Hanieh has her seat belts still on, looking inside her purse. Robert runs to the other side of the vehicle, opens the door for Hanieh. "Your majesty," says Robert posing as a butler, "Welcome to the one and only "fishes" sea food restaurant. I hope you enjoy your food."

"Stop it," replies Hanieh laughing, "crazy. Really."

"Yes, I'm crazy about you."

"Really. Oh. Well. I guess I like you too."

Hanieh gets off the car and Robert presses the lock on the remote and locks all the doors. While walking a few yards towards the restaurant, Hanieh holds Robert's arm. This is exactly when Robert can swear, he is already in a deep relationship. Probably the deepest in his life. He is thinking to himself, "I guess she's the one."

Robert wants to know, to really truly find out where he is standing in regards to his very quickly establishing relationship with Hanieh. It is their first official date, but they seem like they've been in a relationship for quite a long time already. Robert is quite eager to know if it is only him who feels that way? Or the feeling is mutual and that is how Hanieh feels as well?

A doorman with Arabic clothes and ornaments hanging from his belt opens the restaurant's door, bows before and welcomes them to the restaurant. Hanieh smiles and thanks the old doorman. Robert too. A hostess approaches them as soon as they enter asking them if it is only the two of them or they are expecting more people to join them? She guides them to a romantic spot in the restaurant, near the aquarium and some tropical indoor plants after she makes sure it is only Robert and Hanieh there to eat. Robert and Hanieh are both smiling as they are quite pleased with the way they are welcomed and treated. Another waitress comes to their table moments after they sit, brings them two complementary cold lemonades. The hostess places a fish shaped menu in front of them and says she would be available to them anytime they have rested and chosen their main course. Hanieh opens the menu while taking a sip of the lemonade. She looks at Robert with her eyeballs bulging out, telling him how delicious the lemonade is. Tempted by Hanieh's description of the lemonade, Robert too takes a sip and finds out she was right.

"Their secret ingredients is mint I tell you," says Robert trying to look like he has discovered penicillin. Robert is impersonating nerdy scientists and acts as if he was the one who discovered the lemonade's formula to begin with.

"Oh my god," replies Hanieh after bursting into laughter, "You're making me laugh Robert. My tears would mess up my makeup. Please."



Robert covers his face so Hanieh would not see his face and burst into laughter. Moments later, they have both chosen what they want to order. Robert lifts his right hand, asking for the hostess. She comes to their table immediately and takes their orders. When the hostess is leaving their table, Hanieh asks her where the ladies' room is. She asks Robert to be excused for a minute after she is told to follow the hostess. Robert is seated alone pondering. He figures he absolutely loves everything about Hanieh. The way she puts make up, mild but beautiful, the way she smiles, the way she talks, walks, sits, gets up, drinks lemonade. He can live forever with a girl like that, he thinks. Robert questions his judgment a few times. But he trusts his instincts. Hanieh is a very kind, beautiful, well-mannered, educated and a complete package of a lady in general. Robert is feeling as he is very lucky guy having a relation with her. He is pondering, what if he ended up proposing to her? What if she said yes? Would she say yes? Really? Does it matter that he is a Christian and she is a Muslim? Who cares Robert thinks. Hanieh comes back even more beautiful than when she left. It is obvious she has fixed her makeup. Robert gets up and pulls her chair for her.

"You know?" asks Hanieh, "I think of you as a real gentleman Robert."

"Oh. Thanks Honey." replies Robert.

But they both suddenly realize Robert Addressed her as "Honey". Robert feels embarrassed and wants to correct his pronunciation mistake.

"Sorry," continues Robert, "I meant Hanieh."

"It's okay. I liked it." replies Hanieh, "I don't mind you calling me honey. I guess it's okay."

Robert's face has turned red. He does not know what to think or say. He just smiles. Hanieh notices Robert feeling shy and embarrassed.

"Hey," continues Hanieh while placing her hand over Robert's shoulder, "I like you Robert. I mean it. Do you think I take all guys I know and show them my work? Look at me. I mean it. I like you. So, don't feel anything wrong with calling me Honey."

"Sweetheart," replies Robert, "I'm not embarrassed calling you Honey. Believe me. I'm really not the type of a guy who's ashamed of expressing his feelings. I know guys who have been

in a relationship with a girl and are still embarrassed to tell their girl they love them. Some of them think they would be breaking their ego expressing their emotions directly by saying a simple sentence "I love you". That's not me though. If you figured I immediately corrected myself, changed Honey to Hanieh, it's simply because I don't want to scare you off and freak you out. I think you might say to yourself, Robert expressing his feelings even if it is by calling me as honey a few hours after our first official date. I sounded weird and I know that. I just don't want to scare you off, thinking I'm a freak, getting too comfortable too soon. It's all because I don't want to lose you. That's what makes me feel bad exactly, and by the way, for your kind information, I like you too, so much that you may not believe. And thank you for being honest with me. To be quite honest, I like you even more. I think Sammy is an idiot letting you go, even in that very young age."

Robert said his last sentence, which was about Sammy being an idiot, in a joking way which made Hanieh and even himself laugh. Hanieh's tears of laughter are about to roll out of her eyes and mess up her eye make-up as she thought.

"Oh my God," replies Hanieh laughing, "It was ages ago. Do you know how old Sammy and I were when we had a childish premature so-called relationship?"

"I know. I'm just trying to make you laugh Hanieh."

Two waitresses carry Robert and Hanieh's food in two wide fish-shaped platters and serve them. Hanieh wipes her eyelashes dry very carefully. Waitresses uncover Robert and Hanieh's food and the look of the sea food they ordered, adds to their hunger and appetite. Lobsters and jumbo shrimps with salmon roe and garlic bread as side dish.

The chef seem to be an expert in both cooking and designing food platers. He has decorated their food quite handsomely. Hanieh and Robert lay their napkins on their knees and begin eating. Hanieh is still laughing, not as hard as moments ago though, and Robert feels good making her laugh. They are both quiet for a few second busy eating. Hanieh's mind seems to be occupied by some thoughts and Robert can say from her facial expressions.

"You okay?" asks Robert.

"Oh. Yeah. I am thinking about Sammy after you brought his name up. Thinking about his crush on Nelly. I just pity him so damn much. That's all."

"Pity him?"

"Yeah. Because we told Nelly about Sammy having a major crush on her but she does not seem to be interested at all. I mean not in Sammy alone. She says she's not generally interested to have a relationship with any man whatsoever. Oh, and I almost forgot. She does not want to have anything to do with a Muslim guy if ever she decides she wants to have a boyfriend or a husband."

Robert remembers Amer's instruction in the car on the same morning before they arrived to their appointments. So, he acts very normal, he decides to not comment and be the listener more than the person who comments and provides his own point of view. So, he just nods after a mild frown. He is acting like he feels bad about what he has just heard that the girl his best friend has a crush on, says she believes all massacre and mass executions are because of Muslims.

"No wait." Says Hanieh. "She believes wherever there's war, killing and rape, Muslims are somehow involved. Not only she cannot have any man in her life, she says she does not accept a Muslim man later if she changes her mind about having a relationship. I guess she has a valid reason for what she thinks both about men after what happened to her and especially Muslim men.

"What about you?" asks Robert, "Do you or your parents have a problem with a guy's religion when you want to get married to a none Muslim for instance?"

Hanieh pauses for a moment gazing into Robert's eyes. Robert is slowly getting the impression maybe this too was a very immature thing to ask her.

"I don't. No. I have no problem with your religion. Honesty, commitment, passion, romance, etc. are what's important for me to see in a guy. I don't care what religion, culture, color of skin or language the guy has. I need a real human who understand me. I need a best friend who happens to be my husband. That's what's important for me. About my parents, well, I've always been thinking to be very careful choosing a guy. They trust my judgment if I tell them I like a guy, they know for sure I'm not saying it under the influence of love only. But also, because I have evaluated and analyzed the guy well in advance before coming to that conclusion. "

Robert sighs relieved in his heart. He got a pleasing answer to one of the most important questions which has occupied his thoughts since getting to know Hanieh. Robert now knows his religion difference with Hanieh is not going to be a problem after they possibly get so much attached and inseparable.

"But you know?" continues Hanieh, "You know you'll have to convert to Islam if you decide you want to marry a Muslim girl for example. Because there are rules and regulations about it in our country being an Islamic one. Do you have a problem with that?"

"It depends." replies Robert, "It totally depends on who the girl is. If it's you, I'll convert to Buddhism to have you mine. To wake up early morning, getting to see your beautiful eyes as the first thing I see after I open my eyes. Yeah. I will convert to any religion."

Hanieh is blushing.

"Stop it. You don't really mean that."

"Oh, I do. Hell, yeah I do."

Hanieh and Robert gaze at each other for a long moment. They both know they are falling in love. Robert advances his hand on Hanieh's, he touches her hand, feeling her warmth once again. He feels so lucky and calm he has not felt that way till now. The waitress comes and cleans up their table. So, they both lay back while still staring into each other's eyes. Robert asks if she wants anything else? But Hanieh is full and says she feels like driving with Robert. So, Robert asks for the bill, pays and they leaves the restaurant. That is probably the only day Robert is not stressed and worried about Robin, his brother's whereabouts, his parents and their worries in a long time. He has remembered his problems twice only, but has convinced himself that his brother is without a question alive and he is not supposed to get to receive his brother's will that way. He satisfies his curiosity by thinking to himself, Hassan and Hussein are actually the ones whom they have to receive their wills as they are both in a critical situation not Robin. Robert is satisfying himself like this, because he is in a desperate need for a break. He has been feeling a big gap in his heart, feeling an empty place for someone like Hanieh for a long time and destiny is now filling that gap by placing Hanieh on his way. A girl who happens to like him as much as he does her.

Robert and Hanieh sit in the car after they exit the sea food restaurant and Robert drives Hanieh around, like she had said she felt like. While driving in Al Thowrah's streets and alleys, they are so surprised getting to see almost all shops and stores having sales signs. They have of course not driven all the way to Al Thowrah from Al Darrah for shopping from discounted stores, but for Hanieh to simply show Robert her photographs, plus she has to clear the air with the advertising agency in charge of making her exhibition to happen. Even that reason is also not the real reason they have travelled all the way to Al Thowrah city. It is just an excuse for both of them to spend some time with each other. After having lunch, they are circling around when they figure they both crave for coffee and Arabic humbly bubbly (shisha). So, they choose a coffee shop with a romantic view, stop the car and sit there to drink some coffee and smoke some shisha. Like most of the couples who go to that coffee shop, Robert and Hanieh are given a private chamber which is mainly divided and separated from the area single men and women sit separately. They order their popular Arabic tea and shisha. They are enjoying each other's company, getting closer and closer to each other spiritually. They are holding each other's hand and seat so close to one another as though there is not enough space for the two of them to sit separately and comfortably. The chamber they are seated in, and other private corners, are designed for couples and families which the man of the house does not like any other men look at their wife or daughters or sisters. Almost all restaurants and coffee shops have dedicated part of their business space to private family rooms, as there are so many strict and extremist Muslims who do not even allow their wives, daughters or sisters to eat in the presence of strange men. They believe it is totally against their Islamic beliefs and guidelines.

Time is passing fast and Robert's heart feels closer to Hanieh's, and vice versa, every second goes by. They often gaze at each other's eyes for consecutive times, knowing they love each other the more they get to know each other.

Having noticed so many stores having sales and sell their products for a much less price than its original price, Hanieh suggests they walk after they are done with the coffee shop and do some window shopping. It is another excuse for the both of them to spend more time together. Robert agrees immediately. Store owners and shop owners have reduced their prices to almost less than half to sell what is left of their products, so they would too shut down their business and

escape the city, like all others who had a valid reason after knowing Isis is approaching from the media, what television shows, radio says and newspapers write. This is, however, a golden opportunity for people who can under no circumstances afford to pay the original price of what they need to buy. So, there are some people in the market street, looking for what they need to purchase. They all want to get what they want and leave. On the contrary though, what interests Robert and Hanieh, is that there are not many buyers in the streets and sidewalks of the stores.

Hanieh and Robert decide to let the car stay at the coffee shop's parking lot. They want to walk towards those discounted stores as they are not that far. Hanieh has noticed two musical instruments stores, which both have sales and suggests they visit them first. So, they head towards those stores while holding hands like real couples. Knowing window shopping with females would take hours, Robert is going to have Hanieh by his side for as long as their window shopping takes. Robert has heard Hanieh can play violin and she was an outstanding member of her school band. But he has no idea whatsoever how well she can play the violin. Robert goes towards a row where all guitars are displayed as soon as they enter the musical instrument's store. He has a passion for guitar ever since he was a kid. There are classic guitars at one side, acoustic another side and electric at the middle. He is testing a classic guitar, when he suddenly hears a very nice and relaxing violin sound. He initially thinks the store owner has played a music CD for his customers to enjoy the ambiance. But he is shocked after he turns his head towards the sound. It is Hanieh, holding a violin in a quite professional way and playing it. Hanieh plays the whole theme music of the movie Schindler's list while anyone who is passing by that store stops and enjoys her performance. Some take pictures and some others take selfies and record video clips. Being so surprised and amazed, Robert sits on a bench near him and watches Hanieh plays beautifully. She is in fact testing violins so she would know what brand to buy. Robert decides right there, and he is going to get her chosen violin for her birthday. He is just focusing on which one she would finally choose.

Minutes later, Robert and Hanieh walk out of the store. They have roamed around while Robert was thinking to find an Italian restaurant to treat Hanieh to, considering she had mentioned Italian food as one of her meal choices of that day.

Robert's main objective is to make her enjoy her day, creates her a memorable day. The only thing worries him is whether they can find an Italian restaurant which is still open? Like the sea food restaurant which was still operational, despite lack of clientele, since people are leaving the city constantly. So, many shops, offices and stores have closed down. They have stuck a note on their doors saying the establishment is no longer operational. They have all left the city before they fall into evil hands of Isis terrorists. Lucky Robert, the sea food restaurant was open and he could get Hanieh one of her meal choices. Even at the sea food restaurant, there were not many customers. Only a middle-aged couple were having grilled fish. While walking, Hanieh lays herself on Robert, expressing she feels sleepy.

\* \* \*

With the help of Al and Freddy, Sammy prepares the balcony for everyone to sit in the fresh air, while he barbeques his popular Arabic kebab Tom asked for. They have placed three Arabic style cushions laid to the wall and glass of the windows at the balcony, so everyone would sit comfortably. It is time to help bring Tom to the balcony too, since he feels much better. Sammy brings a huge platter he has arranged to the balcony and places it at the middle so everyone would have easy access to it. The platter contains alcoholic drink bottles, family size soft drinks, glasses for everyone and some small forks plus ice and Mezza of course.

In Arabic country, Mezza is whatever acts as appetizer. It is served with alcohol and before the main course and it usually contains olives, pickles, cheese sometimes, potato chips and some other food stuffs according to the choice of the host. They begin drinking and talking. Their gathering becomes more fun when alcohol kicks in. So, everyone gets louder and funnier by every minute going by. Sammy's main aim is to create a traditional Arabic ambience for his American friends, so they would experience how Syrian guys have fun and enjoy their times.

Sammy has the barbeque behind him. It is ready for the fire, full of meat, already a stick in them. They have covered Tom with a thin sheet, so the wind would not ignite his pain. Everyone is really enjoying the time Sammy has created them. They all wait to see Sammy taking his first sip of his alcohol. They still had their doubts he would consume alcohol; despite the fact he had already admitted he would.

Believing the fact that a Muslim man would consume alcohol is still a new idea for them all. They fill glass after glass and drink it after saying cheers hitting their glasses touched. They feel hungry soon after alcohol kicks in. So, they request Sammy to begin the barbeque. There are around 8 Arabic traditional loaves of bread, and there is a big bowl filled with veggies. Sammy pours some oil over the charcoal and sets it on fire. He makes a little mountain out of burning charcoal for them to get red all at once. The sound of music can be heard coming from inside. Al, Freddy and Tom enjoy the Arabic music despite having no idea what the lyrics says. But they know it is part of Sammy's ambiance creativity. They enjoy a safe, friendly and hospitable atmosphere Sammy has created. It is all about laughter, happiness and making the day count. There is no talk of religion, culture, language, skin color. No talk of Isis at all. Everybody enjoys the moment and that's what matters to them.

Sammy's Arabic kebab is cooked. It is barbecued nicely and ready to eat. Sammy takes the stick of kebabs, places two or three sticks on a loaf of bread and places another piece of bread on the top. He presses the upper piece of bread and pulling the stick out. This leaves pieces of kebab on the lower bread, while separating meat from kebab sticks. Sammy has made so much kebab so everyone would eat as much as they want. He picks a plate specially for Tom. He takes 3 sticks of kebab from the top of the grill, separates the meat from the sticks, puts some veggies and adds some extra bread for him and places it in front of him. He picks the kebab plate and holds it in front of his face. Tom smells the kebab. He closes his eyes and sighs. He opens his eyes and looks at Sammy.

"Now that's exactly what I was expecting." says Tom, "Man, this is the real traditional Arabic kebab. Best in the world. Thanks Sammy. Good jo, buddy."

Everyone is now eating and praising Sammy's cooking skills. Tom is even more impressed after he puts the first piece of the kebab in his mouth. A long humming sound can be heard coming out of his nose which indicates the level of enjoyment he experiences tasting Sammy's kebab. Everyone is quite impressed. Al gathers everyone's empty glass and places them all in front of Sammy, so he would refill them. Having his hand made oily because of serving the kebab, Sammy requests Al to refill the glasses himself. So, Al does what needs to be done. He distributes glasses among everyone.



No one speaks much as they are all busy enjoying Sammy's Arabic traditional kebab. But Tom thanks Al and says he had enough for the night, considering he is taking medications for his wounds and injuries. Tom says he has to actually listen to miss Rana who said about being a moderate drinker till he would completely recovers. He expresses it is enough and he is in fact enjoying his time and does not wish to spoil that by over doing things.

When everyone is almost done eating, Tom begins telling some tales, some funny reminiscences about what happened to him when he was young. It is his way of being a bit entertaining, since everyone else has done all the work to prepare and serve the dinner. Tom's tales are so funny that make them all laugh. Freddy says a memory too. It is Sammy and Al's turn. They say their experiences in the funniest way and every single is enjoying hearing them. They have finished eating their dinner; however, they do not seem to have any plans to stop drinking except Tom who has a valid excuse for not companying others in drinking alcohol.

Sammy has kept some kebab, bread and vegetables, plus some alcohol for Robert and Amer aside, so in case they come home late and feel hungry by any chance, he would have something for them. The four of them keep on talking, laughing and having fun, without noticing how fast time flies. Around an hour after everyone finishes eating, Sammy and others hear the doorbell. Al, Freddy and Tom stop talking and laughing, going on high alert like any other time someone knocks on the door or rings the doorbell. Sammy, however, smiles and sits on his knee, looking down the balcony. He sees Robert and Amer down by the building's entrance door, waiting for Sammy to open the door for them. So, he tells his alerted American friends to relax:

"Relax guys." says Sammy smiling, "It's Amer and Robert. Al, can you give me my stick please, so I would go and open the door for them?"

"I'll go." replies Freddy.

"Ok. Thanks."

Freddy gets up and goes inside. He presses the bottom on the intercom and the apartment entrance, waiting for Amer and Robert to reach the fifth floor. Amer and Robert appear at the entrance about a minute later. They see Freddy first. He

introduces himself. So do Amer and Robert. The three of them go to the balcony after closing the door and shaking hands. Sammy introduces Al and Tom to them. Al gets up and shakes their hands. He says he is very happy to finally meet them. Tom, however, apologizes for not being able to stand up. So, Amer and Robert finally get to meet Al, Freddy and Tom.

Robert and Amer had said goodbye to Hanieh and Sara almost around the same time. Amer had called Robert and requested him to pick him up from Sara's house when he was done with Hanieh. So, Robert had driven to Sara's place, picked Amer up and they came back to Sammy's apartment. It didn't take Amer, Robert, Al, Freddy and Tom friendship to hit it off.

A few minutes pass. Amer and Robert speak to Al, Freddy and Tom a bit. Amer, who is next to Sammy, gets his mouth close to Sammy's ear.

"They are such a nice guys dude." whispers Amer into Sammy's ear, "I now know why you were so insistent to help them. They are good people. They deserve your help dude. I'm so glad finally meeting them."

Al begins telling another reminiscence. The story he says plus his body language and facial expressions while saying that has made it so much funnier. Everyone is laughing loudly, especially Robert and Amer. They can't really stop laughing. Sammy couldn't even imagine how funny Al can possibly get. Every single one of them is having fun. Everyone laughs and enjoys every moment of that night.

Al, Tom and Freddy congratulate Amer for getting engaged after Sammy and Robert bring it up. They tell Robert they know he was on his first official date since early that morning. They make jokes with him, pull his leg and tease him for a while. Freddy asks if there is going to be a problem for whether Hanieh or Robert? Since they have different religions? Robert who is completely in love with Hanieh already, clears his throat and says in a confident tone that neither his nor his girlfriend's religion is going to become an issue. Not for him, his parents and not for her and her parents also.

Sammy asks Amer how was his day? He begins telling all what he and Sara had gone through since early morning, while everyone at the balcony has kept quiet listening to him out of curiosity. Amer asks Robert he needs his help in the morning to take care of matters related to his engagement

ceremony. So, they should leave the house early in the morning. But Sammy says Sharif is going to help take Al, Tom and Freddy, smuggle them out of Al Darrah the following night and he is surely going to need Amer's help and his vehicle to drop them off near Al Namar exit. Amer promises everyone that he is going to come back on time and be there for them. Everything sounds like in place.

Sammy tells Amer he can be with him in the morning in case he can be of any help to him. Amer knows Sammy has to be around to manage his guests related affairs. So, he assures Sammy that Robert is enough and he can take care of everything with Robert's help.

It is about 2 A.M. Everyone has begun yawning already. Al stands up and asks Freddy to hand him the dirty dishes, so he would take them to the kitchen. He wants to help clean the balcony for Sammy before heading to bed. Seeing Al getting up, everyone else gets up to help, except Tom of course who cannot move. It takes everyone's cooperation only three or four minutes to take everything back inside from the balcony.

Dirty dishes are at the kitchen inside the sink, cushions, platters and everything goes back to their original place and balcony hence gets cleared, just like it was a few hours earlier. Al and Freddy begins washing the dishes immediately after taking them to the kitchen. Despite Sammy insisting to leave dish washing for the following morning. But Al says it is already the following morning and continues washing them alongside Freddy. However, he asks Robert and Amer to kindly transfer Tom back inside and place him back on his bedding.

Washing the dishes is over quicker than Sammy imagined it is going to take. Al and Freddy say good night to everyone and head back to the storage. Tom feels asleep as soon as he is laid down inside on his bed. Robert and Amer prepare their beds too. They go to bed after changing and doing their nightly routines. Sammy limps to his bed and lays down. He feels he is quite successful in making his guests an enjoyable and memorable evening. He feels asleep soon after laying down.

\* \* \*

Sammy opens his eyes the next daybreak. He turns his head and Tom is the first thing catches his attention. Tom is still asleep while seated and laid back to the cushions and pillows under his neck and head. Sammy glances at his wall clock as

he does every morning as soon as he wakes up. It is six thirty A.M. He wants to get up already, but decides to review in his mind all what he has to do that day.

He knows his most critical part of his day is the evening when he has to hand Al, Tom and Freddy over to Sharif, so he would do what he has to, to smuggle them to Jarabulus city in north. But he has some other daily chores he has to take care of too. He has to do the final, a few minutes machining of the rifle's metal parts. The next most important thing comes to his mind is Nelly. He misses seeing her cross the intersection near his apartment.

Sammy is still sleepy. He changes position, goes from one side to another in hopes he may be able to go back to sleep even for thirty minutes more. He is, however, wondering why he has no hangover despite drinking alcohol excessively the night before. Sammy decides he cannot go back to sleep. So, he gets up and sits on the edge of his bed. He picks his cane quietly and tiptoes towards the kitchen, while being extra cautious not to wake Tom up. He closes his room door after he exits the room. He is entering the toilet when he notices Amer and Robert.

Stress and worry have woken Amer up. He is thinking about how to solve his problems at Al Majed's garden. His eyes have become red and his hair is badly messy. He just waves hand after he sees Sammy without saying a word. Robert is in a deep sleep still. Sammy can hear him breathing deeply. Sammy crosses them both and enters the kitchen, while drying his hands and face. He fills the kettle and places it on the stove. He lights the stow. He opens the fridge's door and removes the usual breakfast stuff from it and places them over the kitchen table. He places two clean cups on the table too and gets out of the kitchen with his cane. He sees Amer in the same state. So, he signals him asking him to follow him into the kitchen, so they would have breakfast together.

Amer gets up nodding. He follows Sammy to the kitchen. Sammy asks him to close the door behind him. He can obviously see Amer is confounded and muzzy. So, Sammy asks Amer if he is planning to freshen up and wash his face before beginning to have breakfast? Sammy whispers, so he would not wake Robert and Tom up. Hang over and sleepy, perplexed and worried, Amer says he would wash up in the sink. He washes his face and sits at the kitchen table. The next thing Sammy does, is

texting Al and informing him he is awake in case he has woken up too and wants to have breakfast.

Sammy makes two cups of Nescafe for himself and Amer. He sits and asks Amer to explain again what has exactly happened the previous day and what causes him to be so stressed and worried? Sammy says he was not able to fully understand what Amer had explained about his issues with Al Majed garden people the night before.

While having breakfast, Amer begins talking with a sigh. He speaks in a quite disappointed tone. He sounds hopeless, as if everything has gone wrong and no engagement ceremony is going to take place at all. This definitely worries Sammy. Amer explains all that had happened the morning before. He tells Sammy all about Sheikh, the witnesses problem, Al Majed garden and its irresponsible staff. He tells Sammy everything. He explains he was trying not to be quiet the night before, that's why he had not been specific, as he did not want to spoil everyone's mood. Amer speaks angry and sad. He wants to yell, but he controls himself. Amer's main worries is that his engagement ceremony and party will not happen as planned. He is worried to disappoint Sara's parents and fails Sara. He is worried that Sara's parents and their close relatives to consider him as a looser who could not even make his own engagement arrangements properly.

Amer is mainly angry because people who played an important role in making his engagement ceremony and party happen, have escaped town. He is really pissed off with the way things were handled with individuals and managing establishments, who had agreed to provide him with their products or services he needs to make his ceremony and party happen. He is no longer able to make arrangements and even follow up with suppliers of products and services he needs to cater his ceremony and party. Whomever who had previously agreed to provide Amer with their services, was now gone. People have simply left town. They have just escaped, up and gone.

Amer gives them the right to worry for their families safety and therefor leaving Al Darrah for a safer place. What makes him mad, is the fact that all these are happening hours from his engagement. His only hope is now the event management firm which he has to meet and hand the task over to. Sammy can understand Amer's concerns and he thinks Amer has the right to be so stressed and extremely worried. This is not something that can be repeated. Not for Amer and not for Sara.

They are only going to have one engagement ceremony which is going to be as their only ceremony legalizing and announcing their marriage.

Sammy tries his very best to calm Amer down and gives him some confidence by telling him everything is going to be okay eventually. He tells Amer the engagement ceremony and party are surely going to happen, even better than he thinks. Because he will go with Robert and personally handle everything if they need to. Amer feels a bit better after he hears Sammy. He feels he has support and is not alone in this, even if he is not sure what the mechanics would be and are going to work out.

Amer and Sammy finish having breakfast. Sammy takes his cane and gets up while Amer holds his head with both hands thinking. Sammy goes to his room and opens its door quietly. He tiptoes towards his bed side table, opens the drawer and takes a can of aspirin out. He leaves the drawer open so he would not produce an unwanted sound which would wake Tom up. He tiptoes outside his room again, closes the door behind him and goes to the kitchen, joining Amer. He pays no attention to where Robert has been sleeping though. He comes face to face with Robert as soon as he enters the kitchen. He sees Robert's sleepy face with messy hair. After waving and nodding Sammy saying good morning, he goes to the washroom. Sammy places the aspirin can in front of Amer. He picks a glass, fills it with water and places it next to the aspirin bottle. Amer takes a pill and thanks Sammy, laying back going deep in his thoughts, thinking of everything that worries him. Sammy lights the stove again, so the water would be heated again. He wants to make Robert a coffee or Nescafe. Robert turns back to the kitchen and takes a seat opposite Amer. He notices Amer's very depressed and stressed and looks at Sammy, waits for him or Amer to say something.

"What now?" asks Robert. "I mean is there anything new? Or he's worried for what he told me in the car last night?"

Amer had already told Robert everything after he picked him up last night on their way back to Sammy.

"I don't know what he has told you though." replies Sammy. "Wouldn't you worry dude?" asks Amer, "No. seriously. Doesn't a problem like this concern you?"

"So, you know everything?" asks Sammy from Robert.

"Yeah." replies Robert, "He told me last night. I thought there was something new. I thought a new issue has been raised."

Robert turns his head towards Amer again. He is looking down at his fingers. Robert taps on Amer's back and begins talking when Amer looks at him:

"Listen to me and listen to me carefully." says Robert frowning, "We have no time to mourn dude. Look at me."

Amer who has begun looking back at his fingers lifts his head up and looks at Robert who is dead serious in what he is saying.

"We are going to make your engagement ceremony and party happen no matter what. I'm going to stay with you all the way, and I want you to know I will help you and we are going to make it happen, even if I have to spend all my savings. I, I mean we, will not let you look like a loser. Oh no. We won't. I'm sure Sammy is with me on this. Why are you sad? Got dressed? We'll go and talk to that event management people of yours first. Wear your clothes while I eat something. And no negative thinking please. I just don't understand why didn't you call me yesterday itself you Moron? I would have finished everything yesterday itself."

"What could you do man?" asks Amer, "even if let's say I called you. There are no stores, shops, companies and establishments open man. They've all run off. They've taken shelter elsewhere dude. We're on our own."

"What I can do?" asks Robert, "You don't dare. I'll get all guests to Damascus and back with my own expense if I have to. That's what I can do."

Sammy interrupts Robert and looks at Amer.

"I'm really suspecting you've hit your head. Are you fucking deaf? He's telling you we won't let your fiancé's family think low of you because of this. We are family. If they think of you as a loser, that means they think of us as losers. So, shut the fuck up and wait to see the fucking event management firm."

Amer smirks and that seriously makes Robert angry.

"You are grinning, you asshole fuck?" says Sammy, "We are saying your honor and image in front of your future wife's family and relatives is our honor and image too. You're grinning? You are such an asshole sometimes, for real. Wouldn't they think you failed arranging for a simple regular engagement ceremony and a party, despite being young, energetic, so sociable and most of all, having two best friends assisting you? So, your image is our image, your honor is our honor, your failure is equal to our failure. Got it?"

Sad and worried, Amer goes towards the washroom after he shakes head listening to Sammy's last words. Sammy who is now seated next to Robert requests him to get him his wallet from the top of the drawer in his room, as he limps and can't easily trip, makes a sound and wakes Tom up. Robert says sure, he goes to Sammy's room, gets his wallet from his trousers' pocket and comes back immediately and quietly. Sammy takes his ATM card and his credit card out. He looks at Robert, shakes his shoulder and gives them to Robert.

"Now listen as I would be able to say it once before Amer is back." says Sammy with a serious tone, "I don't give a flying fuck if you spend all what I've got. I want you to arrange for the best engagement ceremony Al Darrah has ever seen. I want you to make wonders dude. Do not, I repeat man, do not pay any attention to Amer if he says don't do it because it would cost so much and shit like this. Do your own thing without listening to him. Understand? There's around four thousand in my cards altogether, I guess. You also have some yourself. So, it should do. Don't let him talk to the event management firm. Take control of everything yourself. He is stressed. So, he would easily fuck everything up. You control everything. Try coming back home earlier in the evening. We should take Al, Freddy and Tom to where Sharif has told me. You know Sharif? One of the soldiers we met at Mr. Zahir's restaurant two three days ago. Just finish everything and come back. Don't think things are going to cost less. No. They would be even more expensive. Especially now that there are not too many choices. Just pay whatever they ask and get it over with. Don't let him interfere. I'll hold you responsible Robert now. Eat your damn breakfast and go to get it done.

Robert nods the whole time Sammy is saying all those things to him. He seems quite determined that he is going to make things happen. Amer now comes back and asks what is going on?



But Sammy and Robert just say nothing. Robert takes last sip of his coffee and looks at Amer:

"Move your ass." says Robert. "Let's go."

"It's a bit early, isn't it" replies Amer.

Sammy interrupts Amer:

"Don't piss him off now. Just do as he says." says Sammy, "Don't make him angry Amer. We have guests and he starts yelling if you make him angry. Please. Do what he says."

While having his right hand over his forehead, Amer looks at Robert and Sammy dumbstruck. Robert goes to the room, takes his clothes, gets them out and wears them in the living room quickly.

It does not take long when him and Amer leave the apartment. Sammy can now relax. He sits at the kitchen table, sighing when his cell-phone begins vibrating. He has switched the ringtone on silent, so when Al or anyone else calls him would not wake Tom up. But he sees Robert's name on the screen when he checks his cell-phone. He has called to inform Sammy that Freddy is on his way upstairs to him. He wants to ask Sammy to open the entrance already, so Freddy would not have to use the door bell and wake Tom up. He hangs up his phone without saying anything else.

Sammy takes his cane to go to the apartment's entrance. He opens the door, and as soon as opening the door, he comes face to face with Freddy who tells him "good morning". Sammy invites him in and asks if he is alone. Freddy says he is. He says he has come up alone as Al has a severe hangover. Al has headache and can't move. Freddy says he is there to take some breakfast downstairs for Al and himself. Freddy has brought a big platter with him that was sent downstairs before. Sammy tells Freddy what to do and what to take. Freddy fills the big platter with breakfast and leaves. Sammy receives a text message as soon as he closes the door behind Freddy. The message is sent by Al.

"I just wanted to thank you again for last night my friend. I'll never forget last night. I have a severe headache and nausea. I try resting since we'll have many things to do. Dying our hair, getting ready to move and all that. So, I'll be down here resting. Thanks again. God bless."

Sammy smiles and writes a reply:

"Don't mention it. I enjoyed last night the most. I hope you get better soon enough. Let me know if you need anything my friend. I'll text or call you on lunch time. Rest now."

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Robert and Amer reach the ground floor. As a habit, Amer puts his hand into his trousers' pocket to take his car keys out. Robert notices that and reminds him that the car key is with him. Just by looking at Amer and his mental estate, Robert figures he is in no condition to drive.

"I got it dude." says Robert, "I have the car keys. I'll drive. I feel like driving if you don't mind."

Amer just nods. His face is the same, down and nervous. Robert presses the bottom on the car key remote. It opens all the doors.

Robert drives away moments later while Amer is seated next to him pondering. Robert recalls all that Amer told him the night before, after he picked him from Sara's house. Robert is trying to put pieces together and figure out alternatives for certain possible issues, if raised by the event management firm. He remembers how depressed Amer sounded the night before.

Amer, however, is quiet. He has just laid his head to the car window, looking at a few people and vehicles in the street. Amer's phone rings. He gives an irritable look at his cell-phone. He wants to answer his phone when he hears Robert telling him to stop. Robert asks Amer if it is his fiancé calling? Amer glances at his cell-phone once again, sighs and replies yes, it is his fiancé.

"Don't answer." says Robert, "Wait a second. Just tell her not to worry if she asks about solving the issues with the engagement ceremony. Don't tell her you are with me though. Just assure her you are going to take care of everything today and you tell her you are on your way to meet the event management guy. Tell her it's your duty to take care of these things and you certainly will. Tell her to chill out. Ok, you can answer the phone now."

Amer nods again and touches his smart phone, answers his phone and begins talking.

"Good morning." says Sara, "Where are you babe? I couldn't sleep the whole night. What are we going to do? I hope this event management firm is good as everyone said. Oh my God. I'm so stressed."

"Baby," replies Amer, "why are you stressed? I'm going to take care of it. Do not worry a bit. I'm going to fix everything."

"Ok." sighs Sara, "Promise?"

"Yeah sweetheart. Promise."

"Nelly, Hanieh and I are going to meet today for your information. Just give me a buzz if you think I can help in any way."

"Relax. Everything's going to be alright. But thanks for informing me love. Just be with your friends and have fun. Don't worry about anything else darling."

Amer hangs up the phone. Robert has heard Amer and he can tell what has been communicated by Sara as well. He notices Amer's silence:

"Hey. What is it?" asks Robert, "I'm talking to you."

Amer lays his head back on the window. He sighs again after closing his eyes. He has become extremely emotional and Robert feels it. He can see reflection of light in Amer's tears which are about to roll down his cheeks.

"I've saved for my marriage." says Amer, "I have a budget for everything you know. Like for the engagement, I mean both the ceremony as well as the party, I have allocated a certain amount. The same thing I've done for our wedding party. It looks like I'll have to pay all my savings, only to take care of our engagement's expenses considering this fucking situation. If it was up to me alone, I would just show up at Sheikh's office and I would even forget about having a party. But you see? Every girl dreams of a day like this in her life. That's why I'm felt with no choice but to pay whatever it costs to give my Sara her day and save my own damn image in front of her folks."

Robert slows the car down a bit. He pats on Amer's shoulder: "Dude," replies Robert, "you are not alone. You forgot to mention that you have two sincere assistants, Sammy and myself. You know what? Just listen to me for a moment please. Can you promise me something?"

Amer looks at Robert's serious face.

"What do you want me to promise you?"

"Promise me you'll not interfere in what I'll be doing today. Don't stand on my way. Don't comment on anything. Just let me do what I've come to do. Can you do that for me please? Just

relax and let me run the show today. Don't even try to change my mind, like you often try doing. Now, I want you to give me the number of that event management firm guy."

Amer takes his cell-phone out and finds the number. Robert asks him to text the number to him, as he would need to use it after arriving at Al Majed's garden.

\* \* \*

Sammy is left alone at the apartment. Al is having a hangover. Freddy have taken their breakfast downstairs to the storage, and Robert has companied Amer to Al Majed garden, the engagement party venue. Sammy decides to use this free time he has, to finish machining the rifle's metal part which he thinks it is only going to take him no longer that an hour or so. He determines to finish the part, assemble it on the rifle, and test the rifle. He reviews all he has to do that day and figures he has nothing more important than working on the rifle and watching Nelly crossing the intersection when the time comes. He remembers he has one more task to attend to and that is looking for empty cardboard boxes, select what he needs, separate them, fold them and get everything else he needs, ready in his luggage and cardboard boxes, so he would be ready to go when they want to relocate to Al Latakia as planned.

Sammy thinks very carefully about what he would be needing most on daily basis, so he can put them aside ready to be packed. Their plan is to escape town exactly the day after Amer and Sara get engaged. Their engagement party in the same evening, can be Sammy's and his family and relatives farewell party as well. He decides to do what his mom had asked him, the following day or even in the same evening after he successfully prepares his American guests to proceed on their journey to Jarabulus.

Sammy wants to start working on his machines, but he knows Tom is sleeping in his room where the machine is. He is concerned the noise produced by his industrial machine may bother Tom. Like this, he cannot finish the rifle's metal part as he wanted. He thinks he may call and ask Tom and Al to come and help him transfer Tom to the living room. Sammy is thinking of the solutions when he hears Tom is calling him. He picks his cane and walks towards his room, opens the door and sees Tom awake. Tom calls Sammy to request him for some drinking water, so he can take his pills. Sammy gets him a

glass of water. He returns to the kitchen and while walking out of his room, he tells Tom he is going to return with breakfast. He arranges Tom a nice breakfast platter and takes it to him.

Tom thanks Sammy and begins drinking some orange juice which Sammy has brought for him and tells Sammy how much he has enjoyed their time the night before. He praises Sammy's cooking skills and admits the kebab Sammy had made was, as a matter of fact, the best Arabic traditional kebab, even better than what he had tried in American restaurants and other Arabic restaurants in other Arabic countries. Sammy is just smiling. He asks if Tom is really serious, or he is just being polite. But Tom sounds quite convincing. So, Sammy tells him he is happy that he and his friends enjoyed their evening, as it was his main objective to create a memorable evening for everyone.

Tom continues eating. But Sammy asks him if it is okay with him if he switches his machine on and work on a rifle's metal piece. Tom's mouth is full, chewing. So, he makes Sammy wait for him to swallow the food, as if he wants to tell Sammy something in response.

"Sammy, please do." Replies Tom after swallowing the food in his mouth, "Please do your daily chores as though I don't exist. I don't honestly want to cause any interruption in what you do. I'm and I will be fine. Just do what you want to do. Please."

Sammy nods and asks Tom to enjoy his breakfast. He gets to his workbench, takes the metal piece out of the machine and begins examining it without paying any further attention to his surroundings. Sammy is examining the piece to figure out where he had left off his work.

Events of the last couple of days interrupted the progress and finishing the metal piece later than what Sammy had scheduled in his mind. Visiting Hassan and Hussein at Al Thowrah city hospital, shopping and the time he spent to find and buy himself a tuxedo, meeting his American new friends and the process of helping them have delayed the work on completing the rifle, and now, Sammy is about to dedicate enough time to his work so he can get it done and over with finally for good. What he has to do is to simply focus and dedicate some time particularly to finish the process of machining the part. So, he has to now remember where he had

left the work off so he can take it from where it was left off.

While having breakfast, Tom is looking around when Sammy's white colored sport target shooting rifle catches his attention once again. He remembers the previous night Al or Freddy wanted to ask Sammy about the military grade rifle which was placed on the glass shelf on the wall, but he changed their mind, telling them Arabic people may not like being asked about their personal belongings.

Tom remembers he wanted to ask Sammy about the rifles later, and now, rifles have caught his attention. They have raised his sense of curiosity and he wants to know the philosophy behind having them. He finishes eating his breakfast. He was getting himself ready to ask Sammy about the rifles all the time he was busy having his breakfast. He looks at Sammy and sees he has not begun working on the machine yet. Sammy is just examining the piece.

"Something has raised my curiosity Sammy." says Tom placing the platter on the floor next to him, "And I would like to ask you if you don't mind. Can I? or you want me to leave it for a better time since you are busy?"

"Not at all." replies Sammy, "Ask me Tom. What is it my friend? What do you want to know?"

"These rifles." replies Tom, "They've made me curious since the time you have let us in your house. What is their story though?"

Sammy takes his cane, walks towards Tom while having a friendly smile on his face. He picks his target shooting rifle first, which is next to his computer, laid against the wall. He sits on his wheeled computer chair and pushes himself until he is situated exactly opposite where Tom is laid down.

"Robert and I," replies Sammy, "we are both professional targets shooting athletes. We are both champions. I am in my own town. I mean this town, Al Darrah town's team target shooting, and Robert target-shoots in his team back in the capital, Damascus. He is in youth club target shooting team. Remember we have gotten to know each other in middle school. So, anyways, we both finished high school and entered college. I moved to Damascus since our college was there, and I joined the youth club target shooting team with Robert, since I did not want to be away from my favorite sport activity. It's been a long time since we both practiced target shooting."

Sammy stands up, takes one long step and hands the sport white color rifle to Tom. Tom is still laid back to the cushion and pillows Sammy had placed behind him. Tom starts examining the rifle as soon as Sammy hands it over to him. He glances at the assault rifle on the wall's glass shelf. But before asking Sammy anything Sammy continues talking.

"I know. That rifle is going to be your next question, right? I'll tell you all about that one too."

Now Sammy stands up again, goes back and picks the rifle from its shelf. He sits on his chair again.

"Robert and I went to a tournament in Beijing, China and came back about two three nights before I got to know you and became friends with you guys. Robert won the first prize and I got the second. As usual. The white target shooting rifle in your hands, my dear friend, is in fact my target shooting practice rifle for tournaments I participated in. The assault military rifle in my hand, however, has a way longer story to it as it has a history to it. To tell you the shortest version, my late father and his best friend decided to modify and develop this rifle which did not operate by the way, and transform it to a one-of-a-kind sniper rifle. They had in fact done most of the work. The only work left on it, is to shape a metal piece, with given dimensions and angles, to be assembled and tested at last. I'm now finishing the said metal part as per the drawing and I hope I've done it right this time."

Sammy gets up again. He limps towards his workbench, takes the rifle's drawing and brings it back along with the metal part and gives them to Tom, so he would see what he is talking about. Tom now lays Sammy's sport rifle against the wall next to him, stretches his hand and receives the metal part as well as the drawing from Sammy. He opens the paper folds of the drawing and takes a long careful look at it. He looks at the drawing and the part back and forth several time, as if he knows what the part is or what the drawing says. He stretches his hand once again, asking Sammy to hand him the military grade old assault rifle. He examines the rifle too after Sammy gives it to him. He looks at the rifle, the metal part and the drawing back and forth several time. Sammy is wondering why does Tom try to imply that he can understand anything that drawing says.

"Before you continue though," asks Tom, "have you ever worked on an assault military grade rifle? Ever? Some rifle like this I mean. Have you aimed, calculated and fired at a target using a military grade rifle?"

"Yes." replies Sammy, not professionally of course, "I used to go hunting with my dad and his friend. He let me shoot with this same rifle. It worked fine back then. Us going hunting is actually the foundation or main reason I followed target shooting. It all began with this assault rifle we used for hunting. My dad insisted I was going to be quite good at it, especially after what happened to my leg and I could not follow my football dreams. I loved playing football so much when I was a teenager. So, I chose what my dad said. I would be good at after I met an accident and had to kiss my football dreams goodbye. Anyhow, like I said, my dad and his best friend were not destined to complete this rifle's work. His best friend died of natural causes and my dad got shot in a terrorist attack after which he died.

Sammy remembers his dad, gets sad and pauses for a moment, trying to swallow his gulp. Noticing Sammy getting emotional while talking about his dad, Tom keeps quiet also and waits for Sammy whenever he likes to continue:

"Finishing this rifle has other importance for me also." continues Sammy, "It's my dad's anniversary in two three days. I promised him I would finish working on it. I want to do that before his anniversary. All that is left to do, is the part on your lap."

Tom places the rifle also on his lap and tries to sit straight. He can't. so, he asks for Sammy's help. Sammy takes his both hands and pulls him towards himself and Tom can sit straight.

"You have helped us Sammy." says Tom, "I want you to allow me to help you too. Please."

Finding it difficult to understand, Sammy thinks to himself what kind, and in fact, how can Tom help him being wounded and laying in his bed all the time. Sammy does not want to refuse him also. It is not who Sammy is. Sammy thinks if doing anything is going to give Tom a better feeling, why not just say yes? He would probably think he would not be uselessly laying down all the time. That's probably how he wants to say thank you for helping him.



"Absolutely," replies Sammy, "Of course you can help me. I'll be delighted my friend."

Tom smiles. He takes another long deep look at the drawing. Not to possibly distract Tom, Sammy keeps quiet and waits for him to say something. Sammy figures Tom has some engineering background probably and that's why he thinks he's able to help him somehow. Two- or three-minutes pass.

Sammy sees Tom placing the drawing next to him. He lifts the rifle from the top of his lap, takes a long breath, stretches his arms and suddenly begins disassembling the rifle in a blink of an eye. Tom separates all parts, all bits and pieces of it from the biggest to the tiniest piece in a matter of seconds. He disassembles the rifle before Sammy has a chance to learn how. He picks the metal part which has taken Sammy days to machine, tries inserting it on its designated chamber. But it does not fit. Tom picks the drawing and lifts it up. The drawing is now like a curtain, separating Tom from Sammy's flabbergasted face.

Who are you guys, Sammy whispers to himself very quietly. What do you do for living? Why can you open each and every single part of this rifle in a blink of an eye, faster than Sammy himself who knows every piece of it by heart? Sammy is seriously confused. He is staring at Tom's hand and witnessing how skillfully he disassembles the rifle when he has to get himself together after hearing Tom asks if he has a measuring tool called coliseum in English. Sammy nods. He says he has. He gets up with the help of his cane once again, goes to his workbench, finds his coliseum between other tools on the top of his workbench and takes it back to Tom.

Tom examines, measures the part and compares it both with the drawing and the rifle's dimensions. Tom ponders for a moment before asking Sammy to bring him one of the bullets he plans to use for that particular rifle. Sammy tells him that the bullets are in fact in the storage. He says he is going to go downstairs and get him one.

Sammy who has seated on the floor, next to Tom after getting him the coliseum, takes his cane again and holds his breath, so he would get up, go downstairs to the storage and bring a bullet for Tom. But Tom asks Sammy to stop and not to get up yet, and Sammy does. So, Sammy sits down again. Tom can see Sammy has difficulty moving much. He doesn't want to keep on asking him to get this and that, considering the fact he has

a bad leg and his mobility is not as easy as it is for a normal healthy person with no limp. So, Tom pauses for a moment after asking Sammy to stop. He looks at Sammy,

"Why don't you call Al, or Freddy, tell them where in the storage you keep the bullets and ask one of them to get you one upstairs?"

Sammy nods. He seems relieved. It is actually difficult for him to go up and downstairs with the condition he has. So, he does as Tom says. He calls the cell-phone line he has given Al. Luckily Freddy answers the phone before the sound of its ringtone wakes Al up. Sammy tells him they need a bullet. He informs Freddy where he kept the bullets and requests him to get one or two of them up for him. Sammy apologizes for the disturbance and he hangs up the phone. Freddy knocks on Sammy's door, hands him two bullets Moments later without even asking what he or Tom need a bullet for. Sammy thanks Freddy before he goes back downstairs. Sammy gets the two bullets, goes back to his room and gives them to Tom. Tom is really focused on examining, measuring and checking the rifle, its metal part and the drawing.

Sammy is still shocked by what he witnesses. Why can Tom disassemble the rifle that quickly? Sammy asks himself. Why is Tom that expert in rifles? Who are they and what do they really do for living? Sammy has no doubt Tom, Al and Freddy are not the bad guys. But still, he wants to know where Tom's expertise comes from? And what their background is?

Sammy does not want to interrupt Tom's concentration. So, he decides he would ask him the reason behind him having such a vast knowledge in guns and assault rifles in the right time. After examining the part several times, looking back and forth at the part, the drawing and the rifle itself, Tom tries fitting the part into its designated compartment in the rifle. The part looks like it was machined in the correct way and its dimensions are accurate. However, it does not still fit in its place in the rifle accurately. Because it is metal, needs some sanding and sifting before it fits to its place easily and correctly.

Tom figures that after trying to fit the part from several different angles. He says it needs a bit sanding and probably oiling for it to fit easily. He says it is the only way they can test it whether it works. Tom asks Sammy for some very soft sandpaper, for him to try sanding the part, hoping it would fit if its edges are a bit softened. Sammy gets up and

goes back to his workbench. He takes a biscuit box and brings it to Tom.

"It's not biscuits," says Sammy, "this box? I put all my sand papers in here."

Sammy opens the box and gives it to Tom. Tom searches for the softest sandpaper he can find. He begins sanding the edges of the rifle's metal part. It doesn't take long before his injured shoulder begins bothering him with pain. So, he hands the part and the sandpaper back to Sammy and teaches him which edges and how to sand the part. Tom picks the drawing and opens it over his lap. He focuses all his attention to it.

"I have never seen, in my entire life, someone being able to disassemble a rifle as quick as you did." says Sammy while sanding, "I don't mean you tell me why and how you know how to do that. I am just flabbergasted to know such a speed is even possible. I have, like I said, never seen in my life. Not even in Hollywood movies."

Tom who is still staring at the drawing over his lap, just smiles without saying a word. Sammy is waiting for Tom to say something when they both hear someone knocks on the door again. This time, however, Tom's facial expression changes. His face turns worried and concerned, not expecting anyone. Sammy takes his cane, gets up and goes towards the door. He looks into the door lens and sees Freddy behind the door again.

"It's ok." says Sammy loudly, "It's Freddy."

Sammy opens the door for him. Freddy asks Sammy if he can borrow a needle and thread. Sammy tells him to follow. Freddy follows Sammy to his mom's room. Sammy opens one of the drawers in his mother's room while Freddy is waiting outside for him. Sammy finds the little stitching kit his mom keeps and gives it to Freddy. Freddy is leaving the apartment, but he figures he wants to take a look at Tom, says hi and asks how he is doing? When Freddy peeks at Sammy's room, he sees Tom, the drawing, a disassembled rifle and some tools. He enters Sammy's room. Sammy is under the impression he is going to tell his rifle's tale once again for Freddy as well. But Freddy just observes Tom and what he is doing for a moment without saying a word. After observing Tom for a moment.

"Where are it's pins?" asks Freddy. "You want me to oil them?"

"Not yet." Replies Tom. "I'm not done yet. It's okay. I got it, thanks. Just attend to Al, though. Still hangover?"

"Yup. Dead. Let me know if you need anything."

"Yeah, I will. Thanks anyways."

Hearing Tom and Freddy's conversation about the rifle's pin, and noticing Freddy is not surprised seeing Tom with the disassembled rifle and everything else, Sammy figures it is not an unusual scene for Freddy to see Tom or probably Al handling a rifle, assembling and disassembling it. It has neither raised any question in Freddy's mind, nor has surprised him. In fact, Tom even offered to do the oiling, as though that is not the first time, they are doing things with rifle together, and seeing an assault rifle does not even look strange to him.

Sammy figures whatever his three new American friends are into, they're into it together. They may be part of CIA operation or even spies Sammy suspects. Whatever they do for living though, they seem pretty good at it.

Tom leaves Tom and Sammy. He exits the apartment.

Sammy sits next to Tom and continues sanding the metal part. He notices Tom is looking at the end of the bullet and nodding. He looks as if he is impressed with something related to the bullets. Sammy has Tom under microscope. He asks Sammy for some oil and a useless tooth brush if he has, and probably some soft cloth. Sammy has no doubt he needs all these to clean the rifle. So, he tells Tom if he means he wants something to clean the rifle with, he already has a special rifle cleaning kit.

Tom smiles, as if he is also impressed with Sammy having a special kit to clean the rifle. He says yes and that's what he exactly meant he wanted as he needs to clean up some particular spots on the rifle itself.

Sammy puts the part on the floor, gets up, goes towards his workbench again and brings the rifle cleaning kit for Tom. He sits next to Tom where he was sitting before and continues sanding the metal piece. Tom begins cleaning the rifle. For them not to feel board, Tom begins asking Sammy questions. He says he wants to know Syrian culture better.

"I have heard that guys in your country prefer to get married sooner, I mean in a younger age than other countries. You told me and my friends about Mr. Amer, your cousin and his fiancé, which they'll get engaged in two three days. You also talked about your buddy Robert, who has just met a nice girl, etc. But none of us has heard anything about you involved

with any girl or something. I mean we have never heard you speak about having a relationship. Or, may be."

"Or maybe what? Replies Sammy asking.

Sammy interrupts Tom, now laughing, "Or maybe I'm a gay? Oh, believe me dear. I'm not."

"It doesn't matter even if you are." says Tom, now he interrupts Sammy, "I have three very close friends back home. They are all gays. We are so close."

"But I'm really not." replies Sammy laughing, "I don't have a problem with them. As a matter of fact, I believe gays are quite creative people. Most of them are artists. In this country though, they would rather stay in closet, hide their identity, considering the Islamic culture and all that. Ok, Tom. Let me tell you about me and a girl. The truth is that I have a major crush on a girl, here in Al Darrah. I met her a few days back, when I went to the cemetery to pray for my dad. That's where I saw her first. I just spoke a few words with her. I mean normal words, not expressing myself or hitting on her or something. I simply thanked her for something nice she did. That's all. But call me a stalker if you like, I followed her and found out where she went, and I got to find out her name, Nelly, and the fact that she is a Christian girl. Call me crazy Tom, but I can't stop thinking about her. I'm sure this is it. This is love. The latest news is that Amer and Robert's girls know her. They've invited her to Amer and Sara's engagement ceremony and I'm practicing how to ask her out, or at least tell her how I feel about her. She would believe it or not, she would be the second girl in my life whom I will have a relationship with if she says yes of course."

"What do you mean by the second girl?" asks Tom, "What are you trying to tell me?"

Sammy keeps quiet and lowers his head.

"Well," replies Sammy, "yeah. That I only happen to be able to establish a relation with two girls throughout my entire life. You see, with my physical condition and all. I'm sure you know; girls are not really looking for disable guys like me."

"What?" asks Tom, "What? Do you really consider yourself a disable guy? But you would still walk even if you don't use

your cane, wouldn't you? Why disabled? That's the wrong term to describe your condition."

"Ok, half disabled." replies Sammy, "Still I'm different than other guys. That's how girls see me. Since my accident."

Tom is quiet. He is not looking at Sammy while talking to him. Probably because he figures Sammy can say whatever he wants, express himself the way he wants if he does not directly look at him psychologically. He just continues cleaning the rifle's parts. His silence makes Sammy wonder. He feels as though someone is finally honest enough to agree with how he feels and why he feels the way he does.

"Well," replies Tom after a long pause at last, "I get it. Maybe you are right. But you should know women look for other qualities in their boyfriends or future husbands than a perfectly operational body part. I don't know about girls in your country though. But back home, you would have more chance of getting good women if you are successful, I mean if you have achieved something in your life both socially and financially. You are not an unsuccessful bum. In the situation your country is in, you are studying, you are an athlete, target shooting champion and now, develop rifles."

Sammy bursts into laughter. He tells Tom he thinks he is an honest person who understands things better than many.

"If I tell you I'm a jinni coming out of a bottle," says Tom, "and you can ask one thing and only one thing from me to make your dream come true, what would that be? What's your dream Sammy?"

Sammy stops sanding the part. He still looks at it though. Thousands of different thoughts cross his mind. What a general question, he thinks. Sammy has many dreams of course. Some of which he knows himself are not achievable.

"Wow." replies Sammy, "What a question. My dream, ha? I would say I have many wishes and desires in my life. If you ask what I wish if the jinni in the bottle asks me, I would say to return my leg to its original state. I would tell the jinni to give my good leg back. But a dream is to see the day Nelly is in love with me as much as I'm in love with her now.

Sammy and Tom speak for around thirty minutes. Tom has cleaned all the rifle's parts and laid them next to each other on the floor, waiting to be reassembled. He takes the metal piece

Sammy is sanding from his hands, measures it with coliseum, returns it back to him and says just little more sanding is left before it is perfectly fitted to its place in the rifle.

Tom who has just handed the metal piece back to Sammy for him to continue sanding it, grabs it back from his hand as soon as giving it to him in a very funny way. He requests Sammy to prepare them both two cups of coffee so they would drink while doing the work.

Sammy gets to the kitchen, fills the kettle with water and puts it on the stove. It is not long before he carries two cups of coffee back to his room.

"Ok, let me ask you something Sammy." says Tom after he takes his first sip of the coffee, "Let's imagine we've done all the required work on this rifle, fixed it and made it work the way you want. Let's say, or no, you finish machining, sanding and fitting this part which you have been working for a long time on, as you said. Then what? How, where and what purpose are you going to use it for?"

"Hmm," replies Sammy pondering, "obviously I'm going to take it hunting if my country's situation improves. The security and all. But I have a bigger objective, I mean I would be achieving a much bigger objective when, like you said, I finish it and make this rifle work, aside from proving to myself that I could do it. I would be achieving what my father and his best friend could not, or had no time to complete and achieve. Complete the work on this rifle has a sentimental value and to me. I promised and I did it you see. I keep my word, even if it happened when my dad was already gone. I would satisfy my own conscience, knowing that I did what my dad had to do, completed what he had aimed to complete and unfortunately couldn't.

"So, hunting, huh?" asks Tom after he pauses and thinks about Sammy's answer for a moment, "What's the farthest target or let's say, how many yards was the farthest target you've ever hit, no matter with your target shooting or a hunting rifle? How far is the farthest target you have ever hit?"

"300 meters." replies Sammy proudly, "Yeah. I hit my target which was 300 meters away."

"Wow. Now tell me the farthest game you have ever hit using the same rifle when it still worked and was not destroyed? I mean hitting the game and killing it?"

"I guess it was around 450-500 meters. I guess. It was a boar. Ok. Now I want you to get up one last time and get a notepad and a pen or pencil."

Sammy wonders what Tom has in mind. Whatever it is, it has already caught Sammy's attention and interest somehow. He gets up and goes his computer desk's. He gets a notepad and a pen.

Tom asks Sammy not to sit yet. Not yet he says. He asks Sammy two or a few led bullets he uses for his target shooting using his white air rifle. Opening a different drawer, Sammy gets him a half full can of target shooting led bullets. He can already guess what Tom wants to do asking these things. He has no doubt Tom wants to teach him something and this makes Sammy quite happy and excited. If so, he would be learning some western shooting methods, techniques and ways.

Tom picks Sammy's sport air rifle. He removes its scope cap off. He asks Sammy to open the balcony door which opens from Sammy's room to the balcony. Sammy pushes the door open. Tom tells him to open the curtain too. Sammy does as Tom asks. Tom begins looking at the other houses' roofs. They can see every house's roof since they are on the fifth floor and higher than other houses and town houses. Tom asks Sammy to look for a target on the roof of the buildings. Tom and Sammy are quiet. They're looking for a target when Sammy remembers he can use his binocular. The same one he uses to spot Nelly crossing the intersection every day. Sammy picks his cane, goes to the living room and brings his binocular with him. He uses it to look for a target. Until Sammy finds a tea cup made of glass on the edge of some house's roof. The cup is glass and transparent. It is left on the edge of the roof's fences as if someone enjoyed drinking a cup of tea on the roof but forgot to take the cup back inside with him. Sammy tells Tom he found something. He gives the binocular and the cup's direction to Tom and waits for him to see it too. Tom sees the tea cup. It is around four to four hundred fifty yards away. Tom asks Sammy to lay down and target the cup. In order to do so, Sammy has to lay down closer to the balcony's door. The target he wants to hit is on the roof of a house which is below Sammy by tens of yards.



Sammy's apartment is on the last floor of the only five floor buildings in the town. Tom waits for Sammy to do his targeting. It is difficult for him to even find the tea cup without the rifle's scope. Tom gives Sammy's his sport rifle's scope and asks him to do his targeting. He also asks Sammy to have his notepad and pens by his side where he is laid. Sammy attaches his sport air rifle's scope and finds the tea cup finally. He targets and pulls the trigger. But it is not a hit. Tom is looking at it using the binocular. Sammy loads his rifle and takes three other shots on the tea cup to no avail. Tom moves himself, changes his position on his bed sitting straight.

"Now write whatever I say on your notepad while you are laid down." says Tom, "You may already know some of what I'm about to tell you, being a target shooting athlete yourself. Write them down anyway. I tell you what I think would help you in your target shooting and you write them down for the future references."

Tom tells Sammy targeting formulas he has never heard, even when he was at school on his algebra, mathematics and geometry classes he had so far attended. Sammy notes down those formulas and asks Tom to explain each and every one of them in details. Patiently and slowly, Tom explains whatever Sammy wants and goes to the next one. He tells Sammy he is going to teach him how to implement those formulas in practice as well only after he has theoretically explained them. He tells Sammy he is later going to help him understand concept of scientific targeting, distanced targets, considering wind strength and direction, how to calculate distance, using target's surrounding, etc. Sammy is quiet listening very carefully. But he is so happy and excited deep inside for the fact he is learning combat targeting and scientific shooting for the first time in his life.

When Sammy finishes writing Tom's formulas, Tom asks Sammy to listen very carefully and tries memorizing the rest. He explains abbreviations used in formulas, numbers and figures and the reason they are used. Sammy cannot hear anything else except what Tom says.

"Like I said, you probably know some of what I'm going to tell you." says Tom, "Forget all about what you've read or learned until now. Trust me, as I'm going to teach you how to fish instead of giving you a fish. I've almost realized your mistakes while you were trying to target and destroy that tea cup."

Sammy is staring at Tom while he talks, realizing he was going to be the number one champion in Beijing tournament if he knew what Tom teaches him before going to China. Target shooting being a very important part of his life, Sammy pays full attention to every word Tom says. Tom takes the last sip of his coffee:

"I'll tell you and you will note down." continues Tom, "You can also write down your questions, so you can ask them after I finish talking. Look man. You are treating your combat rifle like your sport air rifle. They are a whole different ball game. You apply the same techniques you use on your compact rifle as you do on your air sport rifle. But like I said, there is a big difference between how using them. Their weight is different, their bullets and shooting, kicking mechanism are different and many other differences they have. You should lay behind your rifle on forty-five degree, so you would not be forced to bend your neck, to place your cheeks on the rifle. It results in your neck's muscles to get tired, hence your vision angle would change. You must fix your heels to the ground, so your spine would be engaged less. You should lay your rifle's bottom on something soft whether you are shooting from your house or the desert. Whether out or indoor, it does not matter. You hold the bottom of your rifle with your hand if you are on standing position and place the rifle's butts on your shoulder. You do not need to keep your rifle's butts exactly on your shoulder's bezel. It will cause your rifle hitting your bone and you miss. You must place the rifle butts on the soft tissue of your shoulder. Remember, never place your rifle's barrel on anything, so you would have a stand or tripod before you take your shot. The farther your target, the more you would of course be prone to miss. Because the slightest mistake in targeting here, bullet would become farther and farther from your target. Never hold the magazine of the rifle with your hand. You may think the magazine would not move. But it does and you'll miss in distances more than seven hundred if you move by a millimeter. I noticed your breathing rhythm is wrong before you takes your shot. You should never hold your breath. You should make your inhale a bit longer than your exhale. As if you are smelling a scent of a nice perfume or sweet-smelled flower. You should adjust your breathing rhythm with your target's movement. Breath with your target. You have a moment separating your inhale and exhale. There's a little gap in between. That's exactly when you pull the trigger. Right between your inhale and exhale Sammy. Don't close your other

eye while aiming with one. This will result in your eye muscle to get tired and you, hence, miss your next target. Look at the result of your shot, from your rifle's scope. Never lift your head up your rifle to see whether you've hit your target or missed. Do not release the trigger after taking your shot. Lead the trigger back to its original position using the same indication finger. Practice to load your rifle while you observe your target from your scope. That's if your rifle does not automatically load."

Sammy has stopped writing minutes ago. He prefers listening and learning rather than missing some of what Tom is teaching him because he focused on noting them down. He has memorized every single instruction. The level and amount of information Sammy has received from Tom in the past few minutes, exceeded the total amount of information he has received from his target shooting instructions over the past few years. He truly believes the world's most expert sniper is teaching him how to use his rifle after he finishes developing it. He is so excited to have learnt that much in a very short span of time.

"Remember Sammy," continues Tom, "wars happening inside cities are way worse and more difficult than battlefields and deserts. Because you and your enemy both have a less depth of view. There may come a time you would be forced not to take a shot for even four to five hours, if you don't want to be spotted by enemy snipers. Garbage bins and containers are the best hiding places. They are where normally people would not even relish going near to. But it's an ideal hiding place for a sniper. You should bear in mind, setting a trap and cheating is fair in the world of snipers. Any strategy, any method or technique you use to take your enemy down is fair and free."

Tom continues talking. He teaches Sammy how to be a sniper, teaches him all conversion, calculation and other formulas in a period of around an hour. He teaches him aiming, shooting and destroying possible enemies. He talks about shooting another human called enemy, while Sammy is under the impression he is being taught how to hunt better. But soon he realizes Tom is teaching him how to fight and survive a real war. The known jungle law of kill or be killed. Tom teaches Sammy anything that a professional sniper should know. He makes Sammy prepared for becoming a military grade sniper. He explains all formulas and calculation methods in detail for Sammy.

Tom asks Sammy to target and shoot the same tea cup he was not able to hit an hour ago. Sammy implements all what Tom has taught him. But he is still not able to hit his target. Tom tells him his mistakes again and asks him to practice later. Tom's energy is deteriorated dramatically. He sounds tired and in pain. Sammy does not want to bother him any further that day. So, he decides to leave shooting at the tea cup and continues sanding the rifle's metal part instead.

Sammy has three very important questions he needs desperately to know the answer to. So, he apologizes for making Tom talk again. Sammy asks his questions in regards to targeting and shooting while he is sanding rifle's part. Tom is kind enough to explain some of what he has taught Sammy again using some more understandable examples. He makes Sammy understand completely. Sammy keeps on reviewing the notes he has written after he thanks Tom for teaching him. Moving slowly and carefully, Tom begins assembling the rifle carefully. He tells Sammy how he should disassemble and assemble the rifle back in a quicker way. He tells Sammy that he thinks Sammy has to keep on sanding the piece even when they are gone, since they all have to leave in the evening and the piece is not still fitting the rifle. Sammy begins pondering. He figures he has learnt a lot from Tom. He asks himself if he could really finish the work or developing the rifle on time before his father's anniversary if it was not for Tom's guidance and help? He doubts it anyways. Sammy suddenly notices Tom is looking for something in his bed. He pretends he has not noticed it. Sammy suddenly realizes Tom is probably looking for his futuristic rifle scope he found in his trousers pocket at the toilet.

"I know I've made you stand up ten times already." says Tom, "But can you please get me the clothes I removed in the toilet yesterday?"

"Looking for the leather pipe shaped cover?" replies Sammy immediately, "I wanted to put your clothes into the washing machine when I noticed there was something inside your pocket. I don't know you were sleeping, anyway I forgot to tell you. I kept it in the toilet's lower cabinet for you. I'll get it now."

Sammy holds his cane, stands up and walks towards the toilet. He brings the leather container back for Tom and gives it to him. Tom thanks him.

"I know for a fact." says Tom, "This rifle is going to become something extraordinary. It will be one of a kind, powerful and reliable. I found out that your scope, sorry to say, is a toy, not a professional scope. I want to give you a present you remember me with. It has helped me and let's say even saved me in many occasions. Many missions were achieved and completed with its help. It has brought me luck and I wish it would bring you too. Take out your rifle's scope when it is ready and install this on it instead. Put aside that childish scope. It will reduce your shooting and aiming abilities. Or I will do it myself. I'll replace it with your rifle's scope myself right now."

Tom opens the scope which Sammy had installed to his incomplete rifle. It is strongly attached to the rifle as if it has been fixed or attached to it as an accessory for ages and no one had not even bothered to even open it for a simple clean up. Tom takes his own futuristic looking lens out of its leather cover and installs it on Sammy's rifle. Sammy looks so excited and happy like children who receive a present. Tom hands the rifle over to Sammy after attaching his nice scope to it. Sammy holds his rifle up and see how nicer it looks after a cool scope was installed to the top of it. He feels great even if his rifle does not still operate. But still, he knows Amer and Robert would be quite impressed after they see that.

Sammy takes a long and meaningful look at his rifle, lays down and for the first time looks at the same tea cup he has difficulty finding and hitting with his air sport rifle and without any scope at all. He can now spot the glass tea cup as though he can reach out to it and grabs it. For a long while Sammy examines the scope and tries to figure what all those so many characters and signs mean? He asks Tom several questions and gets his curiosity satisfied by finding answers for his questions. He looks at far away objects and the more he looks, the more he realizes how powerful the scope is. Sammy also realizes why Tom taught him some of the targeting formulas and techniques after he looks at a distance using his new scope.

"Wow." says Sammy, "Thank you man. Really. I've never seen such a powerful scope in my entire life. I'll never let it go out of my sight. I promise. The best gift I could possibly receive, while I know the work on developing my rifle is going to be over anytime. Wow. Thanks."

Sammy tells Tom he can see that distances are measured and shown in yards in the scope whereas Syria's distance measurement unit is meters. But Tom replies by saying Sammy has learnt how to convert yards to meters in his mind as quick as possible if he wants to achieve the best results using his new scope. However, the whole measuring and calculating processes, aiming and hitting his target would be the same he can do easily, considering his bullets type and rifle's barrel, and he can take down targets as far as fourteen hundred to twenty-two hundred meters. Tom wants Sammy to learn in the simplest way and an understandable way without using technical terms, so Sammy would understand them completely and apply what he learned in practice.

Tom taught Sammy everything in the most understandable, simple and vulgate way. He explains Sammy has two different kinds of bullet. That they look almost exactly the same, but they are designed to perform different tasks, provided that they are used in a way they've been designed for. Tom explains bullets are of heavy kind and that says they were made for hitting long distanced targets, between around one thousand and four or five hundred meters to two thousand and two or three hundred meters. Sammy interrupts him and explains he has a full wooden box of those bullets. Tom says Sammy probably has a box half with bullets which are particularly designed to penetrate the target, passing through the game's or human's body without losing their original shape completely. That they would not become flattened after they hit the body, bone and flesh and they would leave the body from the opposite side they entered. But the other half of Sammy's bullet box most probably contains the same shiny beautiful bullets, but changes shape after hitting the body and becomes flattened separating a part of flesh or bone from the body. Tom continues by saying that hitting targets with the said bullet requires a very powerful rifle and good knowledge and practice aiming, while considering natural factors such as wind speed, direction and distance.

For Sammy who had practiced aiming and hitting targets of maximum 2 to 300 meters, what Tom says is quite interesting of a subject. Sammy's ears listen to Tom and his brain memorizes and processes every word comes out of his mouth. He is trying hard to learn everything right there instead of writing and memorizing everything.

Sammy knows Tom is leaving and he has no way to ask his questions from him if he has a question after he is gone. Tom

explains all aiming and shooting principles as well as their tiniest details, explains whatever technique he has come up with several times. He specifically tries focusing Sammy's attention and makes him absolutely understand that he has to adjust his breathing with his target's breathing, as the object's chest, and hence, body goes slightly up and down depending on how heavily he breathes. Plus, tiniest distraction in aiming would result in missing the target. Tom teaches Sammy whatever he knows is important. He teaches him all what he remembers, and Sammy listens and listens very carefully. Sammy thinks he would learn the lessons Tom gives him in theory and uses them in practice after he completes his rifle and is certain it is going to work. Sammy decides to implement techniques Tom is teaching him in a shooting range. He knows for a fact that he is never going to aim and take a shot like he used to do before Tom's lessons. Formulas crosses Sammy's mind one after another when he looks into the scope. Then he stops, looks at the note he has taken and looks into the scope again, imagining an imaginary target and takes an imaginary shot. Tom, who has kept quiet giving Sammy sometime to process all the info he was given, begins talking again and says:

"I don't need to remind you that professional sniper missions are regularly done by two people. I'm sure you have seen in the movies where two guys are laid down, facing a faraway target, one is holding the rifle and the other one with a binocular. There should always be someone well trained with the sniper, feeding him with information by which the sniper can make his decision when and how to shoot at the target. But I've seen snipers who are so good even without any assistance. They do everything themselves, do the math, calculations, predictions, etc., and take their shot hitting exactly where they intend to. What I mean to say is that some snipers just have what it takes in them, as though they are born to shoot sharp to hit their target accurately."

Sammy nods expressing he understands what Tom explains to him. He looks at Tom, smiles and says thank you before he fixates his complete attention on watching or observing his target in his new futuristic scope. But his phone begins ringing as soon as he looks inside his rifle's scope. He answers his phone without checking who is calling him. He hears Rana's voice who has called to see how is Tom doing? And whether the medicines and injections had any good effect on him? As soon as he figures Sammy is on the phone with Rana, Tom begins asking Sammy to let him have a word with Rana too.

Sammy tells Rana that Tom is doing much better and wants to have a word with her. Rana says sure and Sammy gives his phone to Tom and returns to what he was doing, watching the target from his rifle's new scope. After a small talk, Tom says the reason he insisted he wants to talk her is that he wanted to sincerely thank her for all what she has done for him. Tom tells her he was not feeling good when she came and gave him medicines and injections and dressing his wounds. So, he has not thanked her and now he thinks it is a good opportunity for him to do so. Rana also asks him if he is taking his medicines on time and whether he was convinced they worked? But Tom assures her he has done all what she instructed him to do and, as a matter of fact, Al is going to give him his injection in the afternoon. Before hanging up the phone, Tom tells her they are leaving in the evening and they may not meet one another again, and wants her to know by helping cure his wounds and pain, not only she has helped a human, but also has helped her own people indirectly.

Rana is beginning to get very confused by what Tom tells her. But Tom thanks her once again and says goodbye before handing the phone to Sammy. Sammy too thanks Rana once again and tells he is happy he is going to see her, her husband and their children at Amer and Sara's engagement party. Their conversation ends and Sammy hangs up the phone. Tom starts sanding the metal part again. After telling Rana he is going to see her and her husband and children at Amer's engagement party, Sammy's mind has automatically directed towards Nelly and the fact that he is going to see and talk to her and express how he feels about her. He becomes anxious and anxiety penetrates each and every single cell in his body. He is like every day waiting for the clock to show five and forty-five P.M., so he would appear by his window holding a binocular, looking to see whether he can find Nelly crossing the intersection near his building.

Sammy thinks about Nelly, looking for her crossing the intersection and seeing her for the second time at Amer and Sara's engagement party, without knowing what she has told Sara and Hanieh about Muslim men. Sammy has absolutely no idea. Nelly has already said she cannot have anything to do with opposite sex, especially with Muslim men. Sammy does not even know Sara and Nelly are going to visit Hanieh at her house and spend great time. Sammy thinks about meeting Nelly and what to tell her and how to tell her that he likes her more than a lot while his eyes are engaged with the scope on



his rifle. So, he figures he better worries about meeting Nelly for the second time and expressing his feelings towards her when the time comes. He is determined to focus his complete attention towards guidelines and sniper lessons Tom has given him, until he is understood and applied them in practice later when the time comes. Around 20 minutes is passed just like that. There is a silence in the room between Sammy and Tom. Sammy's stomach rumbling and growling sound attracts both their attentions.

"Seriously?" says Tom laughing, "You mean to say you really are this much hungry?"

Even Sammy himself is laughing at the sound of his stomach. He glances at the clock which still shows eleven forty A.M. So, he thinks he better places their launch order already as he knows it is going to take the restaurant a while to prepare and deliver the food he wants to order. So, he picks his cane and gets up and goes to the kitchen. He opens the same cabinet drawer they keep all the menus in. He grabs a bunch of fast-food menus and takes them all to Tom.

Sammy and Tom speak about restaurants and their food quality for a moment. They finally decide they want to order some burgers. Tom tells Sammy they have already tried burgers in Al Raqqa, and they haven't liked it. But Sammy is quite certain about how great Al Darrah's burgers are. So, he suggests Tom to try his choice of burger too before leaving and Tom agrees. Sammy contacts the fast-food restaurant and places his order. He and Tom talk about dying his hair and Al's after they had their lunch, Tom's injection and getting ready little by little to go with Sharif. A strange kind of a sadness has overcome Sammy. He himself knows the reason. He knows it is because Al, Tom and Freddy are all leaving at night time. He can't keep his mouth shut about that.

"I know it's not a long time we know each other," says Sammy with a sad voice, "but I don't know how to say it. I'm getting sad and sadder the closer we get to you guys leaving. I just hope we would see each other again in a better situation, in peace and freedom. I mean I'm going to miss you, Al and Freddy. Alas."

Tom who is deep into sanding rifle's metal part stops. "And I wish I could tell you we will see each other again." says Tom while he is still looking below at the metal part, "I have learnt a lot about Syrians, Muslims, from you in this

very brief time we spent with one another. You taught me a lot without even intending to. I just need to tell you a single sentence which I have left it for the time moment. I'm saying goodbye to you, but let me remind you internet has reduced distances. We can talk and even see each other every day since there are social media networks such as twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc. For sure we will keep in touch, Sammy. We will head back home around two or three weeks after we safely arrive Jarabulus. We would get in touch with each other."

Sammy nods and smiles. That's when his cell-phone rings again. He picks his phone up. It is Sharif this time. He has called Sammy to recheck everything with him one last time. He is also concerned about Tom and how he is doing. It is crucial for him to have mobility and act normal in case. Sharif instructs Sammy to simply drop his three American friends at the pick-up point they have spoken about and leave immediately even if he is still not there yet. Sharif reminds Sammy he has no room for mistake and he needs to drop them exactly at the time he instructed him to.

Sharif explains he wants to pick the three Americans like normal passengers and drive. He tells Sammy to explain to Al, Freddy and Tom that he might find it necessary or even safer somewhere at the middle of the road to ask them to transfer to the back of the pickup truck or even hide in one cabinet he has already arranged at the back, of course in case he feels it is safer to transport them without raising suspicions. Sharif also reminds Sammy it is only a possibility for him to do so, he is not sure, but it is possible he does ask them to move to the rear side of his pick-up truck. He feels it is best to mentally prepare Sammy's American guests for that anyway. Sharif tells about their disguise once again before he hangs up the phone. Sammy assures him he is going to do exactly as he had asked, and dyes their hairs also in the next one or two hours, and any other things he had asked to do before dropping them where Sharif wants. Their conversation ends after Sammy thanks Sharif one last time for taking a risk in helping the Americans. Sharif has no doubt in his mind that there are going to be police and Army checkpoints on his way to Jarabulus and he himself has the required documentations and papers. But he has no idea where these checkpoints are going to be located and how many checkpoints are there. So, he has arranged Al, Tom and Freddy for some fake and forge documents to show in case they are caught off guard. Sharif's main concern is in fact checkpoints

set by smaller fractions and groups who are mostly after catching foreigners in the country. Because they mainly believe and are under the impression that foreign involvements and interferences is destroying the nation. They want to get rid of foreigners they capture. They take or kidnap them, ask for ransom and threaten them they are going to be killed if they are seen anywhere in the country again. They believe, in the first place, it is foreigners whose influence and interference that triggered the unrest in the country.

Tom now needs to use the toilet, and obviously, Sammy cannot lift, help or carry him to the toilet by himself considering he has problem walking without limping. So, he calls the phone number he has given Al. It is Al himself who answers the phone this time.

"Hey Al. How are you?" says Sammy, "Look, I hope your headache has gone away already. You guys need to come upstairs to the apartment. Tom needs to go to the toilet. Besides, I've already placed an order for some good burgers. It is going to be delivered to us any moment now. So, just come up. How do you feel anyway?"

"Much better. Thank you." replies Al, "I fell asleep right after I ate the breakfast Freddy got me from your apartment. I woke up like a few seconds ago. I'm actually feeling way better. Oh, what a headache and hangover I had."

Al continues by saying he and Freddy were preparing to go up to Sammy's place even if he hadn't called them. He says they were going up in a few seconds. Sammy goes towards apartment's entrance and leaves it open for Al and Freddy. He goes to his mother's room to contact Robert and Amer. He is worried at the back of his mind and really needs to be updated and know what finally happened to Al Majed's garden and the engagement ceremony. Al and Freddy enter the apartment moments later. Sammy finds out they arrived when he hears they close the entrance door behind them. Sammy peeks to make sure it is them. He was right. Al and Freddy have brought the platters, blankets, dishes, and all what Sammy had given them to use, with them. They have returned back everything with them. Sammy who is holding his phone against his ear, nods after Freddy and Al see him peeking from his mother's room. He goes back to his room. Al and Freddy help Tom get up and help him get to the toilet. They notice the rifle's metal part, Sammy's air sport rifle, sand paper and the scope.

"It looks like you miss teaching, huh? asks Al after Tom stops sanding the part, "I know. Right?"

Freddy completes what Al is saying:

"Is that not your scope on Sammy's old rifle?" asks Freddy after Al finishes commenting.

Looking at the scope, Al nods meaning yes, it is Tom's scope on Sammy's old rifle.

"Gave it to Sammy, huh?" asks Al while taking Tom to the toilet with Freddy's help.

"Of course, man." replies Tom, "I needed to, after all what he has done for me, for us. Of course, I gave it to him."

Al and Freddy now have Tom in the toilet, while Sammy calls Amer from his mom's room. His phone keeps on ringing, but he isn't answering it. So, Sammy calls Robert's phone next. Like Amer's, Robert's phone keeps on ringing without any of them answering it. Sammy is guessing they probably have forgotten their phones in Amer's vehicle or something. That's why they're unable to hear their phones' ringing. Sammy decides to give them another call after thirty minutes. He is getting out of his mother's room when his phone rings. He immediately looks at his phone's screen and sees Robert's name on it. Sammy answers his cell-phone:

"Hello Sammy. Hi." says Robert in a hurry and agitated, "You have no idea what a mess poor Amer had been left in. I honestly did not want to get you worried since you have other things to worry about for now. But just let me tell you they had done nothing, no preparation at all whatsoever for his engagement ceremony the day after tomorrow. Nothing had been done bro. Nothing. Amer was giving up. He was depressed and super anxious, worried the engagement won't take place with the way of Al Majed people handling things. He's too afraid his honor would be questioned by his fiancé's parents and relatives."

"Haven't you solved his issues yet though?" asks Sammy.

"I have. Many of them. I'm doing them one by one. But it's Amer and you know how he becomes when he panics. He has become fucking negative, man. I'll tell you all about it in the evening, after we come back and drop your guests at Sharif's. I'm damn busy right now. I have just called to see whether you have an emergency?"

"No. There's no emergency dude. Just hurry up. Do something before what Amer is afraid of happens. We are at home. Give me a call if you think I can handle part of it and I'll be there in no time."

Sammy hangs up his phone after he finishes talking with Robert. He goes back to his own room. Al and Freddy get Tom out of the toilet as soon as Sammy finishes talking to Robert over the phone. The first thing Freddy tells Sammy is to show him where their Arabic clothes are. He also wants to iron them, since Sammy washed them the previous day. So, he also asks for the iron and iron table too. He says he wants to press their Arabic clothes and have them ready to wear before their lunch order is there.

Sammy tells Freddy he has hung their clothes outside the kitchen at the balcony. So, he can take them from the hanger and get them inside for ironing. After he and Al place Tom on his bed, he heads towards kitchen's balcony, grabs their Arabic clothes and brings them all inside. It is Al's turn now. He wants Sammy to tell him where he has kept the men's hair dye as he wants to start dying their hair after they have their lunch. Sammy tells him where he kept the hair dyes, but he reminds Al he has to inject Tom's medicine to him around an hour after lunch. Every single one at Sammy's apartment is extremely over excited or stressed as in the evening they are going to leave town for good. They have no idea who is going to take care and help them. They don't know Sharif at all and all they need to do is to trust Sammy's judgment about Sharif. None of them actually says anything or expresses himself how stressed and anxious he is. But one can easily read it from their eyes that they are not actually excited they are leaving safely. But they are under anxiety for the fact that they have absolutely no idea who is taking them to Jarabulus and how? Al wants to ask Sammy if he truly trusts Sharif hundred percent? But he asks himself if he trusts anyone hundred percent himself in his life? He thinks to forget about it. He forgets about asking Sammy, thinking he might hurt his sensitive feelings when questioned how sure he is of everything going to go smooth? So, Al keeps quiet and simply gives his own and his friends to the hand of destiny. The delivery guy finally brings them their lunch. Burgers arrive while each and every one is starving. Not only because they are hungry, but also because anxiety and stress made them feel like eating. That's how they want to blow off

some steam and pass their time, so they would face their destiny.

They all sit and eat their burgers in silence, no one talks, but no one wonders why either. They all know a huge chapter of their lives is about to open which includes so much risk and worry. Apparently, everyone agrees with Sammy's choice of a burger. Everyone is quite impressed with the taste of an American fast food in Syria made by Arabic Syrian chefs. They sit quietly after they finish eating. Sammy is getting sadder and sadder each moment passed by like he has told Tom. He is already feeling lonely and sad, because his new friends are leaving. Of course, he is worried for possible outcome of transferring them to Jarabulus, the city they intend to go. But he is also sad for the fact that his country is in a situation that even himself has to leave town soon.

Sammy breaks his silence and tells Al, Tom and Freddy about the phone call he received from Sharif and the conversation he had with him a while ago. Al and Freddy say they have no problem with how they are going to be dropped at pick-up point Sharif has set. What they are concerned about is in fact reaching Jarabulus, their destination at all and safe of course. Sammy directs Freddy's attention to where he keeps his iron and iron table. Sammy asks Al to inject Tom's meds to him while Freddy is beginning to iron the Arabic clothes they were told to wear in the evening as a disguise. Tom takes the sandpaper and continues sanding Sammy's metal part for his rifle.

\* \* \*

Not far from Sammy's apartment, Sara and Nelly arrive at Hanieh's place. As soon as they enter her house, she begins entertaining them, offering them some Nescafe and being a good host, and while doing so, she asks what the news from them is. Nelly says nothing as she has actually nothing important to mention. Sara, however, begins talking. She talks about issues she and her fiancé had to deal with the previous day in regards to witnesses and preparing the required documentation for their official engagement ceremony. Sara explains problems she and Amer faced at Al Majed garden and some of their plans being ruined in details. Hanieh and Nelly console her a bit and assure her everything is going to turn out to be just fine as Amer would never allow their engagement to be spoiled. Sara in fact agrees with what Nelly and Hanieh think Amer would do.

She tells them Amer is already at the venue, trying hard to sort things out as were initially planned. She says she is waiting to hear from Amer sometime in the afternoon to see whether Amer was actually able to solve their problems or what? Sara, Hanieh and Nelly have their Nescafe, fruits and cookies while speaking about Al Darrah becoming more unsafe every day goes by. The three of them know for a fact that Sara and Amer's engagement ceremony is going to happen in the worse time possible. Even Sara herself knows it.

"As you know what is going to happen to our country in general, and our town in particular, you could have made some changes in date or even the venue location." Hanieh says to Sara, "I'm not talking or being concerned individually. What I mean is guests would probably attend your engagement ceremony while being on a high alert."

"Yeah, I know." replies Sara, "We know. I mean Amer and I. But how did we have to know Isis was advancing this fast? We even talked about it, I remember, with our parents about the possibility of Isis threat by the time our engagement date arrives. But everybody, even Amer and his parents and my parents also, they all believed there would be no threat as everyone firmly believed Isis cannot possibly advance and capture more than half of the country that quickly. I mean, we set our engagement day not very long ago. It is around maybe fifty or sixty days ago when we decided on the dates and the venue.

Sadness can clearly be felt and heard from Sara's vocal vibrations. She sounds desperate, sad and anxious. Nelly can easily figure Sara's concerns, sadness and worries.

"It's now pointless to even talk about it girls." says Nelly trying to calm Sara down, "What has been done has been done. Let's hope Mr. Amer would be able to completely take care of issues he and Sara are facing. No one can be that good to predict what Isis is going to do with our people and Iraqi people and how fast they were going to take control of a vast area, like you said almost more than half of the Syrian soil. So, I suggest everyone to forget this subject as us discussing will change nothing. Let's hope everything work out just fine. Mr. Amer looks like a capable man and I have no doubt he is going to solve the issues with the venue, and any other party involved, because he loves you Sara and he will not fail you under any circumstances."

Sara and Hanieh nod. It is lunch time already. With the help of the maid who works at her house, Hanieh has arranged all the food on the dining table. The table is covered by many different kinds of foods. She has prepared three different kinds of main course, so many choices of appetizers and desserts. There are two different and very nice-looking salads which attract anyone's attention. She has also prepared soups with oat and white sauce plus another different kind of soup which looks red as it was obviously painted by tomato sauce and paste.

Nelly and Sara are quite impressed by Hanieh's good taste. They think to themselves Hanieh is very talented in her choice of dishes' designs and their colors which actually match the food color. They are speechless when they take their first spoon of appetizer. Hanieh has cooked some very delicious foods. Praising her talent and ability in cooking starts immediately after Nelly and Sara begin eating. Sara is kidding her asking if it was really her who cooked all the foods? Or in fact it is their maid who cooked and Hanieh is taking credit for that.

A while after, the three of them laugh at Sara's joke and teasing Hanieh. She asks Hanieh again but in a girlish naughtiness this time about her first official date she had gone on with Robert. As if she was actually expecting whether Sara or Nelly to ask her such question, Hanieh begins talking about Robert's plus points as a man. She talks about Robert's kind heart, being an absolute gentleman who really knows how to treat a lady. She talks about where they have gone together and what they have done. While Hanieh speaks about Robert's plus points as a man, Sara's brain begins comparing Robert's described characteristics with her own fiancé, Amer. The three of them are talking, eating, joking and laughing at each other's jokes. Nelly is laughing too, but she looks as though something bothers her deep inside. Nelly is laughing, but she lacks face of a person who is actually enjoying that conversation. No happiness and excitement can be seen in her eyes. She is disturbed by the fact that her oldest and now closest friends are talking about their fiancé and boyfriend or possible future husbands, whereas she has no one to talk about. Even she knows she was the one who rejected the idea of being with Sammy with a kind of strong decision and she said clearly that she could not be with any man, specially Sammy who is in fact a Muslim man. Nelly is now doubting her irrational decision in regards to Sammy. She has a bit of remorse in her, even if she thinks it is late to fix it. That



being girls' natural response of jealousy out of competition, Nelly is feeling a need to have someone, so she can talk about in, similar cases too when the subject of her best friends' conversation is the man of their lives. She is opening to the idea of having a man in her life, but she is embarrassed to say anything, breaking her decisive comment about being with a man, specially a Muslim one.

What Hanieh and Sara told Nelly last time, when they were at Sara's, about Sammy and his supper crush on her has triggered something in Nelly's heart. It has reminded her that she is still a girl. She has been thinking about how Sammy looks like, after Hanieh and Sara told about him, about what he had said to them in regards to her, and generally all what have been spoken concerning her one way or another even day after. She has begun thinking of becoming like any other normal girl, to have a boyfriend and talks about it to her friends after that day. She is, however, forced to save her image and shows her friends she is okay. She doesn't really want Hanieh and Sara to find out what is going on deep in her heart yet.

Sammy is doing their lunch's dirty dishes when Tom calls him. He tells Sammy he believes sanding the metal part is enough when Sammy shows up in his room. He tells Sammy he has measured the part and thinks it is ready to be installed in his rifle. He tells Sammy to clean up the part when he has time, oils it a bit and then he can install it on his rifle.

Sammy takes the part from Tom. He also takes his rifle and its new futuristic scope. He takes them to his workbench, places them on it, so he would do what Tom said to clean, wipe, oil and install it on his rifle when he is alone and free. He is getting his friends ready, so he can send them off with Sharif. That task has consumed most of his thoughts, time and energy. In the meanwhile, Robert is trying hard alongside Amer to finalize his engagement party venue and to solve many other issues related to that. He is solving problems one by one. He is determined to help Amer get everything ready within the forty-eight hours' time remaining to the actual ceremony. Robert has promised himself he would make that happen by any cost.

Hanieh is entertaining Sara and Nelly at her house. She and her friends are spending some happy moments with each other.

Al dyes his own hair as well as Tom's. While Freddy irons their Arabic thobes and hangs them ready to be worn and leave

towards their destiny. Sammy is under anxiety, as he feels responsible for sending his new friends to Jarabulus safe and sound with Sharif. His heart has become sad and sensitive, as he is losing some friends, some good friends before even finding them.

Not aware of the fact that along with Sara, Nelly is also at Hanieh's place, Sammy appears by his living room's window, exactly at five forty-five, just like any other day, to see Nelly crosses the intersection near his house. Sammy waits for a while. Time passes way beyond 5:45 and there is no sign of Nelly, just like the previous days. He calls his mom, like he does every day to ask how she is doing. The sun has set already. It becomes dark and there is only two hours before Sammy's appointment with Sharif. There is still no sign of Amer and Robert. This bothers Sammy, worries him sick. Sharif gives Sammy a quick call and asks how his American friends spirit is? But Sammy assures Sharif they are good and high-spirited. He says they are just waiting for the ride which is going to drop them where Sharif has told them. He also assures Sharif he is going to have the Americans ready at exactly the time he wanted. He says they are going to be there under any circumstances.

Al, Freddy and Tom begin feeling more and more anxious the closer they become to the leaving time. Anxiety is even transmitted to Sammy from them. But Amer calls him and says with an exhausted voice that he and Robert would see them down his building right at ten thirty P.M. to take his friends to their appointment. Amer also tells Sammy he cannot company them and he has to stay back home along with Robert. It is too easy to guess why. Amer's vehicle has not enough space to accommodate them all. Tom cannot sit normally like others. So, one person can sit right beside the driver and one person at the back, whether Al or Freddy, for Tom to lay his head on. Sammy promises Amer everyone is going to be down his building exactly at ten thirty P.M. He thanks Amer for calling, says goodbye and hangs up the phone.

Hearing the name Sharif while Sammy spoke to Amer, they can't take their eyes off Sammy to tell them what the phone call was about. Sammy talked in Arabic with Amer. He wants to calm them down and tells them what he spoke to Amer about and why the name Sharif came up. He explains he cannot company them as Amer's vehicle has no enough space to carry them all since Tom is injured and cannot sit like a normal person. He figures he has to stay home so Tom can lay down at the back seat. The

time shows ten P.M. It is only thirty minutes left to the appointment time when Al, Freddy and Tom leave Al Darrah.

Every single one of them has kept quiet. They become quieter and quieter the closer they get to the leaving time. No one asks why everyone keeps silence. As though everybody knows the reason. Ten thirty. It is finally ten thirty after a while which is felt more like a whole twenty-four hours than thirty-minutes, considering the stress and anxiety. It is only a few hours left for Al, Freddy and Tom to find out what destiny has in store for them.

Everybody begins hugging before going down the building. Sammy's voice vibrates when telling good luck to his American friends. They say farewell up at Sammy's apartment, so they wouldn't have to do it down stairs, attracting neighbors' attention. Sammy escorts them down to the ground floor. Amer's vehicle arrives at the same time. Sammy pauses for a moment. Robert gets off the car. He looks exhausted and bitten. He says hello to everyone and shakes everyone's hand.

Al, Freddy and Tom hug Sammy one by one and thank him for all his help. They say goodbye to him and Robert. Al takes the front seat next to Amer and says hello. Robert helps Freddy to sit Tom at the back seat. Freddy sits at the back holding Tom so he wouldn't move much. They say hello to Amer and thank him for coming on time and taking them to the pick-up point. Tom raises his hand towards Sammy from the car window. Sammy stops Amer as he knows Tom wants to tell him something. He takes one long step towards the car window.

"I forgot to tell you something about that scope." says Tom looking at Sammy's eyes, "There's a bottom on the scope that says infrared. That means infrared. Please remember this Sammy, infrared. Remember it. It can save one's life at the dark that infrared option. Just remember it."

Sammy nods. He is pushing his mind to register what Tom has just told him. He wants to remember what Tom asked him to the way he would never forget. At the same time, he is curious why has Tom asked him to remember it?

"People sometimes play important role in each other's life." continues Tom, "Sometimes without even realizing it themselves. You've been one of those people in our lives Sammy. I will have you in my prayers all the time. Take care and God bless. Remember. Infrared"

Amer's vehicle moves away while everyone in it waves Sammy goodbye. Robert begins pushing Sammy back towards the building entrance after he notices Sammy's eyes are following Amer's vehicle for more than usual. To change their mood, Sammy brings up Amer and Sara's engagement ceremony immediately after that and asks Robert to tell him all that happened and the progress they have made if any.

Robert who is extremely tired says he is going to tell Sammy all about it as soon as he gets home, changes to his pajamas and freshens up. Moments later, Robert and Sammy reach the fifth floor after taking all those stairs up by foot again. Robert immediately starts changing, the moment he enters the apartment. He goes to the toilet. Sammy can hear him washing his face and hands. Sammy goes to the kitchen in the meanwhile, to heat the water and make Robert a cup of tea knowing how tired he is. He fills the kettle with water and switches it on to heat when he hears his phone ringing. He glances at his phone and sees Sharif's name on the screen. He wants to make sure Sammy's American friends have already moved from his apartment. Sammy assures him they are going to reach him any moment, as his cousin has already picked them up minutes ago to drop them where he has said. Sammy also explains he could not accompany them as Tom is injured and has to lay down at the back seat. He says the car cannot accommodate him, as the sitting arrangement does not allow that since Tom has to lay down all the way. Before hanging up the phone, Sammy tells Sharif how thankful he is for him helping the Americans. He also wishes Sharif and his passengers a safe and danger free journey.

Robert has gotten out of the toilet. He is going towards the couch in front of the television. This is how he rests. He lays down on the sofa while watching television. But Sammy calls him into the kitchen instead, saying he wants to give him a cup of tea. He says it would relax his mind. He requests Robert to tell him all that happened at Al Majed garden since that morning, while he prepares him the tea.

Robert is truly too tired to talk. But he knows Sammy is also quite concerned about Amer's situation and thinks he has the right to know, even if he is too exhausted to talk. So, Robert gathers all the energy left in him, so he can update Sammy about what happened.

"Well, first of all," says Robert after clearing his throat, "I believe God really helped Amer to be proud in front of his

future wife and in laws. Just imagine. The day after tomorrow in the evening, there is supposed to be his engagement party and nothing, literally nothing had been done. When I say nothing, I'm not exaggerating dude. No one had done shit for him. Al Majed garden people have apparently agreed to handle everything initially. I mean everything, like from purchasing the food ingrediencies and beverages, sweets, pastry, fruits, etc. to laying the table and arranging them to cooking, serving all in all inclusively. What I heard was, Amer and Sara went to Sheikh's office yesterday morning to prepare required documents. They went to their engagement party venue, which is Al Majed's garden to check them one last time. But they had shockingly found out nothing has been done by them. Bastards had not even brought a single item. They're not professional at all. It seems they had just visited one or two suppliers for fruits and something else, and saw their stores were closed, of course because everyone is just running from this area, I mean our area. They gave up and they did not go to any other supplier, just because they were lazy and idiots. They fooled themselves saying if two suppliers were closed, probably all others were too. Since those people were not responsible, they had given the responsibilities to others to handle and that's exactly how they fucked poor Amer's ceremony. They had not done a single work Sammy. Poor Amer, on the other hand, was relaxing at home, thinking those Al Majed guys are taking care of all what they have to for his engagement party to happen in the best possible way.

"I know about them." says Sammy interrupting Robert, "I know they had done shit. Amer told me this morning. That's why I asked you to go with him dude."

"Oh. Oh yeah. You are right. Sorry. Sorry." replies Robert, "I forgot you knew. That's the reason you gave me your bank debit card. Anyhow, he had apparently contacted an event management firm yesterday. The guy's name is Mr. Saeed. It seems someone has referred him to Amer and he spoke to Mr. Saeed yesterday. This guy had given Amer and Sara so much hope. He had told them he was going to come to Al Darrah today along with two of his very expert assistants to handle everything from scratch. He called Amer as soon as we arrived at the garden this morning. I saw Amer turned pale after talking to the guy over the phone for a moment. The phone was falling from his hand. That much stress he had. I wanted to take the phone from Amer to talk to the guy myself. But Amer hung up the phone on his face before I did. So, anyways, I asked him what was that phone call about? Amer said that asshole, Mr. Saeed, also was a bullshitter. He had called to

say Amer's engagement party was too risky of a project for him and his staff to accept handling. I heard Amer even offered to pay him more. But he said no. Al Darrah was no longer a safe place and he could not risk his personnel's lives for Amer's engagement. I don't know he was lying or being truthful, but he claimed none of his staff had agreed to work in Al Darrah, even for a single night. Anyways. I saw Amer's face turned pale. He was shaking like hell, man. So, I opened the car door and I told him please sit in the car and do not do anything, I'll take it from here. I grabbed the car keys and got out of the car. Oh, I also grabbed his cell-phone, so if Sara calls, he won't start talking to her in a very hopeless manner, making her feel hopeless too. I walked inside Al Majed's garden around twenty meters. I called the same Al Majed's supervisor, Mr. Arif, the one who was initially supposed to handle Amer's engagement in the first place. I told him I was going to call the cops if he doesn't show up in half an hour, because he has not paid the penalty for cancellation to Amer yet. I don't know whether he got scared or he really was near the garden. He said he was near the garden already. He arrived around ten to twelve minutes later. Oh, he began playing innocent saying it was not his fault, etc. He kept on blaming everyone else for his failure, except himself. Asshole. At the end of his speech though, he said he was going to arrange the cancellation penalty and give it to us in about a month and a half or so. When he said that, I immediately figured what his weakness was. As soon as he said he will arrange the money in a month and a half or so, I said I was going to put him in jail in a matter of hours. I warned him. I said he had two choices, choice one was whether he is going to make all purchases today itself and I don't give a shit how and from which source he does it, and his second choice was to be in prison because he has no money to pay as the cancellation fee to us. I made him cry, because he had made Amer cry. I said my best friend was going to have an engagement party in forty-eight hours in that shit hold of a garden, and I will send you all to prison if nothing was bought today, if everything promised is not taken care of by the end of the day. This guy called the garden's new owner and asked him to guarantee him, so I will not charge him. I said to him to bring a piece of paper and a pen, so I'll tell him what the new terms and conditions were. In this way, I will calm down and would not make you go to court and prison. I began writing. First, I wrote I wanted every food item and beverages promised to my friend to be shopped and delivered by the end of today. Number two, I wrote I wanted every table and chair to be ready for our guests by eleven A.M. tomorrow.

Three, I wrote I wanted all Al Majed garden's staff to be present for my speech tomorrow sharp at 12 noon. Four, I wrote I wanted a complete list of decoration items, such as flowers and other things, where and how they were going to be arranged after my speech is over."

Sammy is becoming more and more excited hearing Robert. He keeps on nodding so Robert would tell him the rest faster.

"Assholes." continues Robert, "They thought we were joking with them. Anyways, I kept on demanding about every single item required. I wrote about food, cake, flowers, beverages, fruits and everything else. Now, while I was giving them ultimatum, setting deadlines, etc., I noticed Amer was standing on my left side. I glanced at him to see if he still looked pale? But I saw he was on a high spirit again, hopeful, listening to me. He also began commanding and demanding and asking for this and that. The contract went back to its original, to what people who were initially supposed to do that but had not done shit about it. I told them as clear and honest as I possibly could. I said I was not going to talk anymore if everything was not handled properly and completely by tomorrow noon time. I will directly go to a police station and file a complaint. As simple as that. Dude, it was such a stressful and busy day. I'm sure you had to face your own issues and challenges until you sent your new American friends away. I'm telling you man, you would have not honestly, frankly been able to do anything, even if you came to Al Majed garden with Amer and I. Now, I'm sure everything will certainly be taken care and completed by tomorrow noon. My lovely Hanieh called me twice. I'm tired now dude. I'll tell you about her when I'm in the mood."

As though he just remembered something, Robert gets up and goes to Sammy's closet, where he had hung his clothes a while ago as soon as he enters the apartment. He takes out Sammy's ATM card and returns it back to him. But Sammy asks him to keep his bank card with him as he might still need to spend something extra the following day. Robert thinks Sammy is right. So, he puts Sammy's card back into his trousers' pocket. To tease Robert, Sammy asks if Hanieh went to see him at Al Majed garden today? But Robert responds by saying that she couldn't go, even if she wanted to, as she had guests. Robert says to Sammy that Sara and Nelly were at Hanieh's today since morning or noon, and they only went back home around an hour and a half or two hours ago. Sammy knows now the reason he had not seen Nelly crossing the intersection at five forty-five P.M.

Sammy prepares two cups of tea and places one of the cups in front of Robert. But hen as soon as Sammy wants to place the other cup in front of himself, Amer enters the kitchen, takes Sammy's seat and thanks him for the tea. He looks hopeful and in a good mood. Amer takes a very careful sip of the tea. Sammy is staring at Amer's face.

"Now, how the hell did you enter without a key?" asks Sammy wondering.

"The door was open."

"Did you leave the door open Robert?" asks Sammy addressing Robert.

"No." replies Robert pondering, "I don't know. Why? What?"

"Nothing." replies Sammy just wondering.

"Go pour yourself a tea and let's sit and see each other for a while." says Robert.

Sammy pours himself a cup of tea. He sits at the kitchen's table with Robert and Amer. Amer begins explaining his own version of what Robert had already explained to Sammy before he arrived. All the same story Robert had told Sammy already. He speaks with a kind of obvious satisfaction. He feels as if he and Robert had achieved the ultimate unachievable. He gets up at the middle of talking, hugs Robert and thanks him for all his hard work and making the ceremony happen without letting him look like a failure in the eyes of his in laws and fiancé. He mentions several times he owes Robert his honor and reputation, while Robert remains quiet. Robert just nods and smiles. When Amer finishes telling his own version of that day's events, Robert begins talking and says he had sworn to himself that morning, he was not going to come back home unless everything was taken care of. After having that quite various talk with Sammy in regards to Amer's engagement ceremony and party off course, Robert continues by saying he had made a very genuine promise to himself that he was not going to stop under any circumstances, unless he was absolutely sure every aspect was looked in, taken care of and done the way they was going to be initially done, with no doubt or uncertainty in regards to Amer's ceremony and party in the best possible way.

Robert gazes at Amer deeply.

"What did you really think buddy?" asks Robert, "That Sammy and I would just sit and watch your honor and reputation get fucked in front of your in laws? Seriously? You didn't know this. But Sammy instructed me in the morning and told me to go with you and make it happen, no matter what. He told me to



solve the issues under any circumstance, any cost and do not come back unless you've done it."

Amer's head turns towards Sammy slowly and looks at him in disbelief. He has an incredulous look on his face. Sammy turns his head towards Robert to make him stop talking. He does not want to look at Amer so he would thank him.

"Of course." says Amer, "What would I really do without you guys? The Al Majed guy had no idea my best friends are going to kick his ass in case he messes with me and my engagement ceremony or party. Thank you, guys. I love you. It was your goddamn duty, but anyways thanks."

The three of them burst into laughter. Amer gets up and places the three tea cups inside the sink. He wears an apron on the top of his clothes which he has not yet changed and begins washing whatever is in the sink. Robert goes to the living room as usual to lay down on the couch in front of the television and watch something. Sammy goes back to his own room. He begins folding the bedding he had arranged for Tom, so he would put them back to his mom's closet, where they belong. Sammy and Robert's phone begins ringing at the same time simultaneously.

"Welcome to the national telecommunication station." yells Amer laughing, "This is no longer a residential apartment."

Sammy answers his phone. It is his mother who has called like she does every evening to see how Sammy is doing and if he needs anything. Major Al Ameen also has called Robert to give him the same news concerning Hussein, one of the twins who was hospitalized at Al Thowrah. Major begins his telephone conversation initially with the same small talk, preparing Robert's mind for the news he is about to give him. Sammy's chat with his mom is a short one though. She reminds him of collecting empty cardboard boxes and preparing his belongings and getting them ready for relocation. Then says goodbye and hangs up the phone.

Amer has finished washing the dishes. He is walking towards Sammy's room to change to his pajamas when he notices Robert's face has turned pale. Robert has gone numb, looking at the muted television while listening to his cell-phone. Noticing Amer looking at him with that curiosity, Robert puts his phone on speaker for Amer to hear whatever Major is about to tell him, Sammy who has also finished speaking to his mom over the

phone, joins them when he notices Amer and Robert are listening to the Major curiously. Major tells Robert he has not called him five minutes before midnight to ask how he is and makes some small talk. He says he has called because he has some unpleasant news, he wants to share with him. A news about one of the twins. Major informs Robert that Hussein, passed away ten to twenty minutes ago due to brain failure. He tells Robert he wanted to inform his parents. But he had figured it was not the greatest idea. He tells Robert he thought he would share the news with his parents if he thought and felt it was ok.

Major consoles Robert before he hangs up and promises him, he would not stop following the matter of his missing brother. He also tells Robert he thinks it would be nice to go and visit the twin's mournful mother at the hospital by the end of tomorrow's working hours in case he feels like going, consoling and paying his condolences, as Hussein's body is going to be sent to his home village the day after tomorrow by an ambulance for funeral service. Robert and the major say goodbye and hang up. Robert has become sad and desperate again after major's call and the news he revealed. He reminded him of his missing brother. Robert is quiet. He's starring at the muted TV. Amer and Sammy insinuate that they have to leave him be for a while to digest what is in his mind and what he was told.

Amer changes to his pajamas. He lays down on Sammy's room floor. He starts complaining about his back and stomach pain. Sammy says like always he believes most of his pains have nervous origin brought by so much stress and anxiety. Amer notices Sammy's struggle to transfer Tom's bedding back to his mother's room. So, he gets up and helps Sammy transfer everything back to his mother's room and lays them in her closet on their original location. The scope Tom has given Sammy as a present attracts Amer's attention as soon as they go back to Sammy's room. Amer asks Sammy what is with the scope. Robert who is a professional target shooter himself and very much interested in shooting tools and gadgets, goes to Sammy's room to find out what scope is Amer asking Sammy about. Sammy disassembles the scope, removes it from his rifle and gives it to Amer's hand. But Robert grabs it out of Amer's hand a moment later as he is extra curious to touch it and see how it feels in his hand and how much it weighs. He turns the scope to different directions and examines it thoroughly.

"I finally did not really get what those three nice Americans' jobs were." says Sammy, "They seemed good at whatever they did though. Because Tom asked me about my assault rifle and of course I told him the whole story. I told him I was developing and modifying it like my late father and his best friend wanted. I picked the rifle up and gave it to him. I swear he disassembled it as if he was peeling a banana. I could not believe my own eyes. He gutted the rifle in a blink of an eye. He asked for the blue drawing. I mean the drawing of this rifle. He took a quick look at it, he glanced at me, he measured and told me where I was going wrong. The metal part needed some sanding only. Whereas I wanted to machine it still. He noticed my scope belonged to the ancient times, so he gave his own scope, the one he used every day, to me as a present. I'm sure he wanted to thank me by giving this scope to me as a present. The scope you are looking at, is something extraordinary, guys. I've never seen something like this before."

Robert who is almost about to perform a surgery on the scope to see what is inside, gives it to Amer after he keeps on nagging, he had not allowed him to even take a complete look at it before he snatches it from his hands. Amer examines the scope for a moment. It is obvious he does not understand a thing about the markings and numbers and figures engraved on it. So, he gives the scope back to Sammy after he looks at it for a moment. Robert looks at Sammy and asks him if he has already finished making his rifle's required part or still, he needs to work on it? Sammy puts a satisfied smile on his face, nods positively and installs the scope back on his rifle. He says he has to only oil it when everything is completely done and installs the scope back on the rifle and keeps it there.

Both Robert and Amer are very tired because of all activities they have been involved since that morning. What worn them out is not in fact physical exhaustion, but they are mentally tired because of the stress, anxiety and desperation they had faced since early that day. Robert who can barely keep his eyes open, is the first one who does something about it. He gets up and goes to prepare his bed so he would just go to sleep. Amer who is encouraged after seeing Robert fixing to go to bed already, gets up and imitates Robert. He prepares his bed so he would collapse on it as he said. Sammy is to clean his rifle's related pieces and materials, such as the cleaning kit, coliseum and the drawing when his eyes catch the paper, he had written about targeting formulas. The ones Tom had instructed him to note down.

There is a heavy silence over the entire apartment. Amer's eyes are closed. It is not evident whether he has fallen asleep or has closed his eyes to begin relaxing and waiting to slip into sleep. Robert keeps on yawning, but at the same time sending and receiving text messages until exhaustion takes over and the phone falls off his hands while waiting for a response from Hanieh. He falls asleep and it is not long before Sammy can hear him snoring.

Sammy seems to be the only one awake now. There is a heavy silence and he can already feel Al, Freddy and Tom's absence and this makes Sammy genuinely sad. He feels like crying for a moment. He is thinking Al, Freddy and Tom could be Robert and Amer's good friends if they lived in Al Darrah or stayed there at least for a long time. If, for example, they had a contract and had to work in Al Darrah for a much longer period of time. Sammy has no doubt in his mind that their relationship would have become stronger and stronger every day went by and they got to know each other better. He regrets the fact that he cannot see Al, Freddy and Tom anymore. Sammy begins giving himself hope, telling himself it is a small world and who knows, maybe one day they actually get or at least keep in touch considering it is the technology era and with so many easy communication tools. Sammy's mind gets redirected towards targeting formulas Tom has given him while thinking about his new American friends. Sammy can remember strongly every single one of those formulas. Distance, wind spring of bullet, object's sizes surrounding the target, etc. His mind is automatically practicing Tom's formulas one after the other. He thinks and thinks until he falls asleep. His mind calculates and implements the formulas Tom has taught him, even when he is asleep.

\* \* \*

Sammy opens his eyes while lying on his back. He glances at the wall-clock. It is eight ten A.M. He can hear the usual sounds of surroundings he hears every day when he wakes up in the morning. Sound of vehicles crossing, birds chirping, Hitler's engine getting ignited by his neighbor, etc., like he does every day. Sammy also glances at his cell-phone and sees Sharif had sent him a text around three to four hours ago.

"It was quite scary and challenging, but we made it to Jarabulus safely. Your friends had to hide in a box at the back of my truck. But it's ok now as we are like I said safe

and sound. We are now waiting for some people who are coming to fetch your American friends. just thought of informing you, so you would relax. So, it's done. Mission completed. Ciao. Sharif."

A smile spreads across Sammy's face. He had fallen asleep the night before with a worry deep in his soul. While laying down, Sammy began remembering Tom's lessons and targeting formulas. He began imagining an imaginary target with his own rifle ready and the scope Tom has given to him. He is showered by happiness knowing he had helped his American friends arrive at their destination safe and sound.

Sammy is somewhat proud of himself. He had been able to make it happen. He had been able to send his American friends off successfully, despite all disabilities he sees in himself and all obstacles around, and he owes it to Sharif too. Sammy feels quite relieved. He changes position on his bed a few times. He knows something worried him the night before. Sammy suddenly remembers Major Al Ameer's phone call to Robert the night before. He remembers Amer's engagement ceremony and party is still at risk. Every single cell in his body tells him to get up as there is no time to relax. The nightmare is not yet over Sammy figures. He has no plan on relaxing. Not him, not Robert and definitely not Amer. Especially since they have to attend to the difficult tasks now. It is a very important day, the next day. It is Amer's engagement ceremony and party and Amer's reputation is at stake.

Sammy feels responsible to solve Robert and Amer's problem now that he is relieved, and his American friends have made it to Jarabulus safe and sound. He knows well that he is not going to feel relaxed and completely relieved until Amer's engagement ceremony and party take place flawless and in the best and most convenient way, without any problems.

Sammy can hear Amer and Robert's deep inhale and exhale. It says that they are both still in deep sleep. He decides to get up quickly and wake Amer and Robert too, so they would get out and finish Amer and Sara's next day ceremony and party preparations. So, he gets up and sits on his bed for a moment, picks his cane and stands up. He stops by Amer's bed and moves his leg a bit using his cane and calls his name a few times. Amer does not seem like he is going to wake up that easily and Sammy knows it as he had seen Amer the night before and knows how exhausted he looked. This time Sammy yells Amer's name and Robert's names to no avail. He tries a few more times

before he gives up using the easy way to wake them up. He goes to the kitchen, fills the kettle with water and switches it on for the water to boil, picks a frying pan in one hand and a ladle in the other. He goes back and stands at the middle of the room, hitting the frying pan with the ladle, making a horrible noise.

"Get up ladies." yells Sammy, "Get the hell up both of you, we have a million shit to take care of. Mr. Amer, you have a ceremony tomorrow in the morning and a party in the evening. Robert get the fuck up. That poor guy, Hussein, is dead for your information. What the hell do you want to do? You want to go to Al Thowrah? To the hospital? Or what? I'm asking, because if you want to go to Al Thowrah, who would help Amer? Get up bitches."

Sammy stops hitting the frying pan with the ladle finally.

"I said get the fuck up you lazy bums." yells Sammy louder than before, "I'm worried for what you may not achieve today. Shit. God damn it. I said get up. What the fuck guys?"

Sammy returns to the kitchen angry. He places the frying pan and the ladle back where they belonged and starts growling and insulting Amer and Robert while laying the breakfast over the kitchen table. He goes and peeks at the room and this time sees Robert is sitting on his bed and rubbing his eyes. Exactly at the same time, Amer passes by Sammy without saying a word. He goes towards the toilet while he has his eyes still closed. He moves like a ghost and makes Sammy laugh. Sammy is happy he has woken them both up. The water comes to a boil. Sammy makes three cups of coffee and places them on the table waiting for Amer and Robert to join him. He places a few pieces of bread into the toaster when he hears Robert.

"First of all, hello and good morning." says Robert, "Secondly, what the fuck is wrong with you dude? It's seven thirty for heaven's sake."

Sammy spreads a sarcastic smile all over his face and asks Robert to have a closer look at the clock again. Robert's face turns pale after he glances at the wall clock this time. Amer also enters the kitchen and says hello and good morning to them both.

"What seven thirty?" asks Amer, "Are you fucking blind? It's eight thirty you asshole. Get rid of your ancient hour glass."

The three of them sit at the table and begin having breakfast. As he puts the first mouthful of bread in his mouth, Amer shakes his head.

"Even the universe is not with us nowadays." says Amer shaking his head in a sorry way, "Did that poor guy, Hussein, have to die now? What the hell man? I'm left alone again. I'll have to go to see what I can do all alone, to see whether I can make my goddamned ceremony and party happen finally or what?"

"Now what the hell do you mean all alone? Again?" asks Robert, "What the hell are you even talking about again today?"

"Isn't Hussein dead?" asks Amer, "Don't you have to go to the hospital? To condolence and console his mourning mother? This is what I mean. I'll have to go to Al Majed garden alone now that you are going to Al Thowrah."

"Who says I'm going to Al Thowrah?" yells Robert, "Who says I am going to any hospital? Who says I'll have to go to Al Thowrah hospital when tomorrow is my best friend's engagement? What are you thinking to yourself? Man? Wake up. I'm not going anywhere?"

Amer is not looking at Robert. He knows he has made him angry.

"Guys guys guys," yells Sammy to stop Amer and Robert fighting, "What is wrong with you two fighting like cat and dog? Early morning? Why are you pissing him off accusing him of leaving you alone and going to Al Thowrah Amer? Why are you saying that shit?"

"I guessed." replies Amer putting an innocent face on.

"From now on you don't fuckin' guess shit anymore changing everyone's mood with your shitty guess and predictions."

Amer has a satanic smile on his face. He looks down and takes a sip of his coffee. Sammy pauses for a second.

"What's your plan Robert? I mean for the day." asks Sammy now in a softer voice.

"Nothing." replies Robert, "The same thing I had in my schedule yesterday is still on my schedule today. This asshole changed my fucking mood bro. Nothing has been changed. It's this crazy shit is imagining stuff. Dumb ass. Out of respect

and since I really pity the poor old mother, I just want to call her and convey my condolences, not now though. I'm planning to call her a bit later, so I would claim I've just found out about her son Hussain and it's late for me to come and visit her and pay my respect personally. That's all what's going to happen."

Amer takes another sip of his coffee.

"Well," says Amer to Robert and Sammy, "didn't major ask you to go and convey your condolences because they were going to transfer the body to his home village by the hospital's ambulance? So, I thought you have to do as major said. How the hell do I know what's going on in your mind man?"

"You don't know?" replies Sammy asking, "Don't assume, just ask. Don't guess you idiot. Now come on, eat your breakfast and get the hell out. We have a ceremony and a party tomorrow. We will have so many guests and we will not fail Sara and her folks. Move your asses and go to get everything done."

Amer pushes Robert and begins laughing.

"He's right." says Amer, "Let's go Mr. bad ass."

To finish quarrelling, Robert smiles at Amer's joke and gets up. They both exit the kitchen to go to dress up and leave the apartment. To make Amer and Robert laugh, Sammy starts talking.

"Oh yeah. Leave. I clean up. Don't worry you two. I'm here to prepare your breakfast, wash your dishes, clean up after you ass holes. I'm a maid here."

Amer and Robert burst into laughter when they hear Sammy's complaint, and Sammy knows everything is okay between them and has achieved what he had in mind.

Robert and Amer leave the apartment moments later while talking and joking with one another. Sammy begins tidying up the kitchen after Robert and Amer leave him alone at home. He washes the dishes and gets all the garbage ready to throw out. He cleans the kitchen's floor. He goes to his own room and sits on the edge of his bed, like always, to think what he has to do that day? He remembers what his mother has asked him to do. He has to start packing his most needed belongings. Also, he has to find cardboard boxes, so he would start laying their things in it and get everything ready for the day after tomorrow when they are going to move.



Sammy has become a bit confused since Al, Freddy and Tom left Al Darrah. All what worry him have attacked his mind altogether. He is still worried for them despite the fact they have made it to where they intended safe. Sammy thinks whether the metal rifle part is going to perfectly fit its place on the rifle upon assembling it after sanding, cleaning and oiling it? Would it work? Would the rifle really operate the way his late father and uncle Khalfan expected it would? Is it going to really become one-of-a-kind rifles like he thought and Tom predicted? Thoughts of formulas Tom has given him in regards to targeting, thoughts of Amer's engagement and anxiety of whether he and Robert can finally solve all the problems and save Amer's image in front of his in laws have made Sammy's mind quite busy and extremely worried. Those thoughts are in fact what have confused him.

Sammy knows quite well which one of the tasks he has to attend to first, and he knows how to prioritize them perfectly. The only thing is that he is confused and his confusion has made him lazy where to begin attending to his tasks at hand. Sammy picks his cane and gets up again. He goes towards the kitchen to drink some water. He gets the bottle of cold water from the fridge and pours himself a glass. While drinking his water, Sammy hears garbage bins crashing each other down at the street. Curious what is happening, he goes to the balcony to look down and find out why garbage bins are crashing into each other. He sees a few people in dark blue uniforms who have yellow color safety hat on their heads. They are throwing white color packaging foams into the bins. Sammy notices suddenly one of them is holding a few flattened cardboard boxes, going to throw them inside one of the bins as well. Sammy needs the cardboard boxes to pack his things in as his mom had instructed him. So, he yells calling the guy and asks if he is going to throw the boxes away? He asks the guy not to, after he replies yes. Sammy asks him to place the boxes next to his entrance instead, as he needs to use them. The man places the boxes by Sammy's entrance and goes to the neighboring building without saying anything else.

Sammy picks the storage key, holds his cane and gets out of his apartment to go downstairs at the entrance and collects those nice and clean cardboard boxes. He knows the building's elevator is almost all the time out of order. But still, as a habit, he glances at it to make sure. The elevator is out of order as usual. So, he takes the stairs down as quick as he can, opens the entrance, picks the boxes and brings them

in. There are a few boxes with different dimensions. Sammy goes to his storage, lays the boxes on the wall and begins tidying up the storage first. He places everything Al, Tom and Freddy used, back to their original places. He notices they had already cleaned up after themselves, however, they did not know where to put what they have used. Al and Freddy had taken upstairs whatever they had brought downstairs to use. But there are items which belonged to the storage originally and Sammy had put them in use for Al, Tom and Freddy. Sammy places all those items, arranges them and makes the storage tidy.

\* \* \*

While carrying a few pieces of freshly baked bread, Daniel inserts his key into his door lock. He opens the door and enters. Eva, Ezra and his three sons are seated at the table having breakfast. They have all been sleeping when Daniel left his house to buy them freshly baked bread. No one was actually at the kitchen. Daniel goes and buys his family fresh bread, almost every day and comes back with the bread minutes before his sons leave for school. So, everyone would eat freshly baked bread before leaving the house.

Daniel has woken up a bit later than usual this morning. He noticed the bakery was not crowded with people like he saw every day. The reality is that the bakery's customers are being reduced less and less every day since past month or two. That's simply because Al Darrah residents are leaving town. Every day a number of people leave Al Darrah to take refuge in a safer town where they are sure no terrorists would reach them soon. Even Daniel and his family are going to leave town in a matter of next two days. Bakery faces less and less customers. So, they reduce the amount of the dough every day until they are recently forced not to bake any bread in advance. They figure it is best to let the customers enter the bakery, place an order and then they would only bake as much as they receive the order. They basically do not put any dough in their oven, unless the customers come in, order and tell them how many loafs of bread they want.

The chief baker asked Daniel the number of breads loafs he wanted to buy, first when he entered the bakery that morning. Daniel who normally buys ten loafs of bread, orders three loafs since he notices there are not many customers and there is not a queue of people waiting to buy bread anymore. He figures since the bakery is almost empty every morning, he

would go and buy freshly baked bread for each course which requires bread. The chief baker lays dough for three loafs of bread only. The reason Daniel is delayed this morning is the bakery has no ready bread anymore and Daniel has to wait for his order to be made. So, his three sons have already started having their breakfast, eating whatever bread is available to them since they are already getting late for school and can no longer wait for their father to bring them fresh bread.

Daniel places the three pieces of bread over the kitchen table. He apologizes for being late. He sits next to his wife and begins having breakfast. About three or four minutes later, Eva sends their sons to school. They exit the house and Eva goes back to the kitchen and pours a hot cup of Arabic tea for her husband. Daniel notices Ezra's head spins around looking at house's walls and doors. He notices Ezra has gotten very emotional when he pays a closer attention to her. Daniel wants to hide the fact he has noticed his mother-in-law is about to cry, and at the same time determines to find out the reason. So, he follows the direction she is staring at and notices his house is almost empty. The reception room is almost empty. Shelves on the walls are empty. Sofas has been re-arranged Daniel figures his house doesn't look like the house people normally live in anymore. Everything has been whether removed, packed and kept away or packed to be transferred to Damascus. Daniel thinks one would think people have just moved in his house if someone looks at the house interior. Daniel notices his house has become so empty that people's voices echo in it while talking. Eva and Daniel speak about the day after tomorrow when they are leaving the town, before they get caught by Isis animals. They recheck everything together once again. When Daniel's phone starts ringing, he glances at his phone's screen and sees it is Sayed Majed calling. Daniel and sayed Majed had spoken a few days earlier about a cargo. Sayed Majed wants Daniel to transfer the cargo from a storage facility at the industrial area to another storage facility in Al Yaas town.

After some small talk, Sayed Majed says Daniel he has called to inform Daniel that the cargo they had spoken a few days earlier about are ready to be discharged from factory's containers and loaded on Daniel's transportation trucks accordingly. He also tells Daniel to have his transportation trucks and personnel ready by the storage facility at the industrial area already since the cargo will arrive the industrial area and will be unloaded very soon, as he would like to be able to transship the cargo directly from the

containers to his trucks. Daniel assures Sayed Majed that he is going to take care of his cargo and its discharging, loading and unloading, as not only his personnel and his trucks will be ready at the said storage facility in industrial area, but also, he is going to be present there too to make sure the operation is going to happen in the most professional manner.

Sayed Majed tells Daniel about the dangers threatening Al Darrah and the risks involved doing business in Al Darrah still. He asks Daniel when is he moving his family to the capital again? But Daniel reminds Sayed Majed that the transportation of the cargo they have just spoken about is going to be his last transportation job at Al Darrah which he is going to be personally involved with. Daniel tells him he is going to move his family to the capital in two days. He suggests Sayed Majed to take refuge in a safer city as soon as possible too, as staying in Al Darrah is getting riskier and riskier by day. But Sayed Majed also informs Daniel he is going to the capital as well, only after completing one more job, after what Daniel is going to take care of is done.

To help Sayed Majed, an old friend and business contact, Daniel asks if there is some help, he can give him to accelerate his move to the capital? But Sayed Majed says it's not something anyone can assist him with after he gives Daniel a kind laugh. He says the only work for him left to finish is that he has rented his garden to a young man to hold his engagement party at the following evening. Sayed Majed says he wants to stay and be at his garden when the young couple celebrate their engagement, because he has to protect the young man and his guests from any possible hassle in his garden. Sayed Majed says he feels responsible for the young man as he had promised him, he would be personally there until his engagement party was over. Sayed Majed also says his garden's staff are not going to work and do their duties if he is personally not there. Daniel just finds out that the engagement Nelly, his daughter, is going to attend and has bought a nightgown for, is in fact the same engagement Sayed Majed is staying at Al Darrah for.

Al Majed garden belongs to the same sayed Majed, Daniel finds out. But Daniel does not mention anything about it to Sayed Majed and just allows him to finish talking. Sayed Majed continues by saying that his garden's manager had approached him and requested to let one of his relatives use his garden for a half day engagement party. He says he was hesitant

initially. But since there was a matter of young people forming a family, he had agreed to be just part of a good deed. He says he was scared considering Isis threats, but still, he did not want to change his mind and spoil the young couple's engagement party plan on the last moment notice.

Daniel says he appreciates Sayed Majed's decision. He knows he wants to be involved when it is about a good deed. Daniel tells Sayed Majed he has no doubt in his mind that God is going to reward him for his good deed elsewhere. Sayed Majed and Daniel hang up their phones after they review their transportation schedule and plan one last time. Daniel calls the person he wants to be in charge of his transportation firm and shares what he and Sayed Majed spoke about. He also asks him to hire a few workers for loading and unloading Sayed Majed's cargo, in case they need extra hand, have drivers fill up their tanks in advance and sends them all to the storage facility at the industrial area before he arrives there himself too.

It is still a few minutes before noon, and Sammy is already getting hungry. He was almost done doing his tasks when he hears the apartment door was opened and closed. He is quite surprised as he is not expecting anyone anytime soon. His mind thinks of several different scenarios before he goes towards the entrance and sees who entered the apartment. Is it Amer and Robert who have come back? Tom? Al or Freddy maybe? But No. None of them have the key to apartment's entrance, he thinks. Sammy has gotten up with the help of his cane and is going towards the entrance when he sees his mother appear at the door. She says hi and Sammy limps, running towards her, like children who have not seen their mother for a long time. Sammy hugs her tight and starts kissing her. He notices his mom is holding a carry bag.

"I hope you haven't eaten yet, huh?" asks Sammy's mom. Sammy shakes his head negative.

"No mom." replies Sammy, "I was packing like you told me till now. Are you okay mom? I missed you. Is everything alright my lovely mother? Sammy's life? What are you doing here? Is there anything wrong?"

"Of course, everything is okay son. I missed you and I brought you lunch. That's all, I know Robert and Amer are at Al Majed's garden and they're very busy. Amer called your aunt and told her. That's why I know. So, I decided to bring you

some real food before you get hungry and order what you call that? Oh. Fast food. Your aunt cooked it. But I just brought it so we can have it together. I want to help you pack a little, so we know we'll be ready to go the day after tomorrow without worrying whether we've taken everything."

Sammy's mother goes to the kitchen. She checks the kitchen to see whether everything is clean and tidy. Otherwise, she would clean the house. She knows Sammy would clean up after himself every time.

Zahra places two plates on the kitchen's table. She gets the spoons and forks too. She opens the fridge and gets some Arabic pickles and sauce and lays them on the table too. Sammy leaves for the bathroom to go wash up and get ready to eat.

"Your aunt, cousins and their husbands had to attend to some chores somewhere." says Sammy's mom. So, I requested them to get me home to my hero, so I'll have lunch with him. I want to prepare and pack up myself too and ready to run from Al Darrah. Have you taken everything you may need son?"

"Of course, not mom. I can't take everything I want. I want many things mom. I don't know where's where we are going. What they have and what they don't. But I take the most important stuff."

"Oh. I missed home. It's not two weeks yet, ha? It feels like I have not been here for years. Oh. It's your late father's anniversary the day after tomorrow also."

Sammy nods meaning he knows and remembers. They both keep quiet for a moment. Their faces turn sad while having lunch. It is obvious they have remembered Sammy's father and are both trying to prevent themselves from crying.

"I'll give you some money so you would buy some date cookies and offer people as a votive to your late father's soul. You may want to take Amer or Robert or both to help you offer them to people to encourage them for a little prayer for your dad's soul. It should be today Sammy. Because tomorrow I am very busy helping your aunt for Amer's engagement, guests and other matters and I'm also sure you'll be busy handling Amer's affairs. There will be no other spare time before moving out of Al Darrah. So maybe do it today after lunch. I had also made a vow for your success on Beijing's tournaments. So, it's both for your father's soul and for your success which

you've achieved. I don't know where you want to offer the cookies, in the cemetery? At a mosque maybe? Where ever. You decide."

"Oh, come on mom." replies Sammy getting a bit unkind. Me, mom? With this damn leg of mine for God's sake? I'm sorry mom I'm shy. I can't just take some date cookies in my hand and offer them to the strangers in exchange for some little prayer for my dad's soul. Besides, there's no one left in Al Darrah but us. Everyone is gone already. These things are all superstition mom. Please."

"Shy? What do you mean by shy Sammy? It's for your dad. You are not borrowing money to feel shy. Don't give me excuses, please. I've made a vow and you should help me do it. What superstition are you talking about now? Is it superstition that we want to offer people some date cookies so they would say a sentence long prayer for your dad's soul? Really?"

Sammy knows his chances of getting away from the responsibilities his mom is giving him are too narrow. Against his will, he agrees at the end to do what she wants. Sammy and Zahra finish having their lunch. Zahra goes to her room and Sammy follows her so he would help her pack her things too. They pick what they need to take to Al Latakia, pack them and put them in their luggage ready to move. Sammy gets the cardboard boxes after their luggage is already full and has no more space to put anything in them anymore. He opens two cardboard boxes from their flattened position and tapes the bottom, so they won't open while being handled. Zahra and Sammy lay whatever is left in those boxes and close them with tape. There is almost nothing else left doing. Sammy's mother is in the toilet when her phone starts ringing. She asks Sammy to answer her phone for her. Sammy hears one of his cousin's voice. It is one of Amer's sisters. She wants Sammy to tell Zahra to go downstairs after twenty minutes so they would pick her up. Sammy tells his mom what his cousin said after they hang up their phones. Zahra finds a nightgown she wanted after she goes out of the bathroom. She puts her gown in a bag and hangs it on the door knob, so she would not forget it when she leaves the apartment. Zahra goes back to Sammy.

"I've heard the city we are moving to is full of white skinned available girls. I've heard there are a lot of pretty girls there. Now, tomorrow is your cousin's turn of course. It will be your turn soon. Haven't you met anyone yet son? Someone

who has touched your soul within these few days that I should know and be very happy about?"

Hearing his mom's discomfiting words about him finding a girl and getting married, annoys Sammy again. He is about to get pissed at his mother. But controls his temper, answers his mom by a yes or a simple no word.

"Oh, I almost forgot to ask." continues Zahra, "Did that poor Robert find his brother at last? Oh my God, poor guy. I can imagine what his parents are going through. I pity them. What happened though? We all speak about this matter at least once a day at your aunt's home."

Sammy closes his eyes for a moment and lowers his head. His facial expressions change. He becomes sad and tells Zahra the tale of the twin brothers in detail. Zahra pounds on the back of her hand when Sammy tells her the unpleasant parts of their story that worries her. It is only two or three minutes left before the twenty minutes passes and his mother has to go downstairs. Sammy's mother hands him some cash and a piece of paper, so he would take care of the votive offering she has in mind. Zahra asks if Amer, Robert or Sammy himself need anything in particular that they do not have at home? But Sammy assures her that they have everything they need. He tells her he is going to let her know if there is anything. Sammy hugs his mom and kisses her a few times before she exits the apartment. Zahra tells Sammy she is going to see him the following day at the ceremony. But she corrects herself and says she forgot that the ceremony which is going to take place in the morning involves only elders of the family and she is going to see him the following evening at the engagement party. Sammy is standing by the door, witnessing his mother taking the stairs down when she stops moving. She pauses for a moment looking at her son. She takes a few stairs back up and raises her hand towards Sammy. He realizes she wants to hug him one last time before she leaves. So, he exits the apartment barefooted and takes a few steps towards his mom and hugs her tight again. He notices Zahra's face becomes wet by her tears. Sammy asks her the reason she has become emotional. Zahra replies by saying that for a moment she imagined it is Sammy's engagement ceremony and party the following day and that made her emotional suddenly.

Sammy hugs his mom tighter this time and wipes her tears off with his hand. But that is not actually the reason Zahra cries. Like almost all other parents, at least middle-eastern



parents, Zahra is patiently waiting to see her son happy, getting married with the girl he loves and have children. She wants to become a grandma and help raise her grandchildren. But despite all these reasons, the cause of her crying is in fact because she pities her son for losing his self-confident because of his limp and cannot establish a relationship with a girl as a result. Zahra cries because she knows Sammy is not happy deep in there, because he is not going to have any relationship at all, get married and have children, like any other normal young man. These are actually mattering that had concerned Sammy's father and mother for quite a long time. Of course, Sammy's father had been shot and died. But he was concerned about Sammy's situation until the last breath he took at the hospital. Zahra stays at her sister's now to help her manage her son, Amer's engagement and she thinks every second why Sammy should not be the one who is getting engaged? Why is Sammy not trying to find himself a girl he would love and spend rest of his life with?"

Zahra says goodbye. She goes downstairs and that's how she leaves her son. Sammy returns back inside and his mom exits the building. Sammy goes to his room and decides he wants to relax for a moment. So, he lays on his bed. But he cannot relax as he thinks he has to contact Amer and Robert to find out what is going on and if problems are solved already. But he also thinks Robert is with Amer and he would not stop unless every single aspect has been taken care of and every single issue has been solved. He thinks Amer or Robert would have certainly called and informed him if there was some serious problems. So, he simply figures not to waste their time by a phone call, because he knows for a fact that time is a valuable asset to them considering less than twenty-four hours is left to the engagement ceremony and party.

Sammy changes his position on his bed and his eyes catch the scope Tom gave him as a present. His mind gets directed to Tom's guidelines and targeting formulas automatically. So, he decides to use the scope in the evening in searching for Nelly crossing the intersection near his house instead of using his binoculars. He believes the scope Tom gave him is, as a matter of fact, way more powerful than his own binocular.

Sammy picks his cell-phone and calls his cousin Rana. He explains to her the vow his mother made. He tells Rana he wants her to distribute some date cookies which he is going to buy amongst the hospital's staff. Sammy tells Rana he wants her to help him instead of him going to the deserted streets

and alleys of Al Darrah, waiting for passerby's to offer them date cookies. Rana says she is more than happy to offer the cookies to her colleagues at the hospital instead, provided Sammy going and buying the date cookies and delivering them to her. He agrees with Rana's condition. They speak also a bit about Al, Freddy and Tom, and Sammy thanks her once again for all that she had done for them.

Sammy begins to quickly change his clothes after he and Rana hang up their phones. He exits his apartment and goes towards the pastry shop where he knows he'll have to buy date cookies from. When he enters the pastry shop, he notices there are not many pastries on sale at the, as if they did not prepare cookies and other pastries like before. Sammy looks at the date cookies and asks the shopkeeper to hand him one so he would try and make sure they are fresh. But he has to spit the cookie out which tastes horrible.

Upset and disappointed, Sammy asks the shopkeeper why he still tries to sell those old cookies with shitty smell and taste if he considers his customers health at all? But the shopkeeper's face changes. He is genuinely surprised. He puts a cookie in his own mouth and has no choice but to spit it out like Sammy did. He tells Sammy no one is buying cookies and pastries anymore and he did not really know his cookies were already spoiled and tasted that bad. The shop keeper apologizes to Sammy and continues by saying there are no more people left in Al Darrah to buy his cookies and pastries. He claims cookies and pastries are mainly bought for ceremonies and parties. He asks Sammy if he knows any people in the town who still celebrate something and throw party for anything? The guy is absolutely right, Sammy thinks. Al Darrah and celebration? Al Darrah and party? Instead of cookies, Sammy buys dates. At least dates would not get spoiled that easily, Sammy thinks. He exits the pastry shop, goes and stands by the side of the street and raises his hand for any vehicle crossing so they would give him a ride.

A vehicle stops a few minutes later, He gets in the car. He tells the driver he is first going to the hospital where he would take two or three minutes, and then he wants the driver to drop him home. Sammy gives the driver his home address and the guy drives away. The car stops in front of the hospital. Sammy takes his cane in one hand and the plastic case where date small boxes are in at the other hand. He exits the vehicle and tells the driver he is going to be right back. He stops in front of the hospital's entrance. Rana arrives at

the hospital's entrance a minute later and receives date boxes from Sammy. Sammy thanks her once again before returning into the car. The driver drives his vehicle towards Sammy's house, the address he had provided with. When the driver receives his money and drops Sammy in front of his building, Mr. Al Arafi, Sammy's neighbor is struggling to ignite Hitler, his yellow beetle Volkswagen vehicle. Sammy enters his building without letting Mr. Al Arafi notice him. He is not in the mood to listen to his antifemale advices and comments, particularly that day.

Time passes quickly for Sammy today. He is thinking to himself whether things pass that fast for Amer, Robert, Nelly, Sara and Hanieh too. The next day is a hugely important day for Sammy. He goes to check his tuxedo and his other clothes and shoes he is planning to wear for Amer and Sara's engagement party. He has not opened his closet's door yet when he hears his phone ringing. It is an unknown caller. Sammy pauses for a moment. Who can call him with an unknown number? Sammy asks himself. To find out, he has to answer the call which he normally does not answer phone calls from unknown callers. Not if he does not know who is calling.

Sammy hears an old woman's voice after he answers his phone.

"Sammy sir," asks the old woman, "Do you remember me?"

The woman has a sad shaky voice, as though she has been crying for hours already. Worry takes over Sammy. He suddenly recognizes the poor old woman's voice. It is Bibi Sama, Hassan and Hussein, the twins' mother he has met at Al Thowrah hospital.

"Do you remember you gave me your number son?" asks the old woman.

"Yes Bibi Sama," replies Sammy, "of course I do remember you. Can anyone forget a kind motherly woman like you?"

"My Hussein is gone Sammy sir." says the old woman bursting into tears, "He left me and his brother alone. He tolerated so much of pain you know. Damn all the wars, damn guns. Damn Bashar Al Assad."

Sammy has his eyes closed and just listens without letting a word out. He feels like crying himself. But to comfort the old woman, he knows he has to have his own emotions under control.

"Yes Bibi." replies Sammy, "I heard about Hussein. I'm so sorry. But there are some issues here that needs my immediate attention, so I cannot come over personally to pay my respect and condolences. I really wanted to come and see you, but with my leg condition, my cousin Amer's ceremony tomorrow and all I can't. I hope you forgive me Bibi. I pray for his soul. I believe God takes those he loves, so they wouldn't suffer here in this world much. I understand your pain Bibi."

Bibi Sama cries continuously and Sammy does not know how to calm her down. After crying for a while, the old woman tries to have her emotions under control. So, she would continue saying what she wanted.

"Yeah. You are right I guess." says Bibi Sama, "This was my poor son, my destiny and I cannot do anything about it. You gave me your number when you came to visit my sons. I just called to let you know that we are going to transfer his lifeless body to our village by hospital's ambulance tomorrow around noon time, so we would bury him and give him a proper funeral. I want to know if you or one of your friends can stay with Hassan at the hospital while I go to bury my Hussein? So, I would have enough time to bury this one too."

"Oh my God, don't say that please. God forbid Bibi. I'm sure Hassan will wake up soon and regains his health in no time. These are all our destiny and kismet. I'm sure you know that better than I do with all the experiences you have."

The whole time Sammy is speaking to the old woman, he is trying to figure what to tell her in response to her request? Tomorrow is Amer's engagement ceremony and no one can go to Al Thowrah and stay with Hassan at the hospital. Besides, he's in coma and there's nothing anyone can do about it.

"The guys and I would love to be with Hassan." says Sammy, "He is also like our brother. But you see? Tomorrow"

Sammy holds his tongue and changes his mind. He does not continue saying what he actually wanted to say. He wanted to tell the old mourning woman tomorrow is Amer's engagement ceremony followed by an engagement party. He thinks it does not in fact make her have a good feeling when she hears a young man, almost the same age of his son is getting engaged the following day, whereas she has lost a son and has another one in coma.

Sammy is too concern about the old woman's feelings. She is too fragile and he does not want to add to her sorrow by saying something in a wrong time. So, he simply tells her his friends are not home and they would decide who would go to Al Thowrah and stay with Hassan after they return back home in the evening. Bibi Sama cries a bit more and Sammy comforts her and does all he can to calm her down. Their telephone conversation ends moments later. They hang up the phone, while Sammy has become extremely emotional, pitying the old mourning mother.

Sammy feels really sad for the old woman. It is his general response to people's problems. He can understand and realize people's issues and problems completely. He sympathizes with whomever shares his or her problem with him. He goes to the kitchen to heat the water and make himself a cup of coffee. But he cannot stop thinking about Bibi Sama and her sons, even minutes after their conversation ended. He makes himself a cup of coffee, drinks it and thinks of getting up cleaning his rifle's metal part with a piece of cloth as Tom instructed him. He thinks of oiling the part later, assemble it on his rifle and put an end to the rifle's tale. He and everyone else are leaving town the next forty-eight hours and he knows well he cannot take the rifle with him. So, thinking of that, he became demotivated to finish his rifle. Besides, he is generally feeling quite lazy today. It isn't long before it becomes five forty-five and Sammy has to see Nelly from his apartment window using the scope Tom gave him for the first time.

Sammy takes position behind his living room's window. He has not seen Nelly for the past three or four days crossing the intersection near his building. He begins searching all corners of the intersection until he spots her. She is walking towards her house direction as usual. Sammy's mind immediately starts thinking about Amer and Sara's engagement party the next day and the fact that he is going to talk to Nelly for the first time. Talk to the most beautiful girl he has ever seen in his life and anxiety takes over. Sammy's hands begin shaking a little. He is trying to control himself. But when he thinks he is going to express his emotions to a girl that beautiful, his hands even shake more. Nelly has her guitar case on her back, walking slowly and beautifully. Sammy can again see how young men look at her and how they react seeing her in the street. He gets jealous and angry like any other day he sees young men's reactions towards her, but he cannot do anything about it yet.

Nelly crosses the intersection and shakes Sammy to his core once again when he thinks how beautiful she really is. He is right somehow, he thinks. Nelly's beauty is really talk of the town and Sammy knows he is way lower than her. Sammy is under the impression that only a miracle can happen for him to start a relationship, a serious one, with Nelly. He has no idea whatsoever what would be her reaction to what he is going to tell her. He is determined though. He has made up his mind and has decided to express his feelings towards her the following evening. He probably thinks such a beauty is truly worth the shot.

Sammy remembers the talk he had with Robert. He remembers that Robert told him black will take no other hue and what is the worst thing that can happen? He does not know what Nelly's reaction would be when she hears what Sammy has to tell her. Sammy has decided not to get worried and anxious while thinking of the consequences of telling Nelly how he feels about her. It is in fact easier not to think about it and he knows it. He has set his mind on telling Nelly what he wants and doing his best to make her give him a shot.

From the window Sammy goes to his workbench and begins looking for a piece of cotton rag. He takes his rifle's metal part and begins cleaning it with the rag. Sammy takes out a useless bowl he has under his workbench and places the part inside it. He pours some engine oil he has over it until the oil covers the part completely. He wants to wash the part when Robert calls him and asks him to open the building's entrance door for him with a happy voice. So, he places the bowl of oil and part in it under his workbench and goes towards the intercom. He opens the door for him. Robert arrives upstairs moments later. He looks exhausted, but he smiles. Sammy knows everything was taken care of.

"I fixed everything." says Robert after saying hello to Sammy, "We will have a great party tomorrow. You'll see."

Robert and Sammy hug each other and begin jumping up and down as they are so happy Amer was saved. Sammy hugs Robert once again and thanks him while he himself is about to cry out of joy.

"Where Amer is?" asks Sammy

"We'll see Amer only tomorrow." replies Robert, "He'll sleep here from tomorrow night again. Oh, what again. It's only for tomorrow. We'll be moving. Sara called him several times and

informed him some of her relatives are arriving soon, coming from other cities and towns. She wanted Amer back home. She told him her relatives are going to arrive any moment and they would want to meet him. So, he dropped me and left. But he said he will come later for sleeping of course dude. He's the groom for God sake. He can't be here all the time, specially tomorrow that he has the big day.

Sammy nods and asks Robert to tell him all about what he had done and how he had done it.

"You know everything already buddy." says Robert, "We went and waited there until our fruit order arrived. Pastries in some good hard boxes, though. Flowers came also, a team began decorating the place with lights and all. Let's put it this way, everything ended up happening better than the original plan. I'm so tired dude. All what you should know is that tomorrow the ceremony and the party will be the talk of the town. That's all.

"How about miss Hanieh?" asks Sammy smiling. What's up with her?"

"Oh my God. You have no idea how many times she called. She kept on insisting to take her to a restaurant. But I was very busy and could not even tell her Amer and Sara's engagement party was in jeopardy. She wanted to see me, so she was inviting me. I made up an alibi. She'll come and I'll see her tomorrow. She'll come with Nelly of course."

Robert gives a very serious look at Sammy.

"I'm sure you are ready for tomorrow." Continues Robert. "I hope you are."

"Yup, like a wolf who awaits prey." replies Sammy.

They both burst into laughter. Sammy brings up Bibi Sama's phone call and request.

"Oh my God. We are such assholes." says Robert, "We did not even give the poor old woman a call to condolence her. I'll call her myself. I need to take a shower, change and relax a bit first, though. How about you? How are you?"

"Yeah," replies Sammy, "I'm okay. I packed for my mom and I packed for myself."

"Your mom came here?"

"Yes. She came to pack actually. She brought me lunch too."

"How was she by the way?"

"She's good. She asked about Robin also. You'll see her tomorrow. So, you have done everything, ha? You fixed everything for Amer?"

"Yeah. But I didn't do much. Amer was panicking, thinking everything was going to get screwed. I'm sure we would feel panicked like him if we were in his shoes. It's not a small thing considering country's situation. All people are running from this area. We are asking people to risk their lives and come to this area for a ceremony. But everything is okay. Handled now. No worries."

"Yeah, no worries now. You've solved every problem already. Amer is your friend, yes. But you'll get your reward from the universe mind you. I assure you. Well done buddy anyways."

What Sammy said puts a smile on Robert's face. He gets naked a few minutes later, so he would take a shower and freshen up. Sammy gets his tuxedo and other clothes he wants to wear for Amer's engagement out of his closet, so they will be ready to wear. Robert gets out of the shower a few minutes later. He goes to Sammy's room while he has wrapped a towel around his waist and is drying his hair with a smaller towel. Robert looks for his cell-phone in Sammy's room. He asks Sammy to give him the number Bibi Sama has called him from earlier. Sammy is searching for the number when he suddenly notices Robert's eyes. They are red and teary. Sammy knows Robert has been crying while taking shower. Being a kind person and a good concerned friend, he really wants to ask the reason Robert has been crying. But he changes his mind immediately and simply gives Bibi Sama's number to him. Robert dials the number and goes towards the living room. Sammy hears Robert introduces himself, says hello how are you and conveys his condolences. He hears Robert bursting into tears, crying loudly. Sammy figures the old woman's sobbing has surely had its effect on Robert and has made him cry too, just like it making him cry minutes ago.

"Mother," Sammy hears Robert saying, "You think my brother Robin is somewhere at the middle of a beautiful forest with a pretty girl having fun drinking wine? No mother. I'm not an idiot. I know my brother is already gone. I don't know for sure today, but I'll be told tomorrow by someone. I'm saying this so you would know I understand you. I'll move towards Al Thowrah first thing in the morning, so I will be with you when you take late Hussein's body. I'll stay with Hassan. You



attend to what you need. I'll be there, maybe Hassan wakes up and tell us how my brother died. God willing, He will."

Robert's bawling is getting louder and louder. Sammy does not initially want to touch Robert's ego by mentioning that he found out he has been crying in the shower even if they are best friends. But Robert has lost it already. Robert has forgotten his ego. He cries louder and louder, emptying his broken heart of all negative things he believes have happened to his brother. Sammy notices his own tears rolling down his cheeks when he hears one of his two best friends is crying that loud. Sammy can hear the sound of tissues getting pulled out of its box, Robert cries and moans like a person who had stopped himself from crying for years.

"I'm truly exhausted. I really give up. I swear Hussein is the lucky one. Because he left this shitty world. Is this a country we are living in for God's sake? Is this a life we live? Where this Isis came from? Were Taliban not enough? were Al Qaida not enough? That's all what we need. Terrorists and killers in the name of Islam. I wish I had gone instead of Hussein. You know mother that your son died trying to save his country. I don't know why did my brother die? Why is he missing? Doing what? He did not even love his country.

Like a person who just emptied himself by crying, Robert grows calmer little by little. He may have probably thought it is selfishness to cry and empty himself from sadness while the old woman needs consoling herself and needs emptying herself. So, he begins comforting and consoling her after he calms down. Sammy is frozen. He is just sitting on his bed and is heavily affected by all that Robert, his dear friend, just said and how he said it. Sammy has no idea that how Robert feels. He knows Robert is very sad and worried for his brother. But he cannot imagine Robert actually thinks he was killed.

Sammy gets up and goes to get his alcoholic drinks shoe box and takes out a bottle of vodka. The last bottle of alcohol he has left after drinking with Al, Freddy and Tom. Sammy limps to the kitchen. He prepares two glasses of vodka and soft drink mixed with a few ice cubes and places them in a small platter. He places the bottle in the freezer. Sammy hears Robert to condolence Bibi Sama and bids farewell and hangs up the phone. Sammy cannot stop thinking of the fact how hard Robert has tried to keep his feeling about finding his missing brother from him and Amer, despite them being his closest friends. Robert's sobs are still audible. It sounds

to Sammy as if he is no longer trying to hide how he feels anymore. Sammy wants to calm him down using alcohol. He does not want Amer to see Robert in such a mess. It is his happiest day the following day and Sammy needs him in his highest spirit.

Sammy gets the platter to the living room where Robert is and places it on the coffee table in front of the television. He goes back and gets some peanuts and potato chips to taste with their vodka. Robert who has his head lowered raises his head to say something. He probably wants to justify his behavior or apologize to Sammy for upsetting him as well. But Sammy sits next to him and hugs him as soon as he raises his head. He gives Robert no chance to talk at all. Robert's sobbing sound grows louder after Sammy hugs him, as if he has just realized how sad he is deep inside without saying a word. Robert just cries in Sammy's arms. Moments pass like that. Sammy releases him after he feels Robert has calmed down a bit. Sammy bends and takes one of the glasses from the platter, pours some vodka in it and hands it over to Robert. He wipes a drop of tear has formed on his eyes and pours himself a glass too.

"Here's to you buddy." says Sammy looking at Robert's red and teary eyes.

A bitter smile is formed on Robert's face, another tear rolls down his cheek. Sammy and Robert's glasses hit and they take a big sip of their vodka.

"We started drinking and we are not going to stop until you are completely calm." says Sammy, "So, I can calm down because you calm down. Mr. Amer would not find out your eyes are red because you've been sobbing. He would think it's because of alcohol. I also want you to know your place here with me is not only for joking, laughter and having fun. You are here like you are at your own house. I hope that's what you feel. I hope you feel like I said, you cry on your second brother's shoulder and empty all the stress and sadness off your chest. So, we would attend Amer's party tomorrow with an emptier chest and in a lighter mood. I hope you remember that you are one of groom's best men for God's sake. Why the hell did you tell the old woman you were going to go to Al Thowrah hospital and stay with Hassan tomorrow morning? Have you lost your mind? There's nothing you can do over there. Hassan is in coma."

Robert who is gazing at his glass starts talking in an interrupted and astonished way.

"I'll go tomorrow very early in the morning." says Robert, "I'll send her off with her son's body to their home village by an ambulance. I'll return as soon as they are gone. The engagement ceremony is not going to take place anytime earlier than five thirty or six P.M. as Amer said. I'll be back by then. So, you are all leaving town the next day ha? I will go back to the hospital at Al Thowrah and stay with Hassan and Bibi Sama for two three days. Maybe he wakes up and tells me the fate of my brother. It does not really matter if I'll hear a good or a bad news anymore. I've prepared myself for the worst."

Sammy nods. They both pause for a moment. They finish their first glass. Sammy picks his cane to go back to the kitchen and pour two more glasses. But Robert stops him and gets up himself. He takes their glasses to the kitchen, prepares two more glasses of vodka and brings them back with him for the rest of the evening. Sammy and Robert speak about Amer's problems with his engagement's events which had all been taken care of already and about Hanieh and Nelly.

Sammy orders some Arabic lamb stew and they eat it with their vodka. Robert sends texts to Hanieh and speaks to her over the phone twice. It is very late in the evening when Amer calls Sammy and informs him he is still at Sara's and he has to go to his parents a bit later to take care of some unfinished business. He tells Sammy he is going to spend the night at his parents as he is exhausted and planned on sleeping immediately after he finished doing what he has to do. Sammy and Robert tell Amer about Bibi Sama's phone call and Robert's plan to visit her at Al Thowrah hospital the following morning. Amer reminds Robert he has to come back immediately after arriving as he has to be present at the Sheikh's office for some registration procedures which is around Al Darrah roundabout. Robert promises he is going to be surely back by then. Robert and Sammy fall asleep soon after they speak to Amer over the phone.

\* \* \*

Daniel is driving towards the industrial area near Al Darrah. He glances at the clock on his pick-up truck's dashboard. It is 02:42 A.M. Daniel takes a piece of paper out of his shirt's pocket to check the address he has written on it earlier. He just realizes the storage facility he has to do the loading

from is at the side of the main road exactly and not in those alleys and service roads. He reduces speed after he sees a sign saying welcome to the industrial area. He has no doubt he is already quite close to his destination. He glances at the piece of paper and at the storage numbers. He sees a few of his personnel a few hundred yards farther who are taking boxes out of a factory container and loading them on his transportation trucks. He smiles knowing the job is being done nicely and on time. He knows the personnel have arrived way earlier than him and have started the loading and unloading operation. Daniel parks his truck, gets out and says hello in a rough sleepy voice. He places a stick of cigarette on his lips, takes his lighter out and lights it. He leans against his truck and glances at his wrist watch.

"Move it guys. Move it." yells Daniel, "We'll be here for a long time with this pace, guys. We have been forced to work tonight, this early in the morning to help Sayed Majed." Continues Daniel lowering his voice, "He was quite insistent we finish the work in dark already. Move faster as we still need to go and come back two or three times more. The work has just begun and we need to finish it in no time."

Daniel is stressed. He is not happy with the pace Sayed Majed's work is being done. So, he keeps on growling. Ashraf who acts as Daniel's right-hand man and has a good relation with other personnel, is a bit annoyed with Daniel's attitude.

"Yes sir." replies Ashraf after peaking at Daniel from behind the container,

"Yes. You know these guys are not robots. They are human like you and I. It's almost three in the morning. You are laying against your truck smoking, and you think it's easy what personnel are doing at this hour? Loading or unloading. Half sleep half awake? Besides, we'll still have to drop the boxes and come back for loading again like you said yourself. Please sir, let them do their work in peace. Thank you. Don't piss them off please."

"Yeah, I know." replies Daniel with a remorseful tone, "I understand. I am actually saying these things in a joking manner, everyone is tired. You are tired yourself. That's what I mean. We can go home and rest the faster we finish this operation. Isn't it?"

Sweaty and exhausted, workers carry the boxes from each container to the trucks and load them on them. The traditional

music can be heard coming from Hamid, one of the worker's radio. Javeed, another worker asks Hamid to increase the volume a bit because what is playing is his favorite song. So, Hamid goes towards his radio and increases its volume. He glances at Javeed and wants to see his reaction. Javeed who is enjoying the music a lot begins waving his body with the melody.

Daniel drops his cigarette butt and steps on it. The storage facility where Daniel has to start loading from is at the side of the main road. All containers have arrived and Daniel has to take out Sayed Majed's boxes from them and load them onto his trucks before the storage opens in the morning and have all the containers off load inside the storage facility. Daniel knows this is not what Sayed Majed wanted as in this case he has to pay extra for storage facility. Every storage light is off and the only light which has lit the area is a street lamp pole, which light the street and sidewalks. Every forty meters, the only other light near where Daniel's worker work is a lamp outside a storage facility. There are storage facilities at one side of the main road, and there is a vast desert at the opposite side. A vast desert which has the horizon of Al Yaas town at the far end of it. To see the boxes, Daniel goes near the containers and workers.

"Where are you going Mr. Daniel?" asks Ashraf, "Don't dirty your hands sir. They'll do it themselves."

Daniel has no idea whether Ashraf is joking with him or he is in fact serious.

"No, my dear." replies Daniel laughing, "It's too risky for a guy with my age to carry boxes already. My back is no longer supporting my own wait, let alone carrying heavy packages. I'm looking to see if I can find a toilet. Where's the toilet by the way?"

"There's a toilet somewhere there behind those containers." replies Hamid, "But don't go there. It's locked first of all and it's out of service too. If you really need to go, cross the road, go down the ravine on the edge of the desert and relieve yourself. No one is going to see you. There is no working toilet around here, trust me."

Desperate and disappointed, Daniel wanders to the other side of the road. He glances at both sides of the road to make sure there are no vehicles coming first. He crosses the road,

goes down the ravine. The desert's surface is lower than the road by around a meter. Daniel reaches the desert after he walks down the ravine. He can still hear the music coming from Hamid's radio. He looks around, unzips and. He is at the middle of peeing when he notices the faint music sound stops. The lamp poles get switched off all together at the same time, as though there is power shortage everywhere. No vehicle crosses that road at that hour of the morning. Daniel can feel a heavy silence.

Storage facilities are situated between Al Darrah and Al Yaas town at the industrial area. He looks at the side where Al Darrah is and sees the whole town has gone into darkness. He glances at Al Yaas side and sees the same thing. So, he figures the power is gone everywhere. While looking at Al Yaas side of the desert, he suddenly hears a thunder storm which comes from away. He glances at the sky and sees the stars. The sky is clear and he sees no clouds at all.

Daniel's eyes suddenly catch a strange and inexplicable scene when he looks at Al Yaas town's horizon again. He notices the horizon over Al Yaas town is shining, as if there is a firework going on at Al Yaas. In different spots of the horizon, Daniel observes flashes of light go out irregularly without any particular rhythm, as though some people are taking pictures with flash at night. Daniel has focused his eyes and watches flashes of a lightning kind to see if he can find a reasonable explanation for what he witnesses. He constantly hears the lightning sound, where the sky is clear and stars are clearly visible, as many desert's skies are. There is no sign of rain or cloud. So, there is a different explanation for it, he thinks. Daniel zips his pants and his phone begins ringing. He glances at his cell-phone and sees name and number of Sayed Majed, the man whose goods Daniel's trucks and personnel are there to unload. He is quite surprised why Sayed Majed has called at that hour in the morning. On the other end of the line, Daniel hears sleepy, anxious, worried and discontinuous voice of Sayed Majed asking him to change the destination of the place where he was supposed to deliver his cargo to. He asks Daniel to transport his boxes to the resident of the buyer instead of taking them to a storage facility at Al Yaas town. Daniel does not know what to make of Sayed Majed's last minute decision, specially at that hour in the down. So, he asks Sayed Majed for an explanation. The original destination was in fact supposed to be a storage facility at Al Yaas town, but now the new destination has changed to the house of the

buyer which is located exactly at the opposite direction, a few kilometers outside Al Darrah, not Al Yaas, which is located on the east side of Al Darrah going towards the west. Sayed Majed also asks Daniel to assign someone to go to Al Yaas and returns the storage key to the person in charge at the storage facility, as he needs the key of the storage to store some more goods in the afternoon of the next day. He also tells Daniel he is going to tell him the reason he has changed the boxes destination on a later and more convenient time. He tells Daniel for now; the most important things are for the products to be delivered in one piece. He tells Daniel the security situation is getting very risky and just trust him and do as he say. Daniel assures Sayed Majed that he is going to do exactly as he asked. Their telephone conversation ends quickly after that. Daniel puts his cell-phone back in his pocket and goes up the slope, cross the road and join his staff. But he notices Ashraf and other workers have gathered around an officer in a military uniform. He sees two units of military vans, an armored pick-up truck with a huge machine gun installed on the back of it, three soldiers standing around the machine gun on high alert, and another Toyota pick-up truck, which apparently belongs to an officer, parked very close to one another, where his loading and unloading is taking place. Daniel runs to the other side of the road immediately. As soon as he sees Daniel, Ashraf points his finger at him and shows him to the officer. He is joining them. Daniel says hello curiously as soon as he reaches them. He shakes the officer's hand and introduces himself. The officer introduces himself as commander Ayman. He asks Daniel if they are still going to take long in that area? Daniel is confused and everything starts sounding suspicious to him. So, he asks the commander, who has noticed Daniel's worries and concerns, to explain to him why he says they are doing loading jobs in a risky situation. commander Ayman says he has information and knows it as an army officer that the situation is going to change any minute.

Ashraf, Hamid, Javeed and other workers have gathered around the commander and listen to every word coming out of his mouth quite carefully. A kind of worry and anxiety can be clearly seen in the way they look at the commander Ayman. Daniel places another stick of cigarette in his mouth. Something is telling him he is about to hear an unexpected, shocking and bad news. He offers the commander Ayman and others cigarettes too. The commander and Javeed take a stick each. Daniel lights his lighter and let them light their cigarettes.

"I don't want to scare you." says the commander, "I just want to explain our country's current situation which is not a good situation by the way. Isis terrorists attacked west of Al Yaas about five or six hours ago. Their main objective was to capture Al Yass's arsenal. The arsenal I'm talking about is not that far from the residential areas. Of course, we had predicted they would do this. We just didn't know when? We also had no idea about how many soldiers they were going to attack Al Yaas with. We still don't know if they've advanced despite all our military efforts. They are definitely not going to stop at Al Yaas town for sure. Their next destination would certainly be Al Darrah, and they will advance to the next town and the next and the next."

Everyone has become numb and turned pale. They are not able to digest that much of disturbing military information all at once. Information that made them think of their own lives and every member of their families lives which is going to be at risk.

"They would keep on advancing until they reach Aleppo." continues the commander. We will obviously do whatever we have in us to stop them. I'm waiting for the other units to arrive and join us while I'm here right now and am talking to you guys. So, we join forces and go to Al Yaas together to support units which are already there defending the town's gates. That's why I have to tell you that you should stop doing what you are doing, at least until we know for sure what would the result of this battle become. Or do it quickly and get away from this area as soon as possible. I know they are still far away and we are going to stop them. But I should also tell you, nothing in a war like this is certain. They have started their attack using element of surprise. They attacked Al Yaas at midnight."

Daniel has just realized the reason he saw flashes over Al Yass's skyline which looked and sounded like lightning. Everybody is scared, anxious and trying to contemplate. Daniel puffs on his cigarette. He pauses for a moment and tells everyone about Sayed Majed's phone call when he had gone to urinate. He says he is certain Sayed Majed knew something, that's why he changed the destination of the goods at that time of the midnight. He looks at the commander and tells him they were supposed to transfer his client, Sayed Majed's goods to storage facility number nineteen at Al Yaas town. But he called a few minutes earlier and requested him to change the destination to the buyer's resident, which is located exactly at the opposite direction. Daniel says the



new destination is not only farther, but is even in a hard to drive dirt road.

The commander asks Daniel about the amount of time transferring his client's goods to the new destination is going to take now. Daniel tells the commander Ayman in response that according to the time table he and his staff thought of, they figured it was going to take up until six or seven A.M. provided the destination does not change. The whole operation is now going to take probably up until eleven or twelve considering dirt roads and so many ups and downs the road is going to have now. Saeed, another one of Daniel's staff hits himself on his forehead and sits on the ground after Daniel's finishes talking,

"Sir," says Saeed with a terrified and pulsating voice, "I'm worried as fuck. I have a child for God's sake. They are waiting for me at home. I'll have to take my kid to school. I've not been sleeping for two days already. I swear I had difficulty in getting my courage together to tell you what I'm telling you. You know what? Fuck the money. I'll be working up until five A.M. I'll not be staying a second longer than that. I mean my body would not support me. It will shut down eventually. I'm exhausted. Now get up everyone, let's finish this shit and get the hell out of here."

The rest of Daniel's staff shake their heads sorry and head back to the loading spot.

"The guy's right." says Ashraf to Daniel feeling responsible for the rest of the workers as a foreman. Is it worth it already? For a small amount? Working with fear, anxiety, worry. Believe me sir. My wife and children get worried for me also. They also told me not to go to work tonight. Because the story of Isis and their threats is not a story we just heard today. It's been almost a month since everyone says Isis will arrive Al Darrah soon. But I've never heard them. I am a stupid hard-headed idiot because I had to listen to my wife when she told me we better take off faster and ran."

Ashraf is almost about to cry. Daniel suddenly notices a bus and two military transportation trucks approaching from Al Darrah side. The commander Ayman goes and stands by the road to lead and welcome the soldiers. He directs them to stop next to his vehicles. All the bases and military transportation vehicles have Syrian flag raised on them. Buses are filled with soldiers and civilian fighters. Everyone is armed to their teeth. The driver of the bus walks

to commander Ayman after parking his bus next to the vans. He gives the commander an army salute and they begin talking.

Commander Ayman asks the bus driver if all the volunteers are present in the bus? The driver says that almost all of them are there already. He continues by saying that only five or six volunteers are not with him, because they have decided to join them later on with their own personal vehicles. The commander calls everyone's attention and yells saying they are going to move already. He tells the driver he'll have to lead and drive as the lead. He goes to Daniel and warns him one last time to finish the job there quickly and get away as soon as they can. Daniel gazes at the commander's mouth while he speaks to him. The commander and Daniel bid their farewells before leaving though. The commander waves hand for all Daniel's staff and drivers, goes to his pick-up Toyota and all soldiers, volunteers and officers follow the bus and disappear into the road's darkness.

Daniel calls all his staff after the commander leaves. The staff were going back to their jobs, but they all gather around him when Daniel calls them.

"I understand your worries and fear." says Daniel loudly, "So, everyone can hear him. I'm a human being like you all. Married with children like most of you, worried like you and scared. Yeah. Hell yeah. The cargo's destination has been changed. We wouldn't have to drive towards Al Yaas town anymore. Our destination is a bit too farther now. So, you'll accordingly be paid more. About your worries and concerns, we'll leave the second loading unloading trip for tomorrow after we deliver the first trip. So, we can all attend to our families while everything clears up."

Everyone's face becomes happier and look convinced and satisfied with Daniel's words.

"You rest tomorrow until the afternoon." continues Daniel, "Because I know you are going to get exhausted. Someone should only volunteer to go and deliver Al Yaas storage's key to the storage officer around four or five. They need the key because it's stupid. But that's I was told is the only key for some security reasons.

One of the worker's called Hanif raises his hand.

"I've got a motorbike." says Hanif, "I'll drive the key tomorrow about five and come back."

Daniel asks Ashraf to give Hanif the storage key, so he would deliver the key to Al Yaas.

"So, yeah," continues Daniel, "go and rest after the first trip and we will come back tomorrow afternoon for the rest. I'm sure everyone would already feel relaxed knowing nothing threatens them."

Workers who have gotten energy from what Daniel told them, go back to do their jobs. Daniel goes to Ashraf and says he wants all the workers to be present at the same place at 5 P.M. the following afternoon.

It is six A.M. when Daniel arrives home. Like he said, workers had loaded the first trip and they had all gone home, to take a rest and attend to their families.

Daniel enters his house quietly, everybody is asleep. So, he changes quietly and goes to the washroom to freshen up a bit. He tiptoes to his bedroom, crawls to their bed so he would not wake Eva. He can feel Eva's warm body. He thinks of what the commander Ayman told him and what he has witnessed over Al Yass's horizon. He decides not to delay escaping Al Darrah a moment later after he finishes what he has promised Sayed Majed. He has to transfer his family to Damascus he thinks, even if he can't finish Sayed Majed's loading and unloading operation by any chance. He knows he cannot take a dangerous.

\* \* \*

Sammy has a headache when he wakes up in the morning. He gets up to go to the toilet. There is no sign of Robert. It is apparent to him that he has left the apartment to go to Al Thowrah as he had promised Bibi Sama. Sammy decides to go back to bed and try sleeping a bit more as he's suffers a severe headache. He has nothing to do anyways. On the contrary to Sammy's quiet apartment, there is much going on at Amer and Sara's parents' houses. You can't drop a needle. Some of the invitees have come to Al Darrah already and obviously have settled at Sara's house. There are some guests expected to arrive soon. Everyone is having breakfast and talking about the ceremony, who would go and what they would wear. Women speak about where to do their hair and makeups and what should they wear for the party or the ceremony.

Aser's house is no better than Sara's. Invitees had arrived from the night before, stayed at his house and there were still around thirty people expected. Elders knew they had to escort the bride and the groom to Sheikh's office by walk at around five to six P.M. They also knew they had to walk back home, escorting them after Sheikh performed his religious and cultural rituals on them, and finally get ready to attend the engagement party, which is supposed to take place at Al Majed garden.

Hanieh is also preparing for the ceremony. Nelly is waiting for a beautician to arrive in the afternoon at her house after she comes back from her guitar class so she'll work on her for the party. Daniel and his wife have hired one of the top beauticians still available at the town. Whoever is invited for the ceremony or the party that day has begun their day with a kind of an excitement.

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Sammy wakes up for the second time. His head does not hurt that much anymore. He glances at the wall-clock. It shows 11:55 A.M. So, he decides to get up already. He is so excited and only thinks of the moment he is going to meet Nelly face to face. He is a bit worried and anxious too. But mixed with excitement, Sammy does not think of having breakfast anymore. He knows there are some kebab left over from what he had ordered and ate along with Robert the night before. So, he gets the kebab's plate out of the fridge and puts it inside his microwave. The kebab is heated immediately and Sammy begins having his lunch already. Sammy's headache is completely gone after he finishes having his lunch. He goes to the balcony for some fresh air and to think what his plan for the day would be.

Sammy looks below his building as soon as he enters the balcony. Mr. Al Arafy is as usual working on his beetle Volkswagen known as Hitler. But it looks like Hitler has no plan on getting switched on. Sammy is about to burst into laughter. But he does not. He gazes at Al Darrah's horizon. The main road catches his attention and he is surprised seeing a traffic jam he had never seen on the main road. He remembers how many times Amer had to stop in a traffic jam just to be checked by police and security forces while returning from Damascus to Al Darrah. He thinks a checkpoint has been established near Al Darrah on the main road somewhere and that had caused the traffic. He lowers his head and returns back inside. Sammy lays down on the couch in front of the

television and switches the T.V. on. He calls Amer to see how he is doing. But Amer does not answer his cell-phone. He wants to call Robert. But he changes his mind. Sammy remembers Robert's words and his sobbing the previous night. He decides not to bring it up. Not even with Amer. Moments later, Sammy decides to begin his day by shaving.

\* \* \*

Robert had reached Al Thowrah early in the morning and had already arrived at the hospital. He had mourned with Bibi Sama, mother of the twins, now deceased, comforted her and helped put her son, Hussein's body to the ambulance. Bibi Sama had insisted to go with the ambulance to be with her son's body, so he would not feel lonely till he reached his village. These are what Robert had heard Bibi Sama, the old mourning mother, had said. Before leaving for Al Darrah though, Robert stayed with Hassan who's still in coma for a while.

Robert feels totally different as soon as he steps out of the hospital. He sees people scared. There's a ruckus. Robert cannot find any vehicle willing to take him to Al Darrah or any other town in that direction, until he asks the police man and is told no vehicle will he find to agree taking him to Al Darrah because Isis is already too close and driving towards that direction is way risky. He is being finally forced to pay ten times the normal amount to a man who agreed to get him there. The driver who is initially scared and hesitant tells Robert he has a service till five and he can only take him back to Al Darrah after five P.M. Having no choice, Robert agrees to stay at Al Thowrah till five so he will have a ride back. The most fruitful thing Robert can think of doing in the meanwhile, is to hang around the market and find a good engagement present for Amer and Sara. So, he buys a present and goes back to the hospital to be with Hassan and waits till it is time for him to go. Robert also buys himself a handsfree Bluetooth, so he would not be forced to hold his cell-phone up over his ears when someone calls him. He pairs his new handsfree Bluetooth with his cell-phone while waiting at the hospital. Robert calls Sammy after waiting an hour. Sammy is shaving when Robert calls him. He tells Sammy all about finding it quite difficult to get a ride back home. But Sammy suggests he gets back to Al Darrah under any circumstances and by any cost.

After shaving and speaking to Robert, Sammy takes a long shower. He exits the shower. He knows that day is a landmark

in his life, as he has to prove to himself and his friends of his actual capabilities. To express himself to the girl of his dream for the very first time in his entire life. Everything is like a good sign for him that day. He has already prepared the tools he thinks he is going to need getting face to face with Nelly and expressing his emotions towards her. He has prepared himself mentally and the appearance which he is going to meet Nelly with. Sammy has no doubt he is going to look perfect when he shows up at the party. He has filled the bath tub with warm water and soap and has relaxed every muscle in his body. He is getting prepared every moment goes by. A while later, he sees it is 4 P.M. He knows it is the family elders who would escort Amer and Sara to the Sheikh's office and there still is no need for him. He knows the engagement party is going to begin somewhere between 7-8 P.M. So, he has three to four hours still, he thinks. He hates to be one of the first guests to arrive at the venue. Sara and Amer's engagement party is different though. Sammy and Robert are Amer's best men and have to be there from the beginning to the end. It is better for both Sammy and Robert this way, as they both know they will be spending more time with the girls whom they love at the party.

Sammy dries his body, blow-dries his hair, puts some lotion on his hands and arms and glances at the clock. It is only 04:12. He thinks how to pass the time so he would not be forced to wait longer. He remembers his rifle's metal piece and decides to complete working on it while he has some spare time. But his phone rings. He looks at his cell-phone and sees his cousin Rana's name on it. He answers his phone.

"May God accept your avow." says Rana after saying hello and making some small talk, "I have offered all what you had given me to whomever I saw at the hospital. Many people ate so many and took some also for later. I've just called you so you would know I have done it. I'm now going home to get ready little by little. The party begins at eight, ha?"

"Yes." Sammy replies, "I'll see you there, and Rana, really thank you."

After hanging up, Sammy gets to his workbench, takes his apron and wears it. He gets the metal part out of the oil bowl and cleans it thoroughly. He picks his rifle and tries assembling the part on it. But he is so surprised after noticing the part doesn't fit. So, he thinks for a moment that Tom has

measured it. It takes him an hour to figure out where the problem is after examining the rifle, the part and the drawing. His machine has not machined a small part of the metal piece around less than a millimeter. He has to machine the very small part first quite carefully before it exactly fitted its place on the rifle. It is his father's anniversary the following day and he wants to go to the cemetery and tell him he has finished the rifle.

Sammy places the part on the machine. He is too thirsty. He goes to the kitchen and drinks a glass of water. He glances at the clock when he returns to his room. It is 05:10. He figures he can see Nelly a bit more than half an hour later while she crosses the intersection. But he has to finish machining the part before that so that the rifle will become complete and ready and time would pass faster as well. He puts his iPod's earphones into his ears like always and plays his classical music. The music starts playing. He switches the machine on and the machine begins machining the metal part.

\* \* \*

It is clear Hadji Mazen and his other terrorist companions have destroyed the compound's walls instead of entering through the main gate. They have run over the enclosure's walls and crushed them under their tank tracks. The arms and ammunition industry's warehouse staff were doing their daily work. A few of them had gone to a safe smoking area to drink a cup of tea, smoke a cigarette and take a break when they had suddenly witnessed tanks entering through the nearby walls. All staff realized the severity of the situation and wanted to run when Hadji Mazen and his platoon arrived and captured every single one of them. They took all the personnel from all warehouses out and forced them to load arms and ammunition on the armored trucks they had brought along with them without shooting a single person. Isis cavalry attacked the arms and ammunition industry's warehouse compound using their armored pick-up trucks armed with heavy machine guns, tanks, armored personnel carriers and motocross.

Hadji Mazen and his vicious team members are now waiting outside one of the storage facility buildings, waiting for some of the staff to load ammunition boxes onto their trucks. They seem they're just waiting for the loading process to end. Hadji Mazen and his militias are yelling at the innocent

storage workers, commanding them to work faster and get the loading process done quicker. They are quite clear when they tell the scared staffs they are going to cut their balls off if they notice someone is not working fast enough.

"Faster you bastards." yells Hadji Mazen after scaring the staff by firing a few warning shots around them, "Quickly you losers. You were sitting behind your fucking desks, thinking your lousy army could possibly stop us from advancing and capturing your towns?"

After Hadji Mazen makes sure loading staff are terrified enough, he puts his gun back to his shelf next to his dagger.

"Where's that boy?" asks Hadji Mazen, "How long making a cup of tea is going to take in this shithole of a place?"

A scared young man in his twenties walks out of the storage facility, holding a tray with Arabic teapot and a few small Arabic cups in it. The young man's hands are obviously shaking. He walks towards the tank Hadji Mazen is standing on. He genuinely looks terrified.

"Here sir." says the young man with a shaky voice, "Sorry sir. I had to wait for the water to boil."

Petrified of what Hadji Mazen may do to him for delaying, he places the tray on the tank wheel, picks up the tea pot and begins pouring tea in the little tea cups.

"Yalla. Yalla." yells Hadji Mazen, meaning quickly, quickly. The young man stops pouring the tea into the other cups as he is afraid, he is pissing the terrorist off. So, he picks a cup full of Arabic tea and hands it over to Hadji Mazen. The creepy Isis terrorist takes the cup from the young man's hand. That's when he notices a yellow gold ring on the young man's finger.

"What is that you are wearing?" asks Hadji angrily.

"It's my wedding ring sir." replies the young man petrified, "I just got married last week sir.

"Don't you know wearing gold is Haram in our beloved prophet's religion? Ha? Don't you know you Satan lover?"

The young man starts crying. He probably knows what is waiting for him next. He begins apologizing while trying to take his yellow gold ring off his finger. That's when Hadji Mazen places his cup of tea on the tank, jumps down the tank and



stands face to face with the young man. He removes his dagger. The young man knows he is going to die. So, the only thing he can think of is to run towards inside the storage facility. But Hadji Mazen puts his dagger back and removes his gun and shoots the boy on the buttocks.

The young man's face hits the ground. Hadji Mazen places his gun back and takes out his dagger again. He walks towards the young man, bends when he reaches him and starts beheading the moaning young man without paying any attention to his colleagues who are terrifyingly pleading to the monster to forgive the young man and spare him. But Hadji Mazen is not hearing any of it. The monster cuts the young man's finger and throws it towards another Isis member. "Keep the gold and throw the rest." Says Hadji laughing loudly.

An old man who is amongst workers who are forced to load the ammunition, can no longer tolerate what Hadji Mazen and his terrorist crew members are doing to innocent and helpless people, specially to the young boy. So, he lets lose his temper and begins questioning the monster.

"Why?" asks the old man yelling, "Why did you have to kill him? He just got married. Don't you know God? What kind of a religion do you practice? What kind of God do you pray too? This is a sin. I swear to Allah this is a sin."

The old man's voice is quieted down by a bullet that hits him right at his throat. Omar, one of Hadji Mazen crew members targeted the old man's throat and shut him down. Tears roll down workers terrified and fearful faces. But they know they cannot complain or do anything about crimes Isis commits against their innocent people. They know they'll have to finish what Hadji Mazen and his team want so they would know what their fates would be, and only a fraction of hope sparkled in their heart that maybe, just maybe all that Isis and Hadji Mazen want is ammunition and they would spare their lives after they got what they wanted. Every single one of the workers simply thinks of their families and whether they are safe at that moment or they have faced the same fates as them.

After making sure the young man is dead, Hadji Mazen cleans his dagger by the young man's hair and walks back towards his tank, goes up the tank, picks his cup of tea and reminds everyone what just happened to the young boy and the old man,

is going to be their destiny if they do not work fast enough and hard enough.

Hadji Mazen finishes drinking the tea. He is laughing and joking with his people as if nothing has happened and he has not taken lives of two humans. He is lighting his Arabic pipe when he hears a voice on his walkie-talkie.

"This is Al Allawi." says the voice, "From the leader to team one. Assalam Alaykom."

Hearing the voice of his superior, Hadji Mazen gets himself together, clears his throat, and replies,

"Va alaykomosalam sir." replies Hadji Mazen, "At your service sir."

"Declare your position."

"Sir, we are at the ammunition storage compound, completing the given mission as commanded. We will finish loading and get back to you as instructed."

"Ok. Understood." replies Al Alawi, "But I don't want you and your team members back at the temporary base. I was told there's a little town near the storage facilities called Al Darrah. Send the truck and ammunition back to me, attack Al Darrah and clean it up. I'm sure you know what I mean. Team number two will be joining you at 2 A.M. or at dawn tomorrow latest. Team 2 will clean up towards Aleppo. You and your team clean up every town, village, city and civilization towards west, because I will advance tomorrow after you inform me you've done the cleanup. I don't want any surprises, remember that. So, no one alive. No police or military security and anyone holding a gun or rifle alive. We will have to carry ammunition with the same trucks you are loading on. We cannot attack if we lose those two trucks. Over."

"Yes sir. I'll not fail you sir. God be with you."

To please his superior Al Allawi, Hadji Mazen clears his throat again.

"I'll not let anyone holding arms alive. My name is Hadji Mazen. I'm not born yesterday. I'll kill all these non-Muslims. You know I'll not fail you and our beloved profit and Islam. I love executing these so-called Muslim bastards."

"Allah Akbar. God be with you."

"I'm thinking of selecting some souvenirs for you sir. I mean I'm sure I'll come across a few young boys and girls. So, you would have some more fun sir also. I'll catch them and keep them specially for you sir."

"Good man." replies Al Allawi after he laughs an evil laughter, "I'm sure you will find me some. You find yourselves temporary brides, so you'll have some fun also after attack. Find and keep all alcohol, so when we join you, we make a real victory party."

"Of course, sir." replies Hadji Mazen after laughing a devilish laugh like his boss Al Allawi. Because he knows he has pleased him.

"The trucks are almost full of ammunition already. I'm going to send them to you. We will attack that Al Darrah town. We will attack around afternoon and evening sir."

Hadji Mazen and Al Allawi's conversation over walkie-talkies ends. Hadji Mazen calls Abu Mahdi, one of his cruelest assistants. Ayad, another heartless assistant of Hadji Mazen runs towards him at the same time heavily breathing, bends his back and bows before Hadji Mazen,

"It looks like loading is over, ha?" Hadji Mazen asks

"Yes sir. It's done." replies Ayad.

"Ok. Go and push all of them inside the Silo building, stand behind one of them with a dagger and start sawing his head off. Let everyone see that. Use this scare technique, so they'll reveal where they hid the money. They will have to open the safe whether they like it or not. Walk around inside and see if there's any young and beautiful girls or boys."

Hadji Mazen pauses for a moment. He changes his mind and continues:

"Actually, you know what? Bring all female staff outside."

"Yes sir. Right away. Should I let these bastards who helped loading ammunitions on our trucks go free sir?"

"No. no." replies Hadji Mazen getting agitated, "If they agree, I mean any of them agrees to be part of us, bring him to me. If they become rude, kill them all, open machine gun fire on them all. They're actually not useful to us. They are clerks. They don't know shit about war and battle. Smartest ones have already fled before we arrived. Stupid ones are now left. Actually, kill them all. They're waste of my time."

Hadji Mazen issues an order for the truck to go back towards Al Allawi at his base. Truck drivers start their trucks and drive out of the compound. Hadji Mazen calls for all the platoon to gather around him as he wants to tell everyone what their next step and strategic plan is. He asks one of his members to make sure all others are present before he begins talking.

Abu Mahdi enters the Silo building, after he makes sure every single staff is forced in by his soldiers. He attacks one of the youngest staff of the storage facility, hits him on the ground hard, takes his dagger out and glares at everyone angrily.

"Who is the fucking accountant here?" asks Abu Mahdi.

There is a tiny old man amongst terrified staff who steps out and introduces himself as the accountant. Abu Mahdi asks the old man in a threatening way where does he keep all the money? He tells the old man he is going to kill everyone if he does not immediately bring him all the cash available in the safe. Out of fear and as a gesture of respect, the old man places the palm of his right hand on his chest and answers Abu Mahdi while shaking that there is no safe and they do not hold any cash, the facility being a government storage facility. The poor old man swears the only money that sometimes is kept, is some small amount of petty cash and that is for purchasing tea, coffee and sugar for staff's breaks. He tries hard to make evil Abu Mahdi to understand the reason he is called an accountant is simply a title and his actual job is to keep the petty cash and spends it on the required items he just mentioned. But like an angry animal, Abu Mahdi sits on the back of the young man and asks everyone to pay close attention to what he is about to do. He begins sawing the innocent man's neck, while all his colleagues cry and scream for Abu Mahdi to have mercy on the young man's life. Another old man who is hitting himself on the head and shaking out of anger yells,

"Is this a bank? Is a storage compound where the government keeps the money? Why did you kill the poor man? Are you not Muslims?"

After separating the young man's head from his body, Abu Mahdi stands up. He is holding the young man's head. The head swings while he holds it from the bloody hair. Abu Mahdi takes his gun out with his other hand and asks:

"How many women work here?"

"This is not a place for girls and women to work, mister." replies another old man agitated, "We are a bunch of men, middle aged old men mainly, working in this facility. The youngest was the one you Godless piece of hell just Slaughtered."

Abu Mahdi holds his gun up, targets the old man's face and pulls the trigger. The bullet rips through the old man's right cheek and exits from the back of the man's head, splashing, spraying blood and brain particles on the wall behind him.

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Hadji Mazen asks for the military helmet of one of his subordinates. He takes the helmet and gives it to one of the frightened staff.

"Throw all your cash, gold, jewelry and valuables here in this helmet." yells Abu Mahdi furiously.

Terrified storage staff who are shaking, praying and crying for what would their fate be, take off their cash, gold rings, watches, necklaces and all their valuable items inside the helmet.

After robbing the staff from all valuable items, they had on them, Abu Mahdi takes the helmet from the guy's hand and exits the storage building.

The moment he reaches Hadji Mazen, Abu Mahdi places the sawed head of the young man whom he executed in front of him. They both smile and nod. Hadji Mazen tells him how proud he is of Abu Mahdi for doing exactly as Islamic guidelines instruct him to do. But Abu Mahdi tells Hadji that he is not yet done with the staff. He hands the helmet to Hadji and climbs up the truck which he and his four soldiers use for transportation. His truck is armed with a heavy machine gun.

Abu Mahdi orders his driver to drive the armored truck a few yards ahead and stop right in front of the storage's entrance, where the staff are in.

The armored truck moves a few yards ahead. Abu Mahdi thumps the truck's roof and orders the driver to stop already. They're still a few yards before they reach the Silo building's gate. The armored truck driver stops. All staff are shaking terrified. They are realizing slowly the reason they were all pushed inside this Silo building. They know they'll find out in a matter of seconds what dark ending awaits them. They are sweating, some praying, some yelling their wife, child, mother or loved ones names. Abu Mahdi who is standing behind the heavy machine gun himself now, places his index finger on the machine gun's trigger, aims the barrel towards the petrified staff, yells Allah o Akbar and pulls the trigger. The heavy machine gun's bullets, which are originally designed to destroy tanks and heavy metal war machines, rip through the staff who are by now aimlessly running from one side to the other side of the storage. The machine gun's bullets are so powerful that each bullet passes through four to five innocent men's bodies.

But Abu Mahdi wants every single one of them dead. He wants to make absolutely sure no one survives.

All Hadji Mazen's platoon terrorist members are gathering around Hadji, so he would reveal their next mission while they watch what Abu Mahdi does to those helpless and defenseless facility staff, waiting for him to also finish and join them to hear the strategic plan. Isis members cheer and applaud. They yell Allah o Akbar - God is great in Arabic, laugh and whistle for Abu Mahdi's bravery and proving what a great Muslim man, he is once again.

Motionless bodies of Abu Mahdi's victims lay on the ground. A stream is created by the blood of the staff whose crime was simply to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. There is a heaviness inside the Silo building. Abu Mahdi orders one of his soldiers to go and close the Silo building's gate. After closing the gate, proud and pleased with what he has done, Abu Mahdi and his three soldiers join everyone to hear Hadji Mazen, their commander's announcements.

"Brothers," says Hadji Mazen, "there's a reason I did not ask any of you to escort those trucks back to the base. I was told there's a little town nearby called Al Darrah. We are

heading towards that town next. The objective is to clean the town from all law enforcements, police, military, security forces when we arrive Al Darrah. We are heading towards Al Darrah for a cleanup. Now, what's a cleanup I'm sure you ask. I know this is the first time you are doing this knowing you well as fighters. So, a cleanup is eliminating any armed forces in Al Darrah. That means even if a person is in his pajamas, but has a kitchen knife in his hand, he is armed. So, kill him without hesitation. A cleanup is to eliminate potential threats, like young men who want to become a hero. If you feel someone is thinking of taking a revenge, don't hesitate to kill him or her on spot. We are front liners. We will clean up these areas from the enemy for our most respected leaders to cross and conquer the world in safety and assurance that no harm will be done to them when crossing these areas. Also, if we face any serious threat ahead, we know for a fact that we will be supported by those who follow us from the behind. I know you are going to love this part. Another reason we agree to do the cleanup, is also because it's been days since we have one-night brides. So, we are going to have some fun with the captive girls and boys too."

Everyone cheers and gives a round of applause. All Hadji Mazen's soldiers begin clapping for him, laughing loud and humping up and down as if they won the lottery.

"Quiet, Quiet." continues Hadji Mazen, "I'm not finished yet. Yes, we will choose our brides for tonight and like I said, we will have so much fun. You will first get all the girls and beautiful women to me. I'll choose a few for the commander Al Allawi and myself first, as I've promised him some souvenirs. You can have all the rest. This part is damn important. Listen carefully. Search all the banks and financial institutions for cash. Kill the elderly. Do not hesitate. Kill the elderly and ill on spot. This is also very important. Only those who are willing to convert to the most complete religion of Islam and join our cause will survive. The rest will die, one way or another. Take a quick rest, have a cup of tea, get high, I don't give a fuck, pray if you want to, get your weapons cleaned, armed and ready. We will go back to the base after the cleanup is over. We cleanup, so our main leader's group will not face any damn surprises when they advance. Tonight, or maximum tomorrow though, team two will join us as well. They will cleanup towards the city of Aleppo and we head towards Al Thowrah. We normally take care of ourselves. I mean my team barely needs any support. But I want you to know we have two backups in case we face a bigger

enemy than we expected. We first get support from prophet Muhammad and Allah. We get support from army of our leaders. They will hit them with all what they have, in case we are in trouble and need help. You can treat the young girls and women like we did with Yazidis back in Sinjar. You are allowed to have up to ten boys and/or girls, have fun with them as much as your dicks work. You can have boys if you like. Get all alcoholic drinks you can find in the town. We will drink to celebrate our cause and victory for taking another big step ahead. Now, who is ready for victory? Say Allah o Akbar.”

All Isis soldiers and assistants cheer and yell Allah o Akbar and get ready for the attack on Al Darrah.

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The driver finally picks Robert up, so he would drive him to Al Darrah as he wanted. He goes to the main hospital gate as they have agreed, picks him up and drives towards Al Darrah. He is uneasy and disturbed for the fact that he has agreed to take Robert all the way to Al Darrah. It is apparent that he is remorseful for the decision. Why he has made such a stupid decision. So, he drives like a crazy. His mood has affected the way he drives.

“Of course, you have charged me way more than a normal fee to take me to Al Darrah.” says Robert to psychologically calm the driver down, But I’m actually okay with that, you know. You deserve it really. Because I’m going back to Al Darrah to be part of a good deed. It’s one of my two best friend’s engagement ceremony today and I’ll have to be there for him in case he needs me. I have to come to Al Thowrah and visits someone at the hospital this morning. Otherwise, I really had no spare time today specially. But I came anyways and made an old woman happy. I did it because we are human and should be there for one another. I’m sure this help you are doing; I mean your effort would not be unseen by God. I guess what I’m trying to say is, you’ll surely be rewarded by God for the help you have offered me today.”

The driver frowns a bit and glances at Robert who is seated at the back seat from his rearview mirror. He is under the impression Robert is making up stories just to calm him down. So, he pauses for a moment after he glances at Robert.



"Engagement ceremony." replies the driver, "Really? In Al Darrah? In this fucked-up situation. Of course. You think I'm an idiot?"

He glances at Robert from his front mirror again, looking suspicious and continues driving.

"Yes sir." replies Robert, knowing a stressed and agitated drive may result in a car crash. So, to calm the driver down, Robert tries to talk and calm him psychologically.

"You don't believe me? Follow me and see it for yourself. Why do I have to lie about such a thing? I'll invite you inside so you would see. That's easy. This is the engagement present I have bought for my friend and his fiancé."

Robert takes out the gift-wrapped box out of its plastic case, lifts it up, so the driver can see it from his rearview mirror.

"Of course, you have all the right not to believe what I say." continues Robert, "It's a fucked-up situation we are in as you said. But my best friend and his fiancé made all the arrangements months ago. Believe it or not, all of us, their friends, family and relatives are in fact scared to death why we stay at Al Darrah. But the date has been set already long back and everyone has been invited already. Everything, every necessary arrangement is already done and it is impossible and very expensive for them to reschedule their ceremony. But we all, I mean both bride and the groom's side relatives and family, all of us, will flee Al Darrah first thing in the morning tomorrow though. We are just waiting for those two love birds to become legal and Halal to each other. We will all run of course."

The driver looks as if he has believed what Robert tells him. He seems calm and drives more reasonably than minutes ago when he first picked Robert up. The reason why he is so pissed off and agitated is actually that he had spoken to his wife, informing her he has agreed to drive a passenger to Al Darrah, while he was on his way to the Al Thowrah hospital to pick Robert up. His wife had gotten furious, had begun nagging on him angrily, asking him to cancel the trip and not to show up at the hospital. She had done her best to change her husband's mind, telling him they did not need the money, and this had created a verbal argument between the husband and wife. They had hung up the phone in an angry way. But claiming that he is the man of his word and never makes a promise that he

cannot keep, the driver picked Robert up, despite all what his wife did to discourage him.

The driver drives his vehicle to the road which joins the main road and exits the pedestrian area. They come face to face with a huge number of vehicles coming from Al Darrah side.

"You see mister?" asks the driver, "This is one of the reasons why I was pissed off when I picked you up. Do you see the damn traffic? Do you see?" Can you imagine when I'll be reaching back home to my family? Now, you place yourself in my shoes."

Robert glances at the both sides of the main intercity road. The vehicles coming from Al Darrah and east are so many that they move yard by yard. They all have their luggage whether in the trunk and they have secured their trunk door with a piece of robe or have them on the roof secured on their roof racks. It is quite apparent they have carried all what they can in the shortest time span possible and run for their lives. Vehicles move very close to one another and move very slowly. They have to stop every few yards and move again. The other side of the road is literally filled with vehicles. But no vehicle can be seen moving towards the east and Al Darrah. The car Robert is in, is probably the only vehicle heading that direction which is a strange thing to see for the passengers of the vehicles on the other side of the road. Every one of them looks inside the vehicle Robert is sitting in and some shake their heads, thinking him and his driver have lost their minds and are going to the wrong direction.

Robert places the handsfree Bluetooth he bought from Al Thowrah into his ear and contacts Amer to see if everything is okay at his end. Amer answers his cell-phone while he sounds quite in a hurry panting. So, Robert asks him if everything is alright back in Al Darrah? Which Amer says in response that so far everything is going smooth and according to the plan, and he does not know if things are going to continue smoothly. Amer asks Robert to get back to Al Darrah immediately as he needs Robert's help and he is not there with him. Robert calms him down by saying he is already on his way, as a kind gentleman has agreed to drop him back to Al Darrah. He tells Amer all about the huge number of the vehicles on the road. He also informs Amer what he has gone through to find a kind hearted individual who agreed giving him a ride.

"Now all elderly family and relative members are walking me towards Sheikh's office at the roundabout Amer says. "Sara is also walking towards the roundabout along with her family and relative elderly members. We are going to join outside Sheikh's office as per the traditions. We will be registered soon dude."

Robert and Amer's telephone conversation ends. The driver who has heard Robert speaking to his best friend about his engagement is now certain that he was not actually been lying when he told him about the engagement ceremony. So, he feels good that he is doing the right thing and he is really going to be rewarded for his good deed. He plays a nice happy Arabic song and continues driving. It is time for Robert to contact Hanieh after he finishes speaking to Amer over the phone. He calls Hanieh

"How are you darling?" asks Robert, "You know how much I miss you already?"

Hanieh sounds shy and blushing though.

"I guess," she replies, "I guess me too."

"I'm on my way and should immediately join Amer as I arrive. He needs my help. We can meet when I arrive."

"Sara asked me to stick around." replies Hanieh, "She actually asked Nelly and I to company her and their relatives to the Sheikh's office. But Nelly thinks Sara meant she wanted me and her to join her after seven or eight in the evening. So, she went ahead and attended her guitar class. She said she can only join us for the party in the early evening. So, why did you go to Al Thowrah?"

"I texted you last night already and explained why I had to go to Al Thowrah." replies Robert, "I went to help late Hussein's old mother to send her son's body to his village by the hospital's ambulance. Pour old woman was, and still is, in a quite fragile emotional state. Of course, she would be. She has just lost one of her twin sons. These twin brothers really remind me of my brother, Robin. So, I had to go darling. We cried for quite a long time comforting one another. I had made her a promise. I was going to stay with Hassan, the son who is still in coma, while she companied the deceased son's corps back to their village. I knew everyone would head towards Al Latakia. So, I returned to Al Thowrah hospital and stayed with Hassan like I promised, hoping a miracle would happen, Hassan would come to and finally reveals what happened

to my brother. What are you going to do sweetheart? Where do you escape to along with your parents?"

"Oh. I have to go," says Hanieh hurriedly, "You be safe. I'll tell you when I see you. Bye."

Robert and Hanieh's telephone conversation ends.

Elderly members of Sara's family from one side and Amer's from the other, are following them towards Al Darrah's only roundabout by walk. They have to meet at the roundabout where the Sheikh's office actually is. Everyone is happy for the young couple whose engagement is going to be officiated despite the country's critical situation. They laugh and joke with one another while escorting Sara and Amer to the Sheikh's registry office separately.

They reach the meeting point around five minutes later. There are a total number of around fifteen relatives and friends all together. After Sara and Amer's relatives greet one another, hug and congratulate each other, they enter the Sheikh's office to finish the process. Amer's parents, his aunt Zahra, Sammy's mother, and other elderly relatives of both bride and the groom are there. As per their traditions, they have followed their bride and the groom by walk from their parents houses while people cheer and whistle for the auspicious event that is taking place. As a tradition and to participate in the young couple's union, some people escort the bride and some others escort the groom's relatives from a distance.

\* \* \*

Unaware of all that is happening at Al Darrah's roundabout, Nelly is busy learning a new guitar chord at her tutor's place. She knows she has to be ready and show up at Al Majed's garden for the engagement party. So, she figures she still has time and therefore shows no interest to end her guitar session in a hurry.

\* \* \*

Daniel is driving towards the storage facilities at the industrial zone, where he and his staff left off work the very early that morning. After driving out of the town for a while, he reaches the part of the road where a service road joins the main road, he is suddenly shocked by what he

witnesses. He sees a huge number of vehicles rushing from the east, Al Yass and the industrial zone, towards the west, Al Darrah and then western and safer side of the country. Daniel notices none of those vehicles take the exit leading to Al Darrah though. It is apparent that they are all headed to a city far in the west. He knows with the number of vehicles which have illegally occupied the other side of the road and the service road he is driving on; he is not going to reach the industrial zone. At least not that soon. There are so many escaping vehicles that they are using the main double track road as a one-way road, occupying the side Daniel is driving on as well, and preventing him to proceed on the side of the road which belongs to him legally to drive towards the opposite direction.

Daniel presumes he already knows why all those vehicles are hurriedly rushing to the opposite direction, considering what he heard the commander told him and his staff and what he witnessed happened to Al Yaas Town's sky the night before. But he is under the impression the situation in the other eastern cities and provinces is what made people think of escaping. He still does not even imagine how close Isis's threats are already.

Daniel begins feeling uneasy. He has a weird feeling that he cannot explain. He knows he is feeling more afraid every second goes by. But he still cannot pinpoint the reason. So, he clears his throat and call his staff supervisor, Ashraf.

"Sir," says Ashraf after he answers Daniel's call, "We moved towards the storage facilities more than an hour and a half ago and we have still not arrived. It's crazy. The road I mean. So many maniac drivers. They have occupied both sides of the road Mr. Daniel. Do you know why sir?"

Daniel does not want to freak out his staff. So, he tells Ashraf the situation of farther provinces and towns have become threatening and he thinks this was what caused people to panic, fear the uncertainty and escape hurriedly.

"Anyways, I guess we will be arriving at our location in less than an hour if we use dirt roads and shortcuts." replies Ashraf.

"Great." replies Daniel, "But please start the work. Don't wait for me. Ask everyone to start doing their jobs before I arrive and join you."

Daniel suddenly remembers Hanif, one of his staff who had to deliver the Al Yaas storage key to the storage keeper.

"Oh. What happened to Hanif?" asks Daniel, "Did he deliver the key? They are waiting."

"Yeah yeah." replies Ashraf, "I've already spoke to him. He is on his way to Al Yaas now."

What Ashraf tells Daniel, makes him relaxed and happy. Every single angle of his operation has already been taken care of. Daniel and Ashraf's telephone conversation ends after Daniel tells Ashraf he is going to join and meet him in a few minutes.

\* \* \*

Hanif is driving his motorcycle. He is on his way to Al Yaas when he notices the drivers driving from Al Yaas towards the west are quite reckless and seem very much in a hurry. He cannot drive as fast as he wants since cars coming from the east, northeast, Al Yaas and probably other threatened towns and provinces of the danger area have made a two-way road a one-way road to get away from that area as quick as possible. What Hanif witnesses, truly scares him. He feels it is too dangerous to drive with all those reckless drivers coming towards him.

Hanif is a twenty-five-year-old man, recently married and has an infant daughter. He became a law-abiding man after his child was born, so cautious and prudent.

Avoiding to meet an accident, Hanif decides to exit the main road and drive on the service road only. After driving on the service road for a few more seconds he suddenly notices a cavalry of tanks, armored pick-up trucks, motor crosses and army transportation vehicles, which all have black flags with something imprinted raised on them. Something which he cannot read from that far of a distance. He notices the cavalry he sees is heading towards him.

Hanif has put all his focus to see whether the tanks, armed pick-up trucks, bikes and etc. belong to Syrian army or any other security forces. But he suddenly remembers a report he had seen on T.V. where all Isis vehicles had a black flag raised to them. He looks again and he is absolutely certain those are Isis terrorists advancing towards Al Darrah. He recognizes those hideous flags which indicate terror and fear.

Hanif's entire body begins to shake. His face turns pale and he automatically reduces speed. He now has no doubt which evil faction those flags belong to and the sinister message they symbolize. He knows those flags mean terror and barbarity. Fear has taken control of Hanif's every move and thought, so much so that he loses control of driving and crashes. But nothing actually happens to him because the same fear had made his hands and legs numb and caused his bike to slow down before that. Hanif's heart stops beating for a moment. He gets up, lifts his bike up and turns back towards Al Darrah, knowing he is definitely going to get caught and killed by the approaching terrorists if he stays there any longer.

Hanif uses all the energy and focus left in him to get on his motorcycle and drive back as fast as he can. He uses his shaking hands moments later to take his cell-phone out, while he increases speed, pushing the gas. He quickly finds Daniel's number among his call log and dials.

"Daniel's cell-phone is ringing, but he cannot hear it as he has pulled his window down and the sound of his surrounding is so loud that he cannot actually hear his cell-phone ring. Hanif is now over speeding. His face has turned red now, because of anxiety and worry. He dials Daniel once again, begging him to answer. But Daniel cannot still hear his phone and this has made Hanif even more frustrated. He turns his head every now and then to see whether Isis terrorists are catching up. All other vehicles are honking for one another, asking to go faster. But Hanif does not have a traffic problem driving a two wheeled motorcycle. He dials Daniel again, murmurs begging him to answer. He bursts into tears. It's all because of so much fear. Daniel does not answer again.

All that Hanif thinks at that moment is how to save his young and beautiful wife and their infant daughter. Where to take them. How much is their escape going to cost him. He pushes his mind to find answer for all that he has to know while crying loudly. He suddenly figures what he has to do. He thinks of his brother, who is actually in charge of audio-visual department of Al Darrah's municipality. So, he finds his brother's number on his phone and dials his brother this time. His plan is to ask his brother to go pick his wife and daughter and escapes town without waiting or thinking about what would happen to him.

Hanif's brother answers his phone moments after he dials his number. His brother is quite shocked hearing Hanif's

terrified voice, mumbling that Isis is reaching Al Darrah. Hanif tells his brother to go and fetch his wife and child and gets away before it is too late.

Hanif's brother is now panicking too. It is going to take him a while to digest what his brother just told him. But he suddenly figures he has no reason whatsoever to doubt what his brother has just warned him about. He has never heard his brother that scared and apprehensive, shaking and terrified till now.

Hanif's cell-phone rings the moment he hangs up and ends his telephone conversation with his brother. He glances at his phone and sees Daniel's name on the screen. So, he answers the phone.

"Sir. They are coming." says Hanif crying and shaking, "Oh dear God, save us all. Oh my God. What should we do boss? What should I do? Oh God. Run sir. Get away from Al Darrah. Tell everyone you know. They'll arrive any moment. They are right behind me sir. My wife sir. My infant daughter."

"Wait. Calm down." replies Daniel disoriented and panicky, "You stop crying so I would understand what you are trying to tell me. Who is coming man? What are you talking about? Where are you?"

"Isis sir." replies Hanif trying hard not to cry and speak slowly, "Isis is coming boss. Oh, dear God have mercy on us all. Daniel sir, they are coming with their tanks, machine gun pick-up trucks, motor crosses and all that. All have Isis black flags on them. Wait sir."

Daniel face turns pale after what Hanif tells him. He becomes numb and speechless, waiting for Hanif to continue saying what he wanted to say. His mind begins thinking of every possibility and every single member of his family. Daniel is sweating and holding his cell-phone to his ear.

Hanif turns his head and looks back now. He notices Isis vehicles have moved towards their right side, trying to come on the road from the desert around the road. Hanif bursts into tears again crying louder than before. He wants to continue and tells Daniel what he has seen. But he suddenly hears a big blast behind him, and that big explosion sound ends Hanif and Daniel's conversation. Because the blast has tossed his cell-phone out of his hand.



After hearing the huge explosion, Hanif turns his head immediately and is astound when he witnesses a few of the vehicles are knocked off, flying to the left and right side of the road. They are on fire and black smoke bellowing upwards. Some other vehicles lose control after the blast. After hearing the blast and getting disconnected from Hanif, Daniel seems to have just realized what Hanif was talking about and how severe the situation is. He actually hears the blast not only from Hanif's phone, but also, he hears the explosion from far away as he is driving towards Al Yaas storage facilities on the same road. He is now worried for what is going to happen to his other staff who are on their ways to the storage facilities to complete loading Mr. Al Majed's cargo and transportation. He knows they are all on the same bloody road, but with different distances.

Daniel cannot breath properly as he is under a panic and anxiety attack. He makes a U-turn immediately and heads back towards Al Darrah as fast as he can. He steps on the gas, only thinking about his children, wife and mother-in-law.

Hanif is on panic too, driving his motorcycle between so many cars driven by terrified drivers shaking out of fear.

\* \* \*

The driver drives his car to the road that leads to Al Darrah and Robert is happy he is going to make it to Amer's engagement ceremony on time. He has been waiting in the hospital with Hassan since that morning, waiting for the only driver who agreed to drive him back to Al Darrah. The driver had asked for a big amount and Robert had agreed to pay it, just to arrive on time for Amer's ceremony. A big smile appears on Robert's lips when the driver enters the west end entrance to Al Darrah.

When the car moves towards the town a few yards, the driver's cell-phone starts ringing. The driver who happens to be a law-abiding citizen of Al Thowrah, puts his phone on speaker and answers the phone. He knows he cannot talk on his cell-phone and drive at the same time,

"Hello." says the driver knowing who called him, "Hello, hello Mr. Reza, my dear colleague. What's up?"

Reza begins talking while breathing heavily, quite anxious with a shaken voice which says he is terrified and is actually

about to burst into tears. The driver has gotten quite scared hearing the way Reza speaks. He turns pale and pauses, so Reza would say what he wants to say.

"My brother-in-law, the driver, had a passenger he was bringing from Al Yaas to Al Thowrah. I remember you told me you have a passenger for Al Darrah today in the afternoon. Isis just entered Al Darrah. Don't enter Al Darrah town. Don't. Where are you now? Answer me Goddamnit. Mohammad!"

Reza is one of Mohammad, the driver's colleagues. They have services together and have their own clientele. Robert's driver, Mohammad, and Reza are very close. Reza called Mohammad's home and found out from his wife that Mohammad had headed towards Al Darrah despite his wife asking him to return immediately as they didn't really need the money. So, Reza had immediately called Mohammad to give him heads up. He is quite worried his friend and colleague is going to be captured by Isis terrorists.

"I... I...I'm now," rumbles Mohammad shaking, "I'm at Al Darrah's entrance already."

"What? Oh, dear God help us. Make a U-turn immediately." yells Reza, "Drop your God damn passenger wherever you are at, and come back as fast as you can, buddy. I have to go. Just escape while you still can. Bye."

Robert goes pale after he hears Reza, his driver's colleague, tells him over that disturbing phone call. But he cannot believe Isis have already reached Al Darrah. He has a feeling Isis is soon going to arrive and attack Al Darrah. Not that fast though. He knows all those vehicles and people heading towards the safety of west from Al Darrah and other cities are in danger zone, have a reason to do so. He thinks they had probably heard terrorists were going to attack them soon, did not want to take any risks and therefore fled their cities and towns, preventing their loved ones to get captured by Isis, but he never thought Isis was that close that fast.

To make a U-turn, Mohammad the driver has to reach the intersection, which one of its exits leads to Al Darrah. As soon as Mohammad makes a left turn to reach the intersection and drives for one more minute, his legs go numb and gets pulled from the gas.

Mohammad and Robert see vehicles, buses, bikes and even people running on foot. People are rushing towards Mohammad's car like a flood. Only Robert figures there must have been a serious problem. That's why everyone is running. Before picking Robert up, Mohammad suddenly remembers the argument he had with his wife in regards to taking a passenger to Al Darrah. He suddenly pulls over, "get out. We are here." says Mohammad agitated and worried, "I'm not going to drive you any further. Get out before making my children fatherless and orphans." Robert wants to convince the driver to take him a bit further at least.

"Get the hell out of my car you mother fucker." yells Mohammad interrupting Robert in a very mad way. Will you get the fuck out or I should throw your lifeless corps out there? Ha?"

Mohammad reaches for a heavy chain he keeps under his seat before getting out. His eyes has turned red and Robert knows he is in danger. So, he grabs the present case he bought for Amer and Sara's engagement and other things. He jumps out of Mohammad's car before he does something crazy out of fear and anger. Robert is scared. He has lost control over his thoughts. He is extremely nervous.

"What is going on?" he asks himself, "Why are people fleeing in that fear?" He cannot do anything for a moment.

Robert can hear no sound of shooting, explosions and any sound that indicates a conflict is going on anywhere.

While cursing at Robert for being the cause for him to be in a very dangerous part of the country, state and province,

Mohammad returns back to his car, pulls the glass dawn and asks Robert for the fair they had agreed upon. Robert takes a step towards the car window, places his elbows on the glass and begins removing some cash from his wallet. But since he is a bit nervous and anxious, he does not do it fast enough as Mohammad expects. So, Mohammad curses at him for one last time, asking him to hurry up. He loses patience, snatches the money and the wallet together and drives away with his car.

Robert knows Mohammad is not a thief or a criminal, but he also knows people react differently to fear and anxiety. Mohammad's main fear and concern is that he has absolutely no idea what is actually going to happen to him in Al Darrah.

And that fear and anxiety caused him snatching Robert's wallet and all what he has in it.

Speechless and wandering, Robert stares at people, vehicles and motor bikes running from Al Darrah. Mohammad pushes his car gas and leaves people who are scared running so fast that Robert does not even have a chance to ask any of them the reason why they are running or what they are actually running from. So, he begins walking towards Sammy's house, while holding Amer engagement present.

\* \* \*

Hanieh is at Sheikh's office, along with Amer, Sara and some of their close elderly relatives when her parents call her. She, however, cannot hear if anyone calls her since no cell-phone are allowed inside Sheikh's office. Hanieh's parents are quite eager to talk to her and warn her about what is happening and since she does not answer her phone, because she has to put her cell-phone on silence, they have no other choice but to contact Sara and ask her to hand the phone over to their daughter. But at the same time, they call Sara. Sara has luckily forgotten to switch her phone off or put it on silence at least. She answers the phone while Sheikh glowers at her bothered with the fact that her phone rang loudly and messed his concentration. Sara answers her phone and speaks to Hanieh's mom. She hands the phone to Hanieh.

Robert calls Hanieh at the same time. This time, Hanieh's finger touches her cell-phone screen by mistake without her even noticing that. Robert keeps on saying hello. He wants to ask Hanieh where she is and why people are running and acting crazy. But Hanieh is asking her father at the same time to come and pick her up from Al Darrah's roundabout and Robert thinks Hanieh is actually asking him to pick her from the roundabout. So, he hangs up the phone and heads towards the roundabout, worried for why is his girlfriend so distraught?

There are no vehicles going towards eastern side of Al Darrah and the roundabout. There is not a soul in the street anymore. The street is quiet, like a ghost town already. Robert is becoming terrified. He still has a long way to walk as he has no other means of transportation. He suddenly notices a teenager size bicycle which is left at the middle of an alley. It is quite apparent to him that the owner and the parents have fled in hurry and did not even bother to take the bicycle.

So, he calls for the house owner which the bicycle is left in front of and picks the bicycle after he makes sure no one is there to claim the bicycle. He sits on the bicycle and begins paddling as fast as he can. He notices there is a little basket attached to the front of the bicycle. There are few little toys in the basket. So, he takes the little toys out and throw them on the ground while paddling and places the engagement present, he has bought in the basket instead.

\* \* \*

Hadji Mazen ordered his tank driver to shoot a tank missile towards escaping vehicles on the road to prevent them from getting away from him and his terrorist members. The missile's impact was so great that after destroying around six or seven vehicles, left a twenty-meter-wide hole with around a-meter-deep hole on the main road. After the explosion, the vehicles which reached the explosion hole had no other choice but to push their breaks and this caused around fifty speeding vehicles crashing into each other. All other vehicles had to stop as the road was damaged and if they drove into the soft desert sand on the side of the road, they would have been stuck.

All drivers and passengers of those vehicles can see Isis tanks now. They take their chances and try driving through the desert. They do and become stuck a few yards driving into the desert. The desert sand is so light and soft, even a human finds it difficult to walk on it. Every one of the people in the vehicles begin saying their end-of-life prayers, as they have no doubt that death is their fates that afternoon.

\* \* \*

Daniel glances at this rearview mirror and notices a black smoke going up into the sky. He figures he has to call his wife Eva. So, he calls home. Eva replies after the phone rings a few times.

"Hey honey." says Eva after she picks her phone up.

"Listen to me very carefully." says Daniel in panic and worry, "Get whatever we made ready to take with us to Damascus and have them ready outside the door. Isis is coming. I'm on my way to pick you up. They are not that far."

"What do you mean?" asks Eva, "How do you..."

"Don't ask any question." yells Daniel, "Just do what I asked you to. Trust me. Just be ready. I'll be there in no time. I'll have to fetch the boys from school before I come to get you."

"Ok. Oh my God. Ok."

Daniel hangs up the phone and pushes the gas once again.

\* \* \*

Hanif is just a few hundred meters away from reaching Al Darrah when he hears a sound of something like metal scraps being squeezed by a heavy industrial machine. Behind him, vehicles are now moving forward very slowly. There are also other cars that are escaping Al Darrah. Those cars that are joining the main road from Al Darrah, are slowing down the cars that are already on the main road. Some of Al Darrah residents have been informed by their relatives about Isis approaching and decided it is time to escape. So, they picked whatever they could and hit the road.

When Hanif turns his head back to find out what caused that strange screeching metal sound, his heart almost stops for a moment. He sees Isis tanks are amongst the escaping vehicles on the road, running over the civilian vehicles with their heavy tanks, crushing and squishing them, their drivers and passengers, running over each and every vehicle on their way.

Hanif can hear men shouting, kids crying and women screaming. Those yelling and shouting and screaming sounds shake Hanif to his core. He begins saying his Islamic end of life prayers. He finally reaches the entrance of Al Darrah, changes direction towards Al Darrah town and speeds his motorcycle as much as he can. His intention is to make it to Al Darrah's only roundabout first, inform and warn people about approaching Isis and rush towards his family wherever they are. Isis terrorists are now too close to Al Darrah and he sees how far away they are, from the last time he glanced behind him.

\* \* \*

Panicked and worried, Hanif's brother though could think of nothing but to announce the threat publicly to whomever is around. Being the municipality's audio-visual man, he had access to loud speakers, stereos and other audio equipment.

So, he figured the best way he could warn people of what's coming, was to take one of his stereo speakers to the window of his office which opens to the roundabout, connect a microphone to it and warn people, telling them what is happening.

Under a tremendous amount of stress and fear, he did the same. Moments later, he opened his office window and placed a big speaker on the window facing the roundabout. He connected the microphone and tested it to see whether it worked. Counting 1. 2. 3.

"People listen to me." says Hanif's brother on the mic., "Members of Isis are only a kilometer or two from Al Darrah. Please go back home immediately, take your family and run to wherever you can. Isis is coming people. Run. Isis is arriving our town any moment now."

Shop keepers and walking people who are doing their normal daily chores, taxi drivers who have no idea where the sound announcement is coming from, look at all directions. Some think there is a prank going on and do not even take the warning seriously. Whereas some others get concerned immediately. Some close their shops down quickly and in panic. Some run towards home and some sit in their vehicles and drive away.

After officiating Amer and Sara's engagement, already announcing them as husband and wife according to the Islamic rules by the Sheikh, Sara, Amer and all whomever are present at Sheikh's registry office exit the office cheering, clapping and congratulating the young couple. There are elders of both the bride and the groom, their parents, aunts, uncles and Sammy's mother and Hanieh. While cheering and happy for Amer and Sara's engagement being official, they little by little get their attention to what Hanif's brother is saying on the speaker. They get quieter and quieter hearing the warning from the other side of the roundabout. Disordered and distressed, everyone decides to escort the young couple back home by walk as traditions dictated. To walk the bride and the groom home, they actually have to cross the roundabout and can hear what Hanif's brother is saying better and clearer. Their faces change after they get closer to the other side of the roundabout and hear what Hanif's brother is actually saying. Worry and fear begin forming on each and every one of them, talking to each other, trying to discuss whether what is being said on the speaker is actually true. Their legs stop walking. They all slow down out of fear and curiosity.

Meanwhile, about a kilometer away from the roundabout, Hanif is driving his motorcycle, yelling at everyone, asking them to run as Isis is there at the gates of Al Darrah already.

Amer and Sara's relatives, families and friends do not know what to actually think. They are quite confused and scared and mixed-up. They stop for a few seconds and listen carefully to what Hanif's brother is yelling on the speaker.

"I guess this is our groom's prank idea, so we'll remember his beautiful engagement day. Ha Mr. groom?" asks Sara's uncle, an old good-looking chick man with white goatee. I think Mr. Amer has a few hidden cameras to take our fear full reactions to show it to us later just for a laugh."

Amer is shaking his head, trying to say that is not the case when everyone suddenly hears an approaching honking sound. They turn their heads towards the sound and see a motorcycle flashing head lights and honking while getting closer. Everyone present at the roundabout is staring at Hanif on his motorcycle, waiting for him to arrive. They all know there is something going on by them. Hanif enters the roundabout with a high speed. He loses control and falls off his motorcycle. His bike crashes. Hanif who is now badly injured, begins yelling and asking everyone to run as Isis is going to reach them any second. Everyone, including Sara's uncle, know there is no joke or prank involved. They just find out how serious the matter is.

One of Hadji Mazen's tanks fires another rocket towards Al Darrah before anyone at the roundabout has a chance to make a run. The rocket hits Al Darrah's only kindergarten, destroying the kindergarten and the surrounding building for a radius of around fifty meters. This explosion confirms everyone's fear and doubts. The impact pulls everyone out of their houses, shops and offices. Everyone close to the roundabout is now outside in the streets around the roundabout. Isis fires another rocket again and it hits a residential building next to Al Darrah's book-store, destroying it and the buildings around it in a radius of around fifty meters again. Everyone is in the state of panic and dread. They cannot believe what is happening around them.

Officials of the school where Daniel's sons study, also run outside the school building to find out about the explosion sound and what has caused the building shake. The principle



walks to the street and look at both sides. He sees the black smoke caused by the explosion. He turns pale.

"Get all the children out of the building now." He yells at school teachers and administrators in terror. "Let them go home, something bad is happening. I don't know what? But I have a very bad feeling about this."

All school officials run back inside the school building. The end of school day bell is heard making a nonstop sound. It does take the children, including Daniel's sons, to exit and evacuate the building. Children begin running towards their homes screaming and crying. Daniel's sons run towards their home while Daniel is only two blocks away from them. Daniel notices the children rushing out and running towards different directions. So, he reduces speed and looks at the sidewalk carefully. He finds his sons moments later, picks them up and heads towards his house.

Eva and Ezra have brought whatever they prepared for their relocation to Damascus and laid them all outside their house waiting for Daniel to arrive.

Hadji Mazen's tanks, armored pick-up trucks, army transportation and all of his terrorist team members have closed the east entrance to the town. No vehicle can whether enter or exit from Al Darrah's east side. Hadji Mazen's units have formed in a big semicircular shape, all facing Al Darrah, waiting for Hadji Mazen to issue attack command. They are on hills around east side of Al Darrah, aiming their tanks' barrels, machine guns, cannon, etc. at Al Darrah.

Hadji Mazen's orders his platoon to form units in a semicircular shape and the process of doing that, gives some of Al Darrah's residents enough time to escape without taking any needed items with them. But is escaping that easy? But people have to take their chances.

Shaking like leaves of a tree in a windy day, Zahra, Sammy's mom, glances at her sister, Zinat, Amer's mother. She shakes her head thinking about her son Sammy only. She is terrified thinking her son cannot run as fast as others considering his limp and being in constant need of a knee strap to walking.

After hearing the explosions caused by Hadji Mazen's rockets hitting the kindergarten and the book store, and shock waves shaking her guitar instructor's house, Nelly immediately

decides to leave her house and heads home. She still has no idea what has caused the explosion sound and the shock wave. Nelly is running towards her home. She too has a feeling something very bad is happening. Almost all residents left in Al Darrah are warned by now somehow and are aware of Isis's entrance to their lovely little town. Every family member, relative and friend is trying to inform and warn their loved ones about what is happening, by using cell-phones, internet and different apps.

Many people are in their cars driving out of Al Darrah from the west side, while Nelly is still running and walking fast to reach home. Everything seems to be happening in a blink of an eye. Isis fires their tank rockets towards the west entrance and exit road to Al Darrah with the aim of preventing escaping vehicles exit the town. They have no idea that Al Darrah people have another old dusty road which they can use getting away from them. All left in Al Darrah are quite busy with finding and taking their loved ones out of town before they fall into Isis's bloody claws.

Amer, Sara and all of their relatives have begun running back home when two Isis armed pick-up trucks appear from their front and backside. They know they are trapped and have no other way to escape. Machine gun operators who stand up behind their heavy machine guns installed at the back of the pick-up trucks open fire on people who are running. After realizing that Isis is killing those who ran, killing defenseless innocent men, women and children, all the people who are still alive, move to the sidewalks, waiting to find out what fate has in store for them.

Hadji Mazen's tanks and other armored vehicles make a move towards Al Darrah now, heading to the town's only roundabout. People can already see Isis tanks and their horrible looking flags raised on them. Everyone is screaming, yelling and saying something. No one cares whose vehicle it is, as long as they can push themselves into it. People just want to live. They know their survival depends on their ability to escape from the town.

Along with his terrified three sons, Daniel reaches home at last. He tries his best to calm the boys telling them everything is going to be okay. Eva gets her mother, Ezra, out of the house after she hears Daniel honking. Daniel notices one of Isis's motor cross riders crosses the street, looks into the Daniel's alley, but continues his way without

stopping or saying anything. He thinks the motor cross driver has a different task given to him. That's why he did not bother looking into the alley with the aim of getting his family away from him. Eva and her mother sit at the front seat of Daniel's pick-up truck like they always do when they want to go somewhere. The three boys jump on the back of the pick-up truck. Eva pauses for a moment. Her face changes and begins crying.

"I said where's Nelly?" yells Daniel this time looking at Ezra.

"She's at her guitar instructor's." Replies Eva. "I... I'm... You know what happens to me when I am panic Daniel. I forget... what or where."

Daniel notices Ezra peeing, wetting herself. He drives the car to go and pick Nelly from her guitar instructor's place when he hears machine guns firing in a distance.

Isis has almost surrounded Al Darrah. Most of the Isis soldiers have concentrated their forces at the roundabout. A few of Hadji Mazen's soldiers who have their faces covered, jump out of the armored vehicle and fire warning shots into the air. All other Isis group members have the mission to get all houses evacuated and direct every living person, forcing them to gather at the roundabout. Zahra, Zinat and other relatives are now trapped by Isis. Almost all females are in tears. Especially Zahra. She bursts into tears. "What would happen to my Sammy, sis?" Asks Zahra, her frightened sister.

\* \* \*

While all the commotion, Isis's attacks, the explosions and shootings are happening in Al Darrah, Sammy has his headphones on, listening to his usual classical music, machining his rifle's metal part unaware of what is going on out there. He is almost done machining the part. He is hoping the part fits the rifle and his rifle modification and operation is finally going to be completed.

Isis motor cross rides are using their megaphones demanding everyone to get out of hiding and walk towards the roundabout. They are threatening to shoot rockets to demolish buildings they suspect contain hiding people inside. Having heard the first few explosions, innocent people who are still hiding in

their houses and buildings, have no doubt Isis is going to use rockets if they do not show themselves and do not go and gather at the roundabout like Isis wants. So, holding their hands up, people begin surrendering, walking towards the roundabout. It does not take Isis soldiers motor cross riding members long to get almost every resident to the roundabout.

An Isis member, who is a tall monster looking beast with a very dirty beard and an Isis flag on his head like a bandana, is asking people at the roundabout nicely and politely to calm down. He promises them everything is going to be over soon and they can return back to their houses.

Hadji Mazen has two of his assistants on the left and other two on his right side while he exits his tank. The assistants appear to be protecting Hadji, the terrorist group unit's head.

Hadji Mazen has a very big ugly nose. Yellow teeth. His saliva spits out of his mouth when he talks. It resembles a wild hungry wolf ready to feast. Hadji Mazen's red evil eyes check out Sara's body, her breasts, legs, butt and finally her long and beautiful face. Having noticed Hadji Mazen's hungry horny gaze at his new wife, Amer stands between Sara and Hadji Mazen, hiding his wife behind himself. Hanieh moves behind Zinat.

"We are not killers." Yells Hadji Mazen, spitting saliva out of his dirty mouth. "My faithful comrades are getting all remaining residents to this roundabout right now. It's all because we must know how many people live in this town. We will have to report the number of Al Darrah people to our leader, our superior. There are reasons we only need to know. Everyone is free to go back home. Don't be afraid. We are Muslims. We do not kill our brothers and sisters. Just do what you are asked and no one gets hurt."

Hadji Mazen yells at his people, demanding his motor cross riders to bring people to him faster. There are still some cars escaping Al Darrah while motor cross riders ask people to get out and go to the roundabout.

Omar, one of Hadji Mazen's assistants informs him that there are still cars escaping town. Hadji Mazen tells him not to worry as they have nowhere to hide. He tells Omar that they are going to chase and capture them after they are done with Al Darrah's people. He asks Omar to try to stop them as fast as he can though.

Knowing all the short-cuts, forgotten and secret roads and streets of Al Darrah because of the nature of his job, Daniel drives his car to go to get his only daughter from her guitar instructor's place. He sees people rushing to escaping vehicles, kicking and punching one another so they can secure themselves a seat, and no one can force them out after they do.

Isis shoots anyone who even tries to run, without any mercy at all. One of Isis youngest cruel members, a boy actually, has a sharpened machete and slices anyone who even tries passing him. He seems enjoying stabbing children and elderly residents of Al Darrah especially. He keeps on yelling at the people, telling them to walk faster going towards the roundabout. An old limping man who is being helped by a kind young neighbor wants to say something to the Isis young member, but the heartless boy gashes his throat with a single move. Blood splashes and sprays like a fountain.

"Do not talk." Yells the boy. "Just walk and walk faster, no talking you none-Muslim animals."

The number of people gather at the roundabout is being increased by second and this gives Hadji Mazen and his evil people the feeling that a sort of an unexpected chaos is on the way. So, Hadji Mazen gives a signal to his assistants and soldiers. They suddenly attack people and create a mayhem, beating people with their heavy rifle butts, batons, cables and any other thing they can get a hold of.

Another Isis member who is in his thirties, to prove himself to his superior that he is worth giving more responsibility and rank, attacks a defenseless innocent man around his own age and keeps on kicking him until his motionless body falls on the ground. Other Isis members are pulling women's hair cover and hijab, so they would find out who is younger and more beautiful. No one has the courage to argue with merciless animals of Isis and even if they do, they are immediately killed on spot. Terrified people scream and run from one side to the other, while Isis soldiers run after them and give them a good beating, trying to concentrate the crowd at the center. Elderly men and women who have difficulty running are getting a server beating until they pass out. Then their lifeless bodies are dragged to a corner and left there to die.

Hadji Mazen's horny gazes at Sara Continues. Even with Amer trying to hide her behind himself. Being the bride, Sara has make-up on, she's dressed in a beautiful white gown and has done her hair nicely. She feels Hadji Mazen's heavy looks at her since Hadji Mazen and his animal comrades caught her and her relatives off guard. Hadji Mazen stares at Sara's body head to toe.

"It's your wedding today, ha?" Asks Hadji in a very friendly tone. "God bless you. Such a beautiful bride."

Sara is behind Amer and looks away. But her father is getting really mad, knowing what the dirty old beast has in mind.

"Yes. She's the bride." Says Yamen after taking two stops towards her. "She's my daughter and he is her husband now."

Yamen says that to remind Hadji Mazen, that his daughter is married and belonged to another man. He thinks he can stop Hadji Mazen thinking lustfully and imagining things about having her.

"Well, well well." Replies Hadji Mazen sarcastically. "Ok. Mr. bride's father."

He clears his voice and yells at his soldiers.

Separate all people above fifty years old from the rest. Does not matter if it is a man or a woman. People above fifty, send them to the other side.

Hadji Mazen looks at the people now,

"You'll get punished in Isis way if I look at your papers and find out you have lied your age. You and all your family members will be punished for your lie."

Hearing their commander's new order, Isis soldiers and Hadji Mazen's assistant begin separating people older than fifty from the rest. Some of the men and the women older than fifty go near the wall they have been told without any Isis members asking them for their age. Some others afraid they are going to be executed because they are older than fifty, do all the tricks they can to stay behind. Zinat and Zahra and almost all of Sara and Amer's relatives go to the side elder people are told to go to. In the meanwhile, Hadji Mazen calls Sara and tells her he wants to give her their wedding present. But

despite being terrified and angry, Amer steps in to protect his honor and his pregnant wife's honor and tells Hadji Mazen he has to give him anything he wants to give her. Not to his wife.

"Please give me anything you want to give my wife." Says Amer scared, but trying to protect his honor.

But what Amer tells Hadji Mazen, makes him quite mad. So, he yells at Emad, one of his bodyguards and orders them to bring Amer closer to him. Amer's parents, sisters and some other relative's sound of crying, screaming and begging Hadji Mazen for mercy is heard. But Hadji Mazen yells at them all ordering them to shut up. Ayad and Emad, two of Hadji Mazen's people, push Amer towards him.

"Ok sir." Says Hadji Mazen while having an evil smile on his ugly face. "I'll give you the present I wanted to give your wife."

Hadji asks Emad and Samad to tie Amer to a tree near him. They drag Amer who is deferring himself and pushing them away. They force him to the tree and tie him. Looking at how wildly they drag her husband, Sara runs towards Amer screaming. But Hadji Mazen runs and catches her from her arm. Sara tries hard to release her hand but to no avail. She is obviously not strong enough. Hadji Mazen orders Emad and Samad to hold Sara. He goes towards crying Amer, takes out his dagger from his belt's casing and cuts Amer's belt with a quick slashing move. He gets Amer's trousers off him.

"Here we are." Says Hadji Mazen laughing angrily. "Here's what I wanted to give your wife as your wedding present." Hadji inserts the dagger into Amer's ball sack. Amer's scream of pain can be heard by all of the people present at the roundabout despite the hum and surrounding sounds. Amer's family, parents and relatives yell at the monster Hadji Mazen, beshrew and imprecate him. Every other person at the roundabout has forgotten himself being captured after they all witnessed how blood splashed out of Amer's testicle area. Moaning sound of Zinat and Aser can bring a piece of rock to tears. Zahra is holding her sister. She's trying to go grab her son and comfort him.

"Quiet sis." Says Zahra crying and whispering. "Take one step, towards him, make a sound and these animals will kill you. That's exactly what they want you to do"

"I don't care anymore." Yells Zinat. "My boy. My son. Oh God, take me instead."

Hadji Mazen returns to Sara who is now about to pass out. He touches Sara's breast and neck, while his two assistants hold her tight, preventing her to hit herself to the ground. Hadji Mazen holds Sara's head up, looks into her eyes.

"From now on, you'll run to me when I order you to come." Says Hadji Mazen yelling. "We are your new husband from now on." Continues Hadji as he points as Isis members around. "Got it?"

Every Isis terrorist around Hadji Mazen begins laughing after they hear what he tells Sara. Saboura and Yamen find an opportunity to cross Isis guards and run towards their daughter crying and breathing heavily. Seeing someone running from the group of older men and women, one of pick-up truck machine gun operators points the machine gun barrel at the group. Hadji Mazen waits for the woman to take a few more steps. He orders fire. Three machine gun operators open fire at defenseless elder men and women.  
Don't use the last paragraph (reference).

\* \* \*

Robert was still riding the bike towards Al Darrah's town when he suddenly heard an explosion in a distance. He was wondering what had actually caused the explosion and where that happened. For a moment, he suspects what he heard people say in the driver's vehicle was probably true.

Robert stops pedaling for a moment, looks around to see whether he can see any sign that indicates where the explosion took place. But he figures he better continue on his way. After pedaling for a few more minutes, he sees a police flag and knows he is too close to Al Darrah's police station and he can actually inquire what is really going on in the town. So, he keeps on pedaling, thinking also the police station is his best chance to ask help save Hanieh. He reaches the police station moments later and sees a few men are burning some documents and some police uniforms. One of the guys is getting police light off the roof of an unmarked police car.

"Hello sir." Says Robert. "Do you happen to know what is actually going on by any chance?"



"Yeah, I do." Replies the man. "We are all cops and if they find out, we will be executed first. They'll surely behead us all. We are burning any document with our names on it. So, if we are caught and they see our IDs, they would not figure we are cops. We are burning our uniforms as our names have been stuck to them. Sorry, we have no space to take anyone with us. Don't you really know Isis is already in the town? Why the hell are you staring at me young man? Run for your life."

The man who is removing the police light from a car and calls his colleagues, telling them they are ready to go. Robert sees with his own eyes that police officers who have sworn to protect their countrymen, their honor and belongings, run towards their getaway vehicle like cowards without even thinking for a single moment what is going to happen to the people they lived with in the same town after that. This breaks Robert's heart, as four police officers sit in their car wearing sport trousers and white undershirts. Before they drive away, one of the police officers gets off the car and yells calling someone while glaring at the police station.

"Leave him." Yells the driver. "Get the fuck in or I'll drive leaving you behind. We have no more time left you fuck head."

"What about the arsenal though?" Asks the man, while running towards the car. "I couldn't find the key to lock it. What should we do?"

"Leave it for God sake." Replies his colleague driver. "Leave the damn arsenal open. Isis has enough arms and ammunition themselves. Get the fuck in let's get out of here."

Every one pushes himself in the car and opens space for his colleague. The car drives away right in front of Robert's shocked eyes.

Robert whose feeling is really hurt, yells at them and calls them cowards. He curses at them while the car is farther than any of its passengers can hear him. Angry and disappointed, he continues pedaling towards the Al Darrah's east side. But he suddenly stops the bike. Something crosses his mind.

"You fucking cowards." Says Robert murmuring. "But I am not like you. I am not going to chicken out."

He turns back towards the police abandoned station. He lays the bike to the wall of the police station's entrance door and walks inside. Robert searches the whole first floor, but he cannot find what he is looking for. So, he goes up the stairs to the second floor. When he looks around, he notices there is a room with a heavy metal door which is left open. He steps towards the door and pushes it open. His eyes suddenly sparkle. The heavy door is actually the door to the room he is looking for, police station's arsenal door. Happy and excited, Robert sees a number of good rifles and guns in the room and their ammunition boxes.

He checks the rifles one after the other, thinking to himself murmuring:

"I'm the champion of Beijing's tournament. I'll not go down without a fight when the time comes. Wait for me Hanieh darling. I'm coming to get you."

Robert finds a Russian sniper rifle amongst other police rifles and picks it up. Sniper rifle is in a wooden box along with its box of bullets. He sees a police backpack, picks that up too, throws the bullet box inside it and places the sniper rifle on his shoulder. He tightens the strap over his shoulder, fixes it tight and exits the arsenal. He is happy he has found what he needs to save his girlfriend, Hanieh, and possibly others.

There are irregularities in telephone lines after the first Isis's tank rocket hit the kindergarten, and so, Nelly cannot establish any contact with anyone. Nelly, Mira her guitar instructor and her family have already heard about Isis presence in the town. Nelly knows she has to get back to her parents as quickly as possible. But Mira prevents her to leave her house knowing her psychological history and the fragile state she is in. Nelly begs Mira every now and then to let her go and Mira is trying to contact Nelly's house, her father and mom. But she knows people of Al Darrah are not in a situation to be able to attend to any call they receive. Besides, she cannot get connected to any phone number she dials.

Moments later, almost all who are still left in the town hiding, begin marching towards the roundabout while Isis soldiers escort them, holding machete's, daggers and rifles. Those are the people who knew they have to run away in advance. But they could not because of lack of financial resources.

People live in this town are mainly government clerks, bank employees, officers and their families whose income is not big, who do not have any relatives in other safer cities and of course cannot afford travelling abroad before Isis finally advanced and reached Al Darrah.

Mr. Nader, Sammy's neighbor and his family are amongst people being forced towards the roundabout. Mr. Nader who was trying to keep all his family members together had to slow down and reminded his family members to walk together. But this made one of machete holding Isis evil soldiers so angry. The last time Mr. Nader slowed down, the Isis redressed him at the back of his head, the way his spine bone could be clearly seen. Poor injured Mr. Nader gets very angry after being cut at the back of his neck and charged at the animal Isis. But he did not know any fighting technique or any defense art. The only thing he could do was to hold on to the Isis soldiers Arabic clothes collar out of fury and did not let go. But the Isis inserted the machete from Mr. Nader's lower chin. The machete head came out of one of poor Mr. Nader eyes, covering his left eye ball completely. He released Isis soldier's collar screaming in pain and agony, yelling and cursing at the terrorist. The Isis soldier got angrier after being insulted by Mr. Nader. He pulled out his machete quickly, stepped back and stabbed Mr. Nader at his throat, as if he was using a samurai sword. Mr. Nader's throat was slit in front of his speechless and terrified family members. They looked at Mr. Nader, their father and husband. They were in shock and couldn't do anything about it. All others who walked with Mr. Nader and his family members didn't show any reaction to cruelty of the Isis member. They only thought of how to behave in order to be spared by heartless Isis members. They all knew law of the jungle was going to be applied wherever Isis was present.

Mr. Nader cannot yell and curse at the Isis soldier now. He is shocked himself for a brief moment. He did not expect to be easily killed. At least not that easily. A strange sound comes out of his slit throat before his body goes numb and hits the ground. Blood splashes out of his throat like the water getting out of a hose with a pressure. Mr. Nader looks into his killer's eyes before he takes his last breath. The Isis guy cursed at his lifeless body when he notices the man, he killed stares at him into his eyes. Isis member's eyes look very strange. Every one of the people around him have noticed that. They have no doubt he has used a very strong

drug before attacking people. It is not something new that most of Isis members use some sort of drug, so they would not feel and show any mercy to people they kill.

Al Darrah's main street and its alleys are full of people who have been stabbed by Isis members. There are so many dead men laying on the asphalt of Al Darrah's streets and alleys. It is not long after when all unfortunate Al Darrah residents who are captured by Isis, including men, women, young and old, plus students who were released early by their school officials get very near to the roundabout while Isis motor cross drivers, two armed pick-up trucks and some Isis soldiers escort them with a low speed from behind. They finally reach the roundabout while many are wounded and are bleeding bad. In the whole town you can hear men, women and children scream, beg and plead.

After he is assured by his assistants that there are no one left in Al Darrah's houses, Hadji Mazen orders his people to separate all men and women older than fifty and send them all to the southern part of the roundabout, near a long wall of the little shopping center's building. Hadji Mazen's people order every individual older than fifty to go to stand by that wall. Some terrified men and women abide what Isis commander wants them to do.

Hanieh who is well-hidden behind Zahra now, remembers the floorplan of the mini shopping center quite well since she had been there a dozen times already. She has been in that building several times before to ask a photo center on the second floor to develop the photos she took. So, she knows there is a narrow staircase going up until the roof. Hanieh gets her head close to Zahra.

"Follow me slowly." Whispers Hanieh. "I know how we can escape."

But Zinat also hears what Hanieh said. She gets closer to her sister without being noticed or attracting any unwanted attention.

"Go with her sis." Whispers Zinat to her sister. "My baby, my sweet son is here. It was supposed to be the happiest day of his life. Go sis. Save yourselves. Go. Go now."

She gets her mouth closer so Hanieh would hear her.

"Take her my dear." Whispers Zinat. "Go now."

As soon as Zinat finishes her sentence, Emad, one of Hadji Mazen's most evil assistants walks towards them. It is apparent he has suspected something. Hanieh's heart is about to stop. But Zinat and Zahra get closer to each other and cover Hanieh behind them as good as they can. Zahra and Zinat have become numb. But to save a young girl's life and surely honor, do their best to act normal. Emad walks amongst the elder people for a few seconds, walks nearby Zahra and Zinat and does not notice Hanieh.

"On the count of three, bend and just follow me." Whispers Hanieh to Zahra immediately after Emad gets far enough.

"One, two and three." Whispers Hanieh.

She bends and slides inside the old mini shopping center. Suspecting something move around Zahra, Emad turns his head immediately. He stares at the mini shopping mall's entrance and thinks there is actually nothing important. Because Zahra has not followed Hanieh inside the mini shopping center. Being worried for her son Sammy, she is confused and scared to follow Hanieh. She probably thinks she is going to have a liability to Hanieh and would slow her down. Zinat bursts into tears after she notices her sister did not go with Hanieh.

"Why did you not go?" Asks Zinat. "Why did you stay?"

"You said your son was here as if Amer is a stranger to me sis." Replies Zahra, also crying now. "Your son is like my son. You are here sis. My lovely sister. How can I go? Leave all of you to be tortured and terrorized? It's enough for me to know Sammy is not in this crowd to experience what we are experiencing. Besides I would simply have a liability to her and for sure slow her down if I went with her. She will make it without me and she will make it faster and safer."

Moments after sneaking into the mini shopping center, Hanieh looks back and notices Zahra has not followed her as she had told her. So, she figures she has to escape alone. She begins running up the mini shopping center's narrow staircase trying hard not to produce a faintest sound. She pauses and looks down after she crosses one level to make sure no one is following her and no one has noticed that she is on the run. She continues going up until she finally reaches the building's roof. She suddenly hears a few shots are fired and

people begin screaming and crying. Her heart beats faster after she hears any small sound. She hears Hadji Mazen's voice.

"Yalla Samad." Yells Hadji Mazen ordering. "Now separate girls from those coward boys, my dear brothers and colleagues."

Hanieh hears people pleading, screaming and begging the Isis evil beasts after they heard what he ordered his people to do. She has no doubt Isis animal members charge at the girls of Al Darrah, touching them and forcing them, separating them from their worried parents and loved ones.

Everyone at the roundabout knows well why Hadji Mazen wants to separate young women and girls from boys. Even Hanieh is shocked after she hears Isis commander's new order.

The sound of fathers', mothers', brothers', husbands' and girls' screaming has become louder when Isis members charge at the innocent defenseless girls, kicking and pushing them, shoving and throwing them to separate them from their brothers, husbands, fiancés and in some cases young fathers. Hanieh too bursts into tears hearing those begging and crying sounds. But she has no other choice at that moment but to finish the escape she has begun.

While afraid and anxious, Hanieh keeps on picturing an Isis member appearing on her way. She keeps on picturing what would happen to her if that happens. Like a cat trying to get close to its prey, Hanieh begins crawling on all fours. She crawls near the roof of the next building and is happy she can jump to the roof of the next building. Just like what she has hoped for. She figures she can get away as much as she wanted, just jumping from one roof to the other.

All Isis armed pick-up trucks, bikes, tanks and armed vehicles are at the roundabout now. Surprisingly, none of the Isis members has noticed the only three tallest five story buildings where Sammy is at. It probably is because sky residential complex, where Sammy lives in, is completely separated from the town and the three buildings still look under construction to Isis people. Also, because there are no sign of anyone living in any of the apartments. Parking lots below the buildings look empty. For any unknown reason, the three five story of the sky residential complex are not noticed by Isis people. Destiny probably has another fate, another scenario for Sammy's building to be hidden from Isis terrorists eyes.

Isis evil cruel members separate young girls and women from the guys and Amer still has Sara's hand, holding her tight, trying to protect his honor. Hadji Mazen suddenly notices Amer disobeys his soldiers, hiding his wife behind him. Holding the girl who had become his wife minutes ago, trying hard not to let anyone touch her.

After both Amer and Sara's parents notice what is happening, they begin running past Isis soldiers towards their son and newlywed daughter. But they are all stopped before they reach Hadji Mazen.

"To the same Allah you carry his name in yours, we beg you to listen what we want to tell you." Yells Zinat pleading and crying.

Having a satanic disturbing smile on his ugly devilish face, Hadji Mazen asks his people to allow them get closer. Amer and Sara's parents kneel before Hadji Mazen, kissing his dirty boots begging.

"This is my son sir." Begs Zinat weeping. "I only have one son. I get him wed today only. A few minutes ago. I swear you to Allah, to profit, to spare my son and his wife, his legal Islamic wife."

Yamen, Sara's father too starts pleading, crying and begging, while Hadji Mazen and his assistants laugh and joke about the whole situation.

"Ya Allah." Replies Hadji Mazen after hearing Amer's mother and Yamen pleading. "You think we are Satan God forbid? No. no. We are Muslims, just like you."

Hadji Mazen's assistants and closer ones to him continue laughing.

"But I have a condition to leave them free and let them start their married life." Continues Hadji Mazen.

"Tell us sir." Replies Sara's mother.

"We will do whatever you want." Continues Yamen.

"I will let them go if you two women and you two men, I mean the bride and the groom's parents get completely naked and dance tango for everyone. I want the bride's mother dancing

with the groom's father and the bride's father with the groom's mother dance for everyone completely naked."

People begin cursing and spitting toward the monster Isis after what he says. But Hadji Mazen fires a warning shot to keep everyone quiet.

"So?" Asks Hadji Mazen. "What's your decision? I'm waiting."

Amer and Sara's parents are soaked in their sweat. They cannot bear the shame at the presence of hundreds of Al Darrah residents, people who know them, respect them and see them on a daily basis. They have mutual respect with some of Al Darrah residents who are now in the crowd, doing what shameless Hadji Mazen wants them to do. The freedom and life of their son and daughter, the bride and the groom, depends on their sacrifice on the other hand. Zinat, Amer's mother, is the first person who takes her clothes off. Yamen is the next. Sara's mother and Amer's father are the last who remove their clothes and get naked. They do it while tears of shame and embracement roll down their checks. Hadji Mazen and his evil assistants just look and laugh.

Zinat glances at people and what she sees makes her cry even more. All Al Darrah people who are at the roundabout have covered their eyes placing palm of their hands on their eyes. They all look down covering their eyes. Two of Isis members record the whole event using their smart phones.

"Did Islam's profit really instruct Muslims to do this?" Asks Yamen taking the last piece of his clothes off. "Where is embracing naked old men and women written in Quran? Which verse? I swear to Allah we are Muslims too. But we know what sin is and what is not. Leave these innocent people alone. Leave these defenseless innocent people alone or universe makes you pay. If you really believe in heaven and hell, leave everyone alone.

People's hum and curse can be heard. Saboura, Zinat and Aser are asking Yamen to stop talking before pissing the monster off and causing them lose their lives. But as if Yamen knows he is going to be killed soon, regardless of what he does and how many of Isis commander's orders he in fact obeys. So, he thinks he would say what he thinks, maybe what he says changes Isis Hadji Mazen's attitude. Like this, he may have been able to save some other Al Darrah people's lives. But the result of what he says is not what he actually hopes for. Yamen is



covering his penis with his two hands when Hadji Mazen orders him to walk to him.

"Get your ass over here Mr. preacher." Says Hadji Mazen angrily. "Now you want to preach us? Ha? You teach us Islam?" He slaps Yamen hard.

"Listen everybody." Continues Hadji Mazen yelling. "I just want you all to know why this is happening to you. What they have taught you about perfect religion of Islam since you were kid is not the real Islam. Your version of Islam to us is evil worshipping. Islam means duty. Religion is our duty. Duty means what our leader, our Khalif and mentor, Al Zarqawi, tells us to do as good Muslims. Take your version of Islam to the toilet and shit on it. I am going to do what I did to Yazidis of Iraq."

Hadji Mazen has turned red because of anger. He pulls Yamen's right ear very hard.

"Who is your caliph? Ha? Answer me. Who is your Imam?"

Hadji Mazen kicks Yamen in his stomach and Yamen hits the ground before he has a chance to answer Hadji Mazen's question. Amer is holding Sara hard, preventing her to go and help her moaning father. Sara is crying quietly all the time for all that happens. Amer's tears are not coming out. He is under the influence of pain, anger and hatred.

Saboura and Aser go to Yamen. They comfort him as much as they can and try helping him stand up. But Hadji Mazen fires another warning shot ordering them to leave the guy and stay away from him. He puts his knee on the moaning Yamen's chest, gets his dagger out and holds it against his face.

"It's already too late to choose your Imam and khalifate." Says Hadji Mazen now in a lower voice, staring into the eyes of his victim. He pulls one of his victim's ears and cuts it with his super sharp, execution dagger.

Yelling, cursing and begging, people who witnessed what did try to distract the monster, in hope he would stop torturing Yamen. Omar, one of Hadji Mazen's main assistants, gets himself closer to his commander and kneels down.

"Sir, Hadji Mazen," says ugly heartless Omar. "Allow me to shut the older group up. let us fire at them with our machine guns and keep them quiet once and for all. It'll be fun."

"No." Replies Hadji Mazen. "I want them all to witness what is going to happen to these wedding relatives."

While cutting the man's other ear, Hadji Mazen orders Omar to separate Christians from the Muslims. Omar walks towards one of the armed pick-up trucks, climbs up, holds the megaphone and orders all Christian elderly to go stand at the right side and orders elderly Muslims to stand on their left. Elderly innocent men and women begin separating, doing what the Isis evil member asks them. Each and every one of them looks terrified. They all look as though they really know what is going to happen to them soon.

Holding Yamen's two ears, Hadji Mazen finally gets up the man's chest.

He can no longer hear the AZAN yells Hadji Mazen, holding two ears and showing to his captives.

"They say the worst kind of death for a human is to crawl into his own blood. But I have good experience. I know what is worse than that. Is when a man chokes in his own blood."

Everyone gets quiet, trying to see what to make out of the evil man's words. Hadji Mazen takes a dirty piece of cloth out of his trousers' back pocket and ties it around Yamen's mouth. He has cuffed the middle-aged man and kicks him to make him turn face up. Hadji Mazen asks his people for a screwdriver. One of the Isis soldiers picks a screwdriver from the armored vehicle and runs towards him and gives it to him. The whole crowd is quiet to see what the evil man has in mind. Amer is shaking, angry and mad, but he knows well he cannot do anything about what Hadji Mazen is doing to his beloved father-in-Law. Sara keeps on moaning,

"No, no, please."

But Hadji Mazen is not hearing any of it. He takes the screwdriver and inserts the tip of it into Yamen's right nostril. He sits on Yamen's chest and kicks the screwdriver in hard with his right knee. Amer and Sara hear the screwdriver rip through the man's flesh and breaks a bone somewhere in his forehead.

Hadji Mazen removes the screwdriver by pulling it hard and inserts the tip of it into the other nostril of the man in

pain and terror. He does the same by kicking it with his left knee this time. Sara is forced by Amer to look away. She is about to pass out when Amer holds her and starts whispering something into her ears. Hadji Mazen stands up and faces the shocked crowd while everyone cries and yells hearing Yamen's screams of pain.

"A man should be creative." Yells Hadji Mazen. "This talkative old man cannot breathe from his mouth. He can still breathe from his nostrils though. But... the trick is that he will be bleeding from his nose. So, he will choke in his own blood. you see all of you?"

People begin swearing and cursing at the callous man. Yamen cannot breathe. A strong noise comes out of his nostrils. Blood splashes out and it is obvious that he is gasping for air. But he cannot. He sniffs blood out of his nostrils a few times and the old man cannot fight for so much. He finally gives up. He does not sniff out the blood after a few seconds anymore and the strange noise stops coming out of his nostrils. People all know he had given up and died. He died after his honor was demolished.

For the finishing act, Hadji Mazen places a piece of cloth on the dead man's penis, holds it and cuts it. He lifts it up and faces the crowd once again,

"I did it so if I was wrong and you went to heaven, you would not be able to enjoy heavenly angels having sex with them."

All Hadji Mazen's assistants and soldiers burst into laughter.

"Each and every one of my people is way worse than me." Yells Hadji Mazen. "This is what you will see for yourself soon." There is a strange silence all over the town and in the roundabout. Hadji Mazen steps towards Sara and pulls her hair hard and separates her from Amer's arms.

"You resist, and what I did to your father will happen to all your family members." Says Hadji Mazen, whispering into her ear.

Sara is crying hard while Amer is trying to release himself from Isis members who are holding him. He wants to reach out to Sara and protect his wife. Hadji Mazen pulls Sara's hair near her neck to the side with his dirty fingers and smells Sara's neck for a few seconds. He kisses her neck. He smells

Sara's lips, pulls her shirt forward to see her breast size. Amer has gotten mad and begun cursing at Hadji Mazen. His eyes have turn bloody red and he is breathing heavily. Sara is crying loud and telling Hadji Mazen she is going to do whatever he wants.

"I'll do whatever you want." Says Sara, pleading. "Just let my husband go, and let some doctors or nurses attend to him."

But what Sara says has a worse effect on the Isis monster. So, he asks two of his assistants to hold Sara and orders a few soldiers to bring Amer to him. In pain and angry, Amer is still yelling and swearing at Isis. They untie him from the tree and drag him to Hadji Mazen and throw him in front of the man. As soon as he is thrown if front of the Isis commander, Amer spits blood on his boot and this even makes the monster angrier. Hadji Mazen goes towards Amer and lifts him, so he would sit and witness the rest of the show. He orders his assistants to bring Amer's parents and Sara's mother to him. Amer's parents and Saboura are terrified. They are naked and covering their private parts with their hands. Amer has no more power left in him to do anything anymore. He vomits blood again. Hadji Mazen orders his assistants to make Amer's parents and Sara's mother sit facing Amer. Hadji Mazen makes a gesture, draws a line of his own neck indicating he wants his assistants to cut their heads. Assistants first tie Amer's parents and Saboura's hand from the backside. Amer's parents now are staring at their son's eyes. Sara is still screaming and swearing. She is going to do whatever the Isis evil members want. She begs and pleads. But no one is hearing her. Staring at her son's eyes, Zinat drops a tear.

"Don't look son." Says Zinat, smiling. "Close your eyes son." Amer is shaking. He is cursing and swearing at Hadji Mazen's executioners when their blades rip through his mother's throat. All Isis members yell Allah Akbar. No one present at the roundabout can breathe. Amer gives an innocent look at his parents. Two other Hadji Mazen's assistants place their daggers on Amer's father and Sara's mother's throats. Amer gives a lost look at them. He looks at his mother's head, looks at his father, looks ...

"I'm sorry that I did nothing." Says Amer, mumbling.

The executioners begin sawing throw Aser and Saboura's throats after Hadji Mazen nods at them and issues the order. Isis member once again all yell Allah Akbar.

They place the three sawed heads on the back of their bodies and wait for their commander's next order.

Hadji Mazen leaves Amer's body, stands up and walks towards his three headless victims. He picks Saboura's bloody head and throws it in front of Amer. Amer uses all power which is left in him, looks up and whispers something, as if he tells God something. He spits upwards, murmurs some words and looks down again. Hadji Mazen lifts Amer's head from the hair. This time he throws the bloody sawed head towards elder crowd who have been divided as per their religions.

"You see baby." mumbles Amer to Sara with a shaky voice. "My hands are tied. So, I cannot..."

Amer can no longer talk. After what Amer said, Sara and all the crowd around burst into tears loudly.

"You are not cursing at us anymore." Says Hadji Mazen to Amer after returning to him.

He kicks Amer. His assistants hold Amer's feet and hands, keeping him still and faced up. Hadji Mazen sits on Amer's chest, pushing his knee on Amer's chest. Amer wants to spit on Hadji Mazen's face, but he has no more force left in him. Some blood splashes out of his mouth instead and land on his own chin. He starts murmuring, trying to tell his executioner something. Hadji Mazen gets his head closer to Amer, so he would hear what he is saying.

"I'll wait for you in hell." Whispers Amer, trying hard to speak.

Hearing what Amer told him, Hadji Mazen takes out his dagger and pushes the tip of it under Amer's chin.

"At least I'm not going first and will not be there for a long time." Replies Hadji Mazen, pressing his dagger into Amer's throat. Have fun you Satanist.

He cuts Amer from throat to chest. While still alive, Amer looks at the sky. He seems he is not in pain anymore. Hadji Mazen takes his dagger out of Amer's throat and stabs him on his heart while his comrades yell and cheer for him, saying Allah o Akbar. Hadji Mazen orders shooting Christian elder men and women accordingly.

Isis evil members have become so happy and excited that as soon as their commander issues that order, they run towards their machine gun armed pick-up trucks, go up and take position behind the machine guns. They aim at poor innocent elderly Christian men and women. But they hear Hadji Mazen ordering them to stop.

"Don't shoot them." Yells Hadji Mazen. "Don't waste precious bullets on these evil old people. They are not many anyway. Kill them like when Islam was born. Stab them all with your machetes, swords and your holly daggers and send them all to hell."

Christian elderly men and women are shaking out of fear. Some of them urinate in themselves. An old woman has a stroke before Isis begins the genocide.

But no one pays any attention to what is happening to the other person. Everyone is on the state of panic. Every one of them is terrified after hearing ruthless Hadji Mazen's order to his tyrant and evil assistants. Every single Isis member removes his dagger, machete or sword. They talk to one another in a very normal way while waiting for their superior's order, as if killing other humans is as easy and normal as drinking a glass of water.

Ayad, another subaltern of Hadji Mazen, issues the order by yelling Allah Akbar loudly. All Isis murderers attack defenseless elderly Christian men and women.

Swords cut innocent men and women's necks. Daggers are inserted to their hearts and machetes cut their flesh open. Those elderly men and women are surrounded by Isis evil members and have no way to escape. They run from one side to the other. But they see other Isis criminal waiting or running for them. It is not long before each and every one of them is laying on the floor, slithering in a pool of blood. Some are wounded severely, but Isis do not finish them off so they would suffer more before giving up. Elderly Muslim men and women scream and curse at those cruel killers, but they cannot do anything. Machine gun barrels have targeted them already and they know that the smallest mistake would be the last mistake they make. So, they do not make a move but yell and swear at Isis killers while doing the bloody massacre. Some moan and swear at the Isis members loudly. Many of them are still alive but badly wounded. It is probably about six or seven of them. Their moan and cry gets louder by the minute.

That's when Samad, another Hadji's trusted assistants suggests to shut them up by running over them with their tanks and keep them quiet forever. Hadji Mazen looks pleased with Samad's suggestion. He immediately agrees after laughing and telling Samad how proud he is with his way of punishing.

Damdani and Ayad, Hadji's two other assistants, jump on their tanks and drive towards the big number of dead men and women. They run over the dead and alive with their two tanks. The sound of bones breaking can be heard despite running tanks loud sound. Sound of air squeezes out of each body is also being heard between bone breaking sounds which has made the painful and heavy air of Al Darrah even sadder.

Sara, still being held by Hadji Mazen's men, is in total shock. She is just looking at what is happening and is crying. She is held tight and cannot move at all. Staying alive is no longer a concern to her. It does not matter if she dies anymore. She has lost all who she loved and has no purpose for living any longer.

There is no time for the group of Muslim elder men and women including Zahra, Sammy's mother, and many others. Armed pick-up trucks aim their machine guns at them and wait for the order to open fire. Zahra takes a deep breath and looks around at where younger people of Al Darrah being held carefully to see and make sure her son, Sammy, is not amongst them. That is the only thing that makes her happy at that moment. She smiles after she makes sure Sammy is not amongst the captives. She looks at the sky, murmurs something, as if she asks God to look after her son after she is executed. She begins noticing her Islamic death prayer when Hadji Mazen issues the fire order. Everyone of Muslim elder men and women are running to different directions. Terrified and screaming, Zahra runs towards where Sara is being held when the machine gun bullet rips her heart out and exits her back, forming a horrible hole on the innocent woman torso. To mass execute those people, Isis use heavy machine guns that their bullets are designed to penetrate armed vehicles and tanks. Each bullet hits two and three other people after ripping through the first victim. Each bullet rips through two or three people. There are hands, fingers, toes and legs being tossed onto the air.

They stop firing after Hadji Mazen waves his dirty hand. Smoke is coming out of both machine guns, elderly men and women, wounded and dead, lay on the floor and those still alive screams out of pain, yell cursing Isis and swear as loud as

possible. That's when Samad does what he had suggested to end Christian elderly men and women. He gets into his tank and runs over every single one of them, while some of Isis killers record the event with their smart phones.

After Samad is done, he gets out of his tank. All others lift their weapons up and cheer for him. Samad goes back into his tank to get out of the blood bath he has created and takes his original position near Hadji Mazen. Others still cheer and yell Allah Akbar. Samad's tank is about ten yards away from Hadji Mazen when Sara feels she has a chance to run. His captors have their weapons on the air cheering when she feels she is not being held that tight anymore. So, she releases herself and runs towards the tank Samad is driving. She throws herself under the tank before any of Isis evil terrorists can show any reaction. Samad who cannot actually see Sara keeps on driving. His tank runs over Sara's body and kills her and the baby in her stomach. Hadji Mazen and his assistants keep on yelling at Samad to stop, but he cannot hear them since the sound inside the tank is quite loud. He runs over Sara and that's how Sara prevents Isis's upcoming torture and terror. She had nothing to lose. She did that knowing what Hadji Mazen and his people had in mind for her. She kills herself thinking she would join the man she loved, her mother and father in heaven.

\* \* \*

After picking up his terrified sons, Daniel drove towards his house, so he would pick his wife and mother-in-law and his daughter, Nelly. Before reaching home though, he noticed one of his friend's car slowing down, flashing and trying to stop him. Daniel stopped and noticed Bibi Sama was at the back seat.

"What the hell are you doing man?" Asks Daniel's friend hysterically. "Why are you driving towards where those Isis animals are? Just run man. Their pick-up trucks and motor cross drivers are coming towards west slowly, asking all the people to evacuate and gather at the roundabout. They'll catch you all if they see you. Run. Run."

"I can't." Replies Daniel. "My wife, daughter and mother-in-law are all at home waiting for me. You go. Good luck."

Daniel's friend takes off. Daniel who has become so scared starts crying. John and Jacob have Liam between them. They



are holding each other's hands, shaking and crying. Daniel drives quite fast to reach and save his other family members. He decides not to drive on the main road in order not to be captured by Isis motorists. So, he chooses a rarely used road parallel to the main road in order to get home. Daniel arrives home finally. But as soon as he turns left to the alley, one of his neighbors who has all his family members in his car drives very fast by him. But he loses control when he wants to turn to the road and his car crashes to the wall of another neighbor's house and half of his car enters the house. The driver's head hits the steering wheel and a loud honking sound starts. It makes whoever lives in that area very concerned. They know the sound is definitely going to attract Isis attention towards them. Daniel knows no one is going to stop the car honking. So, he presses the brakes and stops his car, gets out and runs towards the honking neighbor's car. He sees his neighbor is luckily conscious. He pushes the man back and the car's honking stops. Daniel apologizes for not being able to stay and help. He runs back to his car and drives away immediately.

Daniel sees his wife, Eva, stand outside their house, holding two big plastic cases. Eva and Ezra have all the luggage laid outside. Daniel suddenly notices people of the neighborhood who have no car running towards him. Shocked and worried, he asks his sons to run inside their house. Daniel switches his pick-up truck off, removes the key from the ignition and throws the key towards Eva. He has no time to stop and make sure everyone is okay.

He asks her to get inside the house and close the door. People jump at the back of Daniel's pick-up truck, beg him to drive away. Daniel's pick-up truck is full of terrified people who need to get away under any circumstances. They show no politeness or understanding towards crossing vehicles. Their main objective is to simply get away and they are determined to do so no matter what it takes.

Despite being a kind man, Daniel's main concern is to take his family to safety. So, he walks towards his house trying to be as calm as possible. He enters his house. Eva is crying, standing behind the door waiting for him.

"Why did you come in?" Asks Eva crying. "What about our luggage?"

"No one is going to touch our luggage." Replies Daniel.

"People have more serious concern now than thinking of stealing our stuff."

People in the street suddenly get quiet and that makes Daniel think why? Everyone hears another Isis member's voice speaking into a megaphone,

"This is an order. Exit your houses and hideouts. Walk towards the roundabout. No harm will be done to you. You are safe. We are not here to kill you."

There's a moment of pause before the Isis member continues talking into the megaphone again.

"Our tanks will destroy all the houses in a few minutes." Says Isis on the megaphone. "We are not going to hurt you innocent people. We just want to prevent you of being killed simply because you are scared of us. We have our order to demolish the entire town. We are Muslims like you, human like you all and only concern for your safety. Walk towards the town's roundabout and save yourselves. You will be safe with our people. I assure you. We only punish armed people who killed many of our brothers last night. We only punish traitors. I repeat, we are not here to kill a single civilian."

Daniel and his family members are truly shaking out of fear. Hearing the Isis man's sound direction and distance, Daniel can say they are not in the alley. He figures they are only doing announcement on the main street still. So, he leads his family members to the side of his house which has a door open to a narrow alley called the garbage alley. The door is only used by Daniel's family to take the garbage out to a garbage bin, which is at the right side of the and situated where the narrow alley becomes wider.

Daniel orders everyone to be quiet He opens the door to garbage alley, asks everyone to go to the garbage bin quietly and crawl inside it. Daniel is shaking himself. Anxiety and fear have taken over now. He opens the door and peeks out at both sides.

"listen." Whispers Daniel into Eva's ear. "I'll go first, open the bin and wait for the kids. Send them quietly one by one and I'll lift and help them inside. Send your mom after the children. You come last."

Daniel speaks quietly. He keeps on asking Eva if she understood what he wanted her to do.

"Why do you keep on asking if I understand the plan." Asks Eva getting upset. "Go. Go before they notice us. Stop talking and go."

Daniel jumps out of the door immediately. He is only a few meters away from the garbage bin. He reaches the bin taking three or four long steps. He pushes the lid open quietly and notices the bin is luckily empty. He figures the municipality garbage cleaners had taken all the garbage out of the bin the previous night. There are only a few empty plastic cases stuck to the bottom of the bin. Daniel glances at the door and sees Eva brings her head out slowly and looks at him. Daniel insinuates and makes a hand gesture to Eva in a bit of agitated way and makes her understand that he wants her to be quicker than she is. Eva is taking long instructing her sons what she and their father want them to do.

Eva sends Jacob towards the bin. Daniel lifts him and helps him get inside the bin. It is John's turn next. Everyone has now gotten inside the bin except Eva and Liam, her youngest son. So, Eva runs towards Daniel carrying the boy. After helping them in, Daniel suddenly hears a footstep getting closer from the end of the alley. So, he immediately climbs up the bin and pulls the cover down closing the bin. But Liam begins coughing and vomiting because of the bad smell inside the bin. Eva and Daniel both cover the boy's mouth. Daniel places his index finger on his nose, makes a gesture demanding everyone to be absolutely quiet. Eva and Ezra are crying very quietly. Moments later, Eva tries Nelly's cell-phone once again. But she remembers Nelly has forgotten her cell-phone at home before going to Mira, her guitar instructor.

Daniel's offspring are absolutely terrified. But their fear level increases even more after hearing Isis members yelling and chasing people, stabbing them and cursing. The Isis terrorist who is holding the megaphone and ordering everyone out is so close that Daniel and everyone else in the bin think they have been found and are going to be forced outside the bin on gun point. The megaphone and the man's footstep sound begin to get farther and farther moments later. John gets his mouth closer to his mom and whispers into her ear telling her he has peed in his pants. Poor boy looks ashamed and embarrassed for wetting himself out of fear. But Daniel covers his mouth with the pail on his hand immediately.

Inside the bin is dark, but outside is still day light. Light can only penetrate the bin from a coin size hole on the bin. The light is the only light source in the bin and the reason Daniel and his family members can see each other's faces. Also, Daniel can see a limited area outside through the hole. They can hear the horrible sound of men and women, young and old, screaming, yelling and crying while their footsteps can also be heard running from Isis members who are chasing them. Being still in the bin and not amongst those unfortunate people of the neighborhood, Daniel feels he has been so far able to protect his family. But what bothers him most is the worry for his daughter. He knows Nelly is still quite fragile and cannot probably handle a terror like that.

Daniel and other suddenly hear a footstep approaching the bin. He looks out through the hole and sees the person who is producing the footstep sound. It's another Isis soldier wearing a vest. Hearing the footstep approaching, Daniel holds the bin's cover from inside, pulling it shut slowly but strongly. He figures if the person outside decides to push the lid up, it might stop him somehow. Everyone suddenly hears a sound from the other entrance of the garbage alley, loading a gun. Did they find Daniel and his family terrifyingly, he thinks? Or an Isis evil member has suspected there are people inside the bin? Everybody is motionless and quiet, holding their breath. They can clearly hear their hearts' beats. Ezra has her eyes closed, praying, while tears roll down her cheeks. Eva has the palm of her right hand on Liam's mouth. John and Jacob are shaking while holding hands. Daniel is still pulling the bin's cover, trying to breathe only with his mouth. They think the gun loading sound they heard means the Isis has suspected there are people hiding inside the bin and are going to open fire any moment killing them all.

The footstep that can be heard just outside the bin begins getting farther suddenly. Everyone then hear a vehicle gets ignited. Two Isis members speak a few words.

"Look, look, look." Say an Isis member to the other one. "They have even left their luggage and run. That's how scary we should be. Remember and talk about," Vehicle's door opens and closes. It's probably one of the Isis armored pick-up trucks driving away at last.

Daniel and his family made it through the terrible purge. They know they have survived and temporarily avoided getting

caught. They have no idea what fate their neighbors have met outside in their alley. Whispering cautiously still, Daniel asks Eva to try contacting Nelly and finds out if she is okay. But Eva replies saying Nelly has forgotten her cell-phone at home that day before going to Mira, her guitar instructor. She continues by saying that calling Mira, Nelly's guitar instructor, is their only way to know about their daughter, Nelly. So, before Daniel asks her to call Mira, Eva begins dialing her. But Daniel stops the phone-call immediately, telling Eva that Mira may be hiding somewhere just like them and calling her may begin her cell-phone ringing at a wrong place on a wrong time. He asks Eva to send her a text instead. So, Eva writes a text and sends her.

"Hello Mira. Please tell Nelly we are all okay. Please tell me you and Nelly are okay too. We are hiding right now. I suggest you do the same. We will find out what will happen to us soon, I guess. Please tell Nelly to come out of your house and runs to her dad's car when I send you the next text message."

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Mira receives the text from Nelly's mother, while hiding at the basement of her house along with Nelly. They can finally hear Isis announcing something using their megaphones. She and Nelly have been seated closely to one another and both terrified and crying. After finding out all her family members are okay, Nelly becomes more hopeful and relaxed. She requests Mira to send her mother a reply. So, Mira writes a text and sends it to Nelly's mother.

"Nelly and I are fine too. We are hiding already. Megaphone sound is getting closer and I better keep quiet. Nelly will be waiting for you. Take care."

Mira's husband is supposed to be at home by now. But there is no sign of him. Nelly knows that has scared Mira to death, but at the same time she thinks of other possible scenarios too.

"I want to suggest something." Whispers Nelly.

"What?" Asks Mira.

"I think you better run with me and my family when they come get me. I know even thinking about it makes us sad. But we don't know for sure if your husband will ever come back."

Mira bursts into tears and Nelly is remorseful for saying that to Mira.

"I'm so sorry." Says Nelly.

"I know. It's okay. You are right."

Mira begins thinking she has to consider what Nelly suggests.

Several minutes pass. Daniel and everyone with him are not hearing any threatening sounds anymore. It seems Al Darrah's people have obeyed Isis orders and all headed towards the roundabout. Moments later and after Daniel thinks about it, he gives himself the courage to let go of the bin's lid. The air inside the bin had become thick. Daniel wants to leave some fresh air in also and to peek out whether he would see anyone. So, he glances at the left and the right side of the bin. There is no one around. But he suddenly notices two people move inside a house that has a window directly opposite the garbage alley. That's when he figures it is not only him and his family who have decided to hide. Daniel finally gives himself the courage to get out of the bin. He pauses for a moment as he hears shots being fired every now and then in a distance. He has no doubt the sound is coming from the roundabout area.

"I'm going towards the car." Says Daniel to his family, getting his head close to the bin's lid.

"Eva, look at me going from the opening of the cover. Get everyone to the pick-up truck as soon as you see it on the top of this alley. Run towards the truck. Nobody make a sound. I do not want to start the car unless every one of you is already seated. It will attract the Isis if I start the car, and neighbors will run and force themselves to the back of the truck if they get to find out we are making a move. They have no choice but to do that, so they may survive this nightmare. I'm going now."

While glancing at all directions, Daniel tiptoes towards his pick-up truck in a crouched position. He unlocks his vehicle slowly and quietly, inserts the car key to the ignition quietly, puts the gear to natural and pushes the vehicle further towards the garbage alley which is a few steps ahead. He waves at the garbage bin, giving his wife a signal that she can do her part already. Everyone runs toward the car after getting out of the garbage bin quietly two minutes later. Everyone is seated in front and at the back of the pick-up truck. The car starts moving forwards as if Daniel releases the hand brake. The alley is a bit steep and the car moves without Daniel switching the ignition. Daniel suddenly notices a vehicle drives from somewhere in his neighborhood towards the dusty old road, driving into soft sand of the

dessert like a crazy. The old road is almost in parallel to the main road but outside residential area in desert. The old road gets closer to the residential area the further it goes towards the west end side of Al Darrah. It ends up joining the main intercity road at the end.

Daniel begins worrying as the vehicle's stupid driver leaves a cloud of dust and debris by driving his SUV into the desert and probably attracting Isis people's attention. Moments later everyone in Daniel's car hears an explosion very similar to a rifle's getting fired. Daniel stops and sees the sound was created by that car in the desert backfired or its tire burst. The sound is so loud that even Hadji Mazen and his sinful assistants hear that too.

Hadji Mazen orders Abu Mahdi to investigate the sound immediately. He assigns one of the heavily armed motor crosses to company Abu Mahdi in case.

As soon as receiving Hadji's order, Abu Mahdi orders his four soldiers to move with him towards the sound.

Daniel decides not to wait any longer. He knows the sound the car's backfire or tire burst had produced was definitely going to pull some of the Isis towards itself in the desert and the dirt road. So, he figures it is their best chance to get away from that area. So, he asks Eva to contact Mira again and tell her to send Nelly out in two minutes. Daniel steps on the gas and drives as fast as he can, glancing at the vehicle in the desert every now and then. He sees the driver who seems to have accepted his fate. Because the driver exits his car calmly and sits under the shadow of his vehicle, waiting for his forbidding fate.

Everyone in Daniel's car is shaking out of fear and stress. Eva, Jacob and Liam are seated in front and next to Daniel. Ezra is holding John at the back of pick-up truck on the floor board.

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Mira and Nelly are ready to go, waiting to hear Daniel's car approaching. Mira has decided to take off with Nelly's family. She has her house's front gate ajar and is peeking out to see whether she can see Daniel's car getting closer. Mira and Nelly exit the house and begin running towards Daniel's car. But they have no idea they are not the only ones who had hidden, waiting for an opportunity to escape pushing

themselves on any vehicle with enough space to carry them. Some other Al Darrah residents have done the same and by seeing Daniel's pick-up truck with available space on its back's floor board, they too run towards Daniel's pick-up truck, jumping at the back, pushing others to get on the car while the car still is in motion. Some throw themselves without thinking how they are going to land. It is the law of jungle, the stronger would win. Daniel, Eva, Ezra and even the three boys are shocked. None of them have thought of such a possibility. Daniel has been caught off guard. He has no choice. Because he knows they are seconds away from getting caught, face to face with Isis people. Daniel now has people at the back of his truck whom he has never seen or associated with before. Daniel stops the truck when he reaches Nelly and Mira. Mira forces herself at the back and Nelly goes up and pushes herself in an uncomfortable position. The back of Daniel's truck has no more space left. It is literally full of terrified people. Daniel drives towards a narrow road in the desert, which leads to the old dirt road. He knows he has no chance of using the main road as he has seen with his own eyes how many escaping vehicles are there. Some abandoned, some stopped after crashing to the other vehicles. He knows the old dusty road is their best choice.

Daniel reaches the old dirt road. He speeds up looking behind from his mirrors constantly to see whether Isis has seen them when suddenly turns pale out of fear. He sees an Isis armed pick-up truck is flashing lights and following them. It is Abu Mahdi and his people trying to make Daniel stop by flashing their head light. Having so many people at the back of the truck, Daniel's truck has become heavy and cannot go fast only so much. One of the people at the back suddenly yells,

"They are coming for us."

Everyone at the back of Daniel's truck begins yelling and screaming at Daniel demanding from him to go faster or they are all going to die. Women and girls crying and citing their prayers. Mira is well aware of Nelly's psychological history. Mira hugs Nelly and holds her head which is shaking while she cries.

"Nelly. Look at me." Yells Mira in panic. "Look at me."  
Nelly lifts her head up and looks at Mira.



"Repeat after me." Says Mira. "Repeat after me. Everything is going to be alright because we are in motion. Because we are on move. Remember what your psychologist taught you to say."

Nelly nods and begins murmuring something while she stares at Mira's lips and cries. She wants to glance at her left side to see how close Isis has gotten to them. But Mira holds her head tight and prevents her to do so. Mira looks behind herself and sees the evil black flag on the armed Isis pick-up truck behind the dust cloud which is created by Daniel's car as the road is dusty. She sees two Isis members standing behind the heavy machine gun on the back of the truck.

The motor cross driver who escorts Abu Mahdi's armed pick-up truck, suddenly notices a woman jumping from one roof to the other. So, he changes his direction towards her. Abu Mahdi's armed pick-up truck is getting closer and closer to Daniel's. While seated next to his driver, Abu Mahdi takes out his binocular and checks Daniel's pick-up truck and its passengers when he suddenly stops moving. He notices Nelly at the back of the truck. Abu Mahdi's mouth is open, astonished by Nelly's beauty. A devilish smile forms his lips.

"I think my future wife is in that pick-up truck." Says Abu Mahdi to his driver. "Go faster. We must catch them. There is a heavenly super beautiful angel in that car."

Daniel has stepped on the gas and is trying to increase speed. His truck is approaching a hill. There is a bump on the road, about ten or fifteen yards before the dirt road begins going uphill. Daniel's vehicle is getting closer to the bump and he has no idea that the bump is there. Abu Mahdi's armed pick-up truck is reaching them fast. All Daniel's passengers shout and scream constantly asking Daniel to go faster. Daniel glances at the Isis pick-up truck and is praying they would somehow stop chasing them. Daniel reaches the bump. But he notices it as soon as he turns his eyes from the mirror to the dusty road and it is too late to do something about it. The truck jumps the bump, throwing the truck up and down, and Nelly is tossed out as her sitting position is not securely. She falls in the dusty old road. Daniel looks at his mirror a few yards after his car jumped the bump and sees his only daughter is laying on the floor. His mind stops responding. He goes numb and pale. All what his mind pictured is come true. His beautiful young daughter is going to be captured by Isis animals within moments. She is going to be abused and raped by God knows how many of them. Daniel's pick-up truck

slows down after Daniel's muscles go numb, while every single passenger shout and curse and swear at him telling him to go as Isis is already too close. Mira is crying and screaming, calling Daniel's name and Eva's name telling them Nelly has fallen out of the truck. But everyone else is shouting and therefor no one can actually hear her.

**Daniel has to make the most difficult decision in his life within seconds. He knows all his passengers, including his sons, wife and mother-in-law are going to be killed if he stops for his daughter. On the other hand, what would happen to his fragile beautiful girl if he continues without her. He glances at the mirror and sees how close Isis truck is to them. He bursts into tears and begins yelling like a crazy man. He keeps on driving as he cannot let all his other family members die because of one. Eva has her ears covered. She has no idea her daughter has fallen out.**

Daniel stops the truck again as soon as he reaches the hill top. He looks at his mirror to see his daughter one last time. But he sees Abu Mahdi's armed truck slow down and stops around ten yards away from where Nelly is. Nelly is now seated on the road, confused and scared. Looking at what is happening. Daniel's tears are not stopping. He is in a complete shock when Eva suddenly pulls his shirt and asks him why has he stopped? And why does he keep looking at the mirror? Daniel's lips are vibrating. He did not tell Eva what has happened. He is beginning to hate himself as he believes he has presented his beautiful daughter to Isis animals by leaving her behind. Daniel's passengers yell and curse constantly, swear at him, demanding him to drive. He drives another five yards and stops again. He is getting crazy. Daniel's pick-up truck is now exactly at the tip of the hill.

Nelly gets up and begins running towards her father's vehicle, after she sees Isis vehicle stops near her. No one gets out of Abu Mahdi's pickup truck.

Daniel looks at Eva crying.

"Our daughter was tossed out of the backside after I hit the bump."

Eva begins hitting herself on the head and screams loudly, saying No. Daniel and Eva's sons are crying and trying to look behind them. Two of Daniel's uninvited passengers decide to jump down and run-on foot after they make sure Daniel's vehicle is no longer going to move. But Abu Mahdi brings his

head out of his car window and orders the heavy machine gun operator, another ugly Isis terrorist called Ostad, to open fire.

"Ostad." Yells Abu Mahdi. "Open fire. I've got whom I wanted already."

As if he was waiting for such an honor, the guy behind the machine gun points the machine gun's barrel to Daniel's truck, Nelly who has fallen while running towards her dad's car, looks back and sees the machine gun has aimed at her family.

**"No." Screams Nelly.**

**But the heartless guy behind the machine gun has his order. He opens fire and creates a horrible scene within seconds. Powerful bullet of the heavy machine gun begins splitting and tearing flesh and bones of Daniel's passengers while Nelly watches in shock. Bullets hitting Daniel's truck rip a part of the vehicle, tossing it to different directions. The sound of screaming and crying innocent people in Daniel's truck is mixed with the loud machine gun firing sound that makes the scene even more terrifying. Moments later, after the operator opens fire at Daniel and his passengers, no one in the car is identifiable after the machine gun operator ceases fire. All that is left are body parts in the car and around it. The truck suddenly engulfs into fire, burning all that is left of those defenseless people into ash.**

Shocked and disoriented, Nelly hears a car door opens behind her. She looks back and sees Abu Mahdi, an evil looking monster in black, is walking towards her. He is only a few yards away and approaching. In shock and frightened, Nelly begins murmuring something. She begins murmuring what Mira reminded her to say when she was scared moments ago.

Abu Mahdi reaches Nelly, gazing into her beautiful eyes.

"Allah o Akbar, Allah o Akbar, Allah o Akbar." Says Abu Mahdi while having the vilest smile on his face again.

"Allah, you are the kindest and greatest. Thank you for this gift. Guys come meet my bride. Look how beautiful she is."

Abu Mahdi gets closer to Nelly by saying each sentence, and Nelly pushes herself back with each step he gets closer to her.

"I swear to Allah I will give you everything." Continues Abu Mahdi. "All I have is yours. I swear to Allah I will not let anyone touch you, only me. Oh God. You are pretty really."

Abu Mahdi turns his head towards his driver.

"Didn't I tell you my bride is in that truck?" Yells Abu Mahdi asking the driver and laughing loudly. "Oh, thank you Ya Allah."

He gets closer to Nelly.

"What's your age?" Asks the evil man. "I will produce a lot of babies with you. Let me just see how big your boobs are. Are they as big as a lemon?"

Abu Mahdi's team members burst into laughter after what he asks Nelly. Nelly, on the other hand, terrified and helpless, pleads and begs the animal Isis rapist not to come any closer.

"Please do not touch me." Begs Nelly while crying hard and shaking. "I'm sick. Please."

But Abu Mahdi seems getting hornier the more Nelly begs him and cries.

"Guys." Yells Abu Mahdi, turning his ugly head towards people in the armed pick-up truck. "Please get out of the truck and give my bride and I some privacy for a few minutes. I need to take her to the back of the truck now."

Cheering and whistling, Abu Mahdi's people congratulate him while getting down the truck. Abu Mahdi begins touching and rubbing his penis while staring at Nelly and getting closer to her. He rubs his penis with one hand and points at Nelly with the other hand, commanding her to stand up and follow him.

"One kiss from your lips right now." Says Abu Mahdi. "The rest at the back of that truck."

Having lost all her family members killed right in front of her eyes, Nelly has no one else left to protect her. She has no one to run to. Confused and petrified, Nelly has no idea what to do and how to make Isis wild and heartless members to leave her alone. She shakes and cries. For a moment, she thinks of killing herself but does not know how. She suddenly stops crying and looking at Abu Mahdi who has already reached her and is only one step away from her.

"Wait, wait, wait please." Pleads Nelly. "Just one second. Let me tell you something first. Who is your God? To please your God, just listen to me."

"Ok. I'll wait." Replies Abu Mahdi. "But first I touch your beautiful young breasts and kiss your lips. I'll give you two minutes to tell me what you want before I take you to the back of my truck."

**To molest and touch Nelly, Abu Mahdi bends to kiss her. Nelly kicks the sand and pushes herself back. She hears a sound come from a distance, something like the sound of a fire cracker. Abu Mahdi gets his dirty face closer to Nelly when a bullet hits his lower jaw and throws it yards away after completely separating it from his ugly face. The bullet impact is so strong that lifts the monster from the ground and throws him two yards away to the direction where his jaw had flown.**

Abu Mahdi's driver who has gotten out of the truck as per his order, suddenly yells.

"Sniper." Yells Ostad, Abu Mahdi's driver after witnessing what happens to his boss.

Ostad is taking shelter now.

Ostad begins running towards Nelly to pull her towards the truck and get away from that area, taking Nelly with him, Ostad is running towards Nelly while Abu Mahdi is on the ground. All his upper tooth set are exposed and a strange snort like sound comes out of his throat when he breathes. Nelly is still on shock, looking around to find out where the bullet came from and who shot the Isis animal.

"So, there's a God." Murmurs Nelly.

Ostad has almost reached Nelly when a bullet hits him on his Adam's apple, creating a hole on his throat exiting from back of his neck. The bullet is so fast and strong that it takes Ostad two seconds to realize he has been shot. Ostad loses control after getting shot and is falling down when a second bullet hits him on his forehead. His dirty head is hit. Ostad lands a yard away from Nelly.

The other two machine gun operators who had been hiding, now are running towards the truck. They think the ordeal is over. They almost reach the truck when two consecutive bullets put holes both on the front and the back tires of Isis's armored

truck. The second machine gun operator is farther from the truck. He is running as fast as he can while the driver has almost made it to the truck. While running for his miserable life, a bullet hits him on his knee, makes him fall down and hit the ground. He sits right up after falling down in pain. He looks at his comrade and sees him reaching the car too. He opens the driver side's door, jumps in and hides under the steering wheel and dashboard.

"Don't leave me alone," yells the wounded machine gun operator. "for Allah's sake. Be a man. Be good Muslim. Help me."

The guy who is extremely afraid himself, is not answering him. He is hiding and shaking.

"You will never go to heaven if you do not help another Isis soldier."

That is the last word he says in his life while begging his comrade to help him. Another bullet hits him on the left shoulder and exits from his right side after ripping through his internal organs and left wrist."

Having followed the bullets' directions, shocked but a bit glad, Nelly looks at the side where bullets are coming. She wants to know who is the guardian angel? But the only thing she sees is some empty houses on the foreground and three five story buildings at the background.

The driver is still hiding in the truck like a real coward. He figures he better establish contact with Hadji Mazen, his superior, and ask for help and back-up. He slowly reaches for his belt and grabs his walky-talky, slowly gets it close to his dirty moth. But a bullet hits him on his back and exits his lower part of the body, ripping through his balls before he presses the button on the walkie talkie to talk. It seems that the sniper is not done with the last Isis guy yet. He hits the car with one bullet, while Nelly witnesses the whole thing. The second bullet he shoots, enters the truck's fuel tank. The truck explodes and engulfs in fire after it explodes and bursts into pieces. The guy is still alive and breathing. He burns in the fire alive while his screaming and yelling sound fills the desert.

Still alive and snorting, Abu Mahdi tries hard to sit upright. He probably wants the sniper to see that he is still alive so he would finish him so he would not suffer the pain anymore. Nelly is waiting for the sniper to end him. She keeps looking

at the monster and at the side where bullets comes from. But it seems that the sniper is not going to take the shot. Angry and furious, Nelly stands up, looks around and sees a big piece of rock. She walks to the rock and picks it and goes towards Abu Mahdi to finish him herself. Abu Mahdi tries reaching for his gun at his left side which is not the side Nelly is getting close to. The wounded monster looks at Nelly while bleeding and snorting. He suddenly makes a move trying to get his gun and points at Nelly. He wants to kill Nelly before she ends him with the piece of rock. Screaming and cursing, Nelly decides to kill the bastard hitting him from a different angle. She changes the direction she is approaching the Isis killer and by doing so, she blocks the view of the sniper. She stops one step away from the man who ordered killing all her family and those people. She screams loudly and lifts the rock. But Abu Mahdi tries lifting his gun to shoot Nelly when Nelly hears a buzzing sound like a flying bee. A bullet touches her shirt at the side she has lifted the rock and hits the Isis killer on the face. Nelly drops the rock and only notices the sniper has saved her life as Abu Mahdi's gun falls out of his hand after getting shot. Nelly turns back and gives a long look at those three five story buildings. She takes a few steps ahead, looks at his father's burning truck. She changes the direction and goes towards her family's dead and burning bodies. But a bullet hits the ground a few yards in front of her feet. She stops and looks back at those buildings. She seems to have gotten the message. The sniper is telling her not to proceed and go to her parents' burning bodies. So, she turns back and sits on the ground, turns her head from the three buildings, lowers her head and cries quietly.

\* \* \*

Hanieh is still on the rooftops. She is under a lot of stress. She hides under the cooler box of the rooftop she is at and decides to take her shoes off. She has a nice outfit and shoes on as she was asked by Sara to company her and others to the Sheikh's registry office. She knows well the shoe she has on is slowing her out aside from producing noises while she walks and jumps from one roof top to another. So, she takes off her shoes and runs in a crouched position again.

Desert sun has shined on the rooftops since it has come up and has heated the floors. But Hanieh has no choice. She pauses for a second and looks for ahead. She is right. She has seen it right. Rooftops are connected to one another until houses finish and reach the alley. She can get away from the

roundabout for about hundred yards just by jumping for rooftop to rooftop.

Hanieh is a strong girl. She witnessed Amer, Sara and their parents die and she can guess what happened to the others as she can hear them scream and cry while she was on a rooftop. She jumps from one building's rooftop to the other, stays down for a second and continues after she makes sure she is secured and unnoticed.

Hanieh continues this until she jumps to the rooftop of a house and sees a slim and young beautiful woman holding her infant child on her right hand and a kitchen knife on the left hand while standing under a little shade on her rooftop. She seems to be holding the knife to protect her child and herself in case she is caught. The woman probably has no idea who Isis is and what are they capable of.

The young woman takes a defensive gesture after she suddenly sees Hanieh. She has turned pale and has the knife lifted. Hanieh puts her finger on her lips and says "Hush" to the terrified young mother.

"Calm down." Whispers Hanieh after she gets closer to the young woman slowly. "Look at me. Do I look like one of those bastards?"

The young mother shakes her head slowly.

"I guess you can go back downstairs after the sunset." Continues Hanieh, whispering. "Keep the baby under shade. I think those bastards will be leaving when it gets dark and when they kill all the town's people. I promise I'll come back for you if I can. Do not switch any of your house lights. No matter what. Stay safe. I have to go."

A bitter smile forms on the young mother's face. Hanieh looks around, focuses ahead, bends and leaves the woman quietly. Most Al Darrah houses are single floor town houses. There are two story houses and buildings also and that makes it a bit difficult for Hanieh to move fast. But Hanieh makes it to the last building on the row and reaches the rooftop of the building after which she sees an alley. She now has to decide her next move.

Hanieh has Garden Street, Al Darrah's the main street that leads to the roundabout on her right side. Other houses and



building's rooftops on her left, and an alley in front of her. She decides to continue her escape by staying on the rooftop at her left side. So, she jumps from one rooftop to the other quietly, carefully and as fast as she possibly can. Minutes later she makes it to the last building's rooftop, which also ends reaching an alley. All what she can see after that alley is desert and an old dirt road. She checks the dome roof door at the house she is on. She has to get out of that building somehow if she wants to continue running. But she also has to decide what she wants to do after that as well. So, she checks the building's dome roof door and it is luckily open. She gets in slowly and walks down stairs very cautiously and quietly. She has to make sure there is no one at home. She feels thirsty because of so much fear and anxiety. So, she goes towards the kitchen first after she makes absolutely sure there is no one at home. She opens the fridge and sees a cold coca cola and drinks it all in one go. She goes to the washroom and washes her face, looks at the mirror and bursts into tears suddenly. Confused, worried and careful, she stands in front of the mirror, stares at herself and cries quietly. She goes back to the living room, lays on a couch there and tries to relax for a moment. She gets up moments later and decides to look for a pair of shoes. Her feet are burnt as she walked on the very hot rooftops. She looks around for a while and finds sinkers, tries it and feels it is bigger than her feet. Having no other choice, she puts on the sneakers, ties the laces and goes towards the window to evaluate her surroundings. After standing there for a moment, she knows she has to cross that alley and sneak to the other side. She wants to enter the building at the other side, go up to the rooftop and continue to the opposite side of the roundabout. She sees one of the building's window is slightly open, so she figures that window is her way in. But she has to check if the house's entrance door is open first.

Hanieh goes to the door and opens it a bit just to see if she can see any danger. She does not see anyone and decides it is time to open the door and runs to the other side of the alley, very quickly, quickly and prudently.

She first tries the main entrance door and finds it open surprisingly. But the door sounds rusty and rattling. She changes her mind and thinks of getting to the house's open window. She is away more than hundred yards from the roundabout and Hadji Mazen's killers. But she cannot take any risks. That door has a load rusty sound.

Jumpy and apprehensive, it takes her sometime to get to that window. She gets into the little garden below the window. But she feels apprehended when she gets closer, thinking if she can really enter from the window. A young man suddenly calls her from a bigger window of that house before she tries that window and startles Hanieh to death.

"Miss. Miss." Whispers the young boy. "Get in from here. Quickly."

The boy opens the bigger window after looking at the left and right. Hanieh jumps in like a cat.

"Thank you." Says Hanieh. "Are you alone?"

She notices she has her sneakers while standing on the carpet. She wants to take them off, but the young boy stops her saying it is okay. She follows the boy to the living room and sees a middle-aged man laid on a mat right at the middle of the room. The man's eyes are closed and a woman is just staring at him and seated next to the man. The woman glances at Hanieh and Hanieh only notices the woman's tears on her face. The young boy looks at her mother, and looks at Hanieh.

"He is my dad." Says the boy. "He had a heart attack as soon as he found out Isis had entered the town. They will burn my dad's body if they find out we are here. My mom and I know what they will do to us. We want to bury him in the court yard tonight. Are you also hiding?"

Tears roll down Hanieh's face again. The woman gets up, goes to Hanieh and hugs her for a moment. She asks the boy to go and get Hanieh a cold juice.

"My condolences." Says Hanieh to the woman. "What a bad time it is for you. I understand."

"Nothing can be done now." Replies the woman. "That was my husband's destiny. You have escaped, haven't you?"

"Yes, I did." Replies Hanieh.

"Good for you. Bravo. My son and I decided to die in our own house like my late husband."

Hanieh nods and looks at the dead body. The boy comes back with a big glass of apple juice in his hand. Hanieh thanks the boy and drinks the cold juice in two sips and gives the glass back to the boy.

"What will you do now?" Asks the woman.

"I don't know yet." Replies Hanieh. "The only thing I can now think about is to get as far as possible and stay hidden for a while."

The woman asks Hanieh to take a seat on the couch and relax a bit. Hanieh sits on the couch. It is not far from the man's dead body. She tells the tale how she could run away and the young mother whom she had come across. She says she is planning to reach the west of the town, hide until it is dark, move again in hopes of getting herself to safety.

The boy gets up and goes to his room. Then he goes to the kitchen and comes back holding a backpack and places it in front of Hanieh.

"I got you something that I think you would need." Says the boy. "My dad taught me desert can be dangerous. You know too. It has nothing much. There's two cold bottles of water, a few canned foods, like beans and tuna. Also, some salami slices, a small knife and a soap. I know you will not stay with us. But you are so brave escaping those murderers. Really."

Moments later, Hanieh thanks the boy and his mother, condolences them once again and heads towards their rooftop, while the boy escorts her up quietly. He opens the dome roof for her. Hanieh hugs the boy and tells him she hopes to see the boy in a happier and better circumstances before she leaves.

Hanieh continues jumping from one rooftop to another, heading towards west side of Al Darrah, opposite side of where Isis is committing a genocide.

She moves faster and quieter now, as if she has become an expert already. She peeks around every now and then to make sure no Isis has noticed her. She continues after she makes sure it is safe to move. She continues until she gets to the end of the buildings where she can see the flowers intersection. She jumps down on the balcony slowly and notices there is a fence on the wall of the balcony side with wild plants grown on it. She climbs down the fence after she makes sure it is strong enough, crosses the flowers street and sneaks to the other side carefully. She has now reached a two cornered store. A corner on the flowers street and the other

one to the back alley. She finds the store door's open and is surprised how lucky she has been.

She enters the grocery store, walks between shelves and does not see anyone. Her main objective is to find a staircase that she can get to the rooftop from. But after she does not find any door or staircase, she walks out cautiously and goes to the next building which is a house. She cannot find any door or window open. So, she checks houses one after the other. Hanieh is forced to be exposed outside in the alley for a while. She is very worried any of Isis killers are going to see and capture her. She finally finds an open door after she sneaks from building's fronts to another for a distance of fifty yards. She finds an open door almost near the end of the alley and enters, takes the stairs up and sees a women's tailors shop, abandoned with lights still and its door open. She continues going upstairs until she reaches the building's rooftop. She continues jumping from one rooftop to the next, until a few minutes later she gets to the rooftop to the last building. She is at the dream intersection when she suddenly hears a gunshot. She opens the dome roof's door and gets downstairs immediately. She glances at her left and right sides and runs towards the other side of the street after she sees no one and feels safe. She sees a house door open and gets in immediately and sees a big dog in front of her, growling. Hanieh and the dog stare at each other for a moment. Hanieh sits down slowly. All what concern her is not to let the dog bark and attract Isis criminals to that house if they are around by any chance. Plus, she does not want to be attacked by the dog. She suddenly remembers the young boy has packed some salami for her in the backpack which he has prepared for her. So, she gets her backpack off her back slowly while the dog growls. She looks in and sees the salami, takes it out of its plastic case and stretches her hand towards the dog. The dog stops growling and begins sniffing and gets closer to Hanieh slowly and bites the salami off her hand. Hanieh sees the dog's water bowl is empty. She picks it up and goes to the house kitchen, fills it with water and places it near the dog, as if it has not drunk any water for some time. The dog begins drinking. Hanieh picks her backpack and goes back upstairs towards the rooftop.

She continues again, jumping from one rooftop to another and gets farther and farther from where Isis evil members are terrorizing Al Darrah's innocent people. The farther she gets, she gains more and more self-confidence. She continues, crosses two more alleys carefully and finally reaches the

last building's rooftop. The next building is around fifty to sixty yards away from the building she is at. She sits under the shade for a moment, thinking what to do. She suddenly remembers Robert and gets curious where he is? She is thinking of Robert when her cell-phone begins vibrating in her pocket. She lays down on the rooftop and looks at her cell-phone and smiles when she sees Robert's name and picture on the screen. She bursts into tears before she answers her phone. She answers the phone and begins talking quietly.

"Hi." Whispers Hanieh while sobbing. "Where are you? Oh, I'm so happy you are alive. I'm scared"

"Hello darling." Replies Robert also quietly. "I'm not going to die without seeing my darling one last time. Where are you?"

"I escaped." Replies Hanieh. "I've just crossed the dream intersection. I walked from one rooftop to the other until I reached here on the last building's rooftop. Buildings end here. But I'm not at the main street side. I'm at the back alley side. I'm near that dirt road. Oh my God. I'm so scared."

"What is the next building?" Asks Robert. "What do you mean? What do you exactly see around you?"

"I can see a few buildings. They look like cellars and storage facility buildings. I know school buildings are behind them. But I cannot see the school."

"Stay where you are honey. I'm not that far from you. I was hiding too after I figured those bastards had begun killing people. I picked a nice rifle from the police station. Don't be afraid babe. Stay where you are. I'm coming to you."

"No. No. No." Whispers Hanieh crying. "Don't hang up for God sake."

"Ok. Ok. Calm down. I'll not. Buying this handsfree Bluetooth device was the best decision I've made in months."

Hanieh is still crying. But her tears are no longer out of fear and horror she has been into, but because a man who loves her is soon going to join and protect her. Hope begins building inside her again. She suddenly hears a vehicle is approaching. She hears people running and yelling, demanding the driver to stop and take them with him.

"I think a car is approaching Robert." Says Hanieh, panting. "Hide. Just hide. Oh my God. Hide for my sake now."

Robert enters a parking lot near him. He hides himself between a few parked vehicles after he is warned by Hanieh when he sees a cellar storage gate is open on the other side of the main street. He figures cellar storage building has gates at the both ends. So, if he crosses the main street and enters the cellar, he can exit from the other end and he is going to be where Hanieh can see him. So, he decides to go for it. Robert starts running towards the other side of the main street and enters the cellar immediately. He was right. The cellar has gates on the both ends. While running and breathing fast, Hanieh gives herself the courage to lift her head a bit and see what car has been approaching. She brings her head up slowly and peeks down. She sees a pick-up truck and so many people hanging from all over the car and holding themselves on it. She sees the back of pick-up truck is filled with man and women, young and old. She describes whatever she sees and keeps Robert informed.

After exiting the other end of the cellar, Robert sees a single building at the middle of the dusty lot. He continues running until he reaches the old building, walks upstairs and gets to the rooftop, while Hanieh tells him about every move the pickup truck and its passengers make.

Robert reaches the rooftop and tells Hanieh to look at the single building's rooftop. He wants to make sure he is where he thinks Hanieh told him. Hanieh looks at the single building on the middle of the dusty lot and begins crying louder after she sees Robert, as if she is finally relieved and happy.

"Oh my God." Whisper shouts Hanieh excitedly. "I can see you baby. Thanks God."

Robert keeps on looking around too, but he is not able to see Hanieh. He can also see the pickup truck Hanieh was talking about. He is looking at the truck and so many passengers at the back and inside it when he also sees an Isis armed truck is approaching it from a far distance, while being escorted by a motor cross. Robert has no doubt they are Isis terrorists when he sees the black flags raised on both the truck and the bike. Only Robert sees Hanieh's head moves on the building's rooftop when she suddenly decides to change her position after Robert told her about Isis armed truck and the motor cross are getting closer and she might be spotted by them.

Hanieh crawls behind a cooler box quickly, so she would see the whole thing about the truck with people and Isis. It is apparent Isis armed truck and the motor cross are chasing the truck which is running with so many people in it. Hanieh and Robert get quiet for a moment.

"They are after those people in that civilian truck." Says Hanieh, whispering.

"Just do not move again please Honey." Says Robert. "No more sudden moves."

"Oh my God." Says Hanieh after the civilian truck crosses the building where she is on. That's Daniel. Nelly's dad. Oh my God. It's Nelly's family escaping. Oh shit. God, please help them."

Robert begins taking the bullets out of the police backpack he had taken from the police station.

"I'll send those Isis mother fuckers to hell." Says Robert angrily.

"No. You do not have to do that." Yells Hanieh scared. "They are not one or two people. Too risky. I've gone through enough to stay alive till now. For my sake do not make such a crazy move."

Robert is breathing heavily out of anger and stress, and Hanieh cries louder after she figures it is Nelly's family on that truck.

Hanieh and Robert, in utter disbelief, witness Nelly falls out of her father's pick-up truck, and the truck stops on the top of the hill. Hanieh cannot breathe after what she saw. She and Robert cannot speak a word while witnessing what happened. Only Robert keeps on murmuring, cursing at Isis murderers and begging God to help them. Their hearts beat faster. They are so stressed and scared. They close their eyes when the Isis man, Abu Mahdi, gets out of his pick-up truck and walks towards Nelly. Hanieh screams and bursts into tears again after she sees the heavy machine gun of Abu Mahdi's armed truck opens fire at Daniel's truck, killing them all. By seeing that scene, a tear rolls down Robert's cheek and he holds his head with his both hands, realizing how ruthless and cruel Isis is for the first time. Hanieh begins praying for Nelly as she knows very well her friend is

not going to last for a long time being that pretty and defenseless. Moments later, Robert and Hanieh hear a gun fire. They witness everything after that. Being a professional shooter himself, Robert follows the direction of the sniper's bullets and knows only Sammy can be the sniper.

Hanieh suddenly stops crying after she witnesses the sniper's first bullet rips Abu Mahdi's lower jaw off, throwing it yards away. She pauses for a moment and thinks Robert had started targeting Isis animals.

"What's happening?" Whispers Hanieh. "Is that you Robert?"  
"No babe." Replies Robert, whispering. "I think it's Sammy."  
Robert pauses for a moment.  
"God damn it." Continues Robert. "It is Sammy taking them out."

They both keep quiet again after they hear the next shot the sniper fires. The next and the next, until sniper has finished them all. What Robert and Hanieh witness the unknown sniper did to each and every Isis member in the desert makes them feel stronger and know somebody is not going down at least without a fight.

"Die you bastards." Murmurs Hanieh. "How is he doing that from such a far distance?"

"He's good." Replies Robert, also whispering. "Just did not know how good he is."

"Yes." Yells both Robert and Hanieh after a bullet hits Isis armed pick-up truck's petrol tank. The truck explodes into pieces, killing the last Isis person alive at that field. They hear each other's excited breathing. Robert and Hanieh think the show is over. But they suddenly notice Nelly lifts a piece of rock and walks towards Abu Mahdi.

"What the hell is she doing?" Asks Hanieh.

"I don't know baby."

Robert sees Abu Mahdi reaches for his gun at his back. He takes his rifle up and targets Abu Mahdi. But the sniper's bullet places the last bullet and ends the Isis animal before he even targets him.

Still watching Nelly and Isis's dead people, Robert and Hanieh hear Robert's call-waiting tone at the background. Robert glances at his phone screen and sees it is Sammy calling him moments later.

"Honey, do not move a muscle." Says Robert to Hanieh, whispering. "Sammy is calling me. Stay on the line. I will talk to him and come back to our call."

"Ok. Tell him that I say he is Nelly's real hero if he is the one shooting those bastards."



"I will."

Robert answers this phone.

"What are you doing on the rooftop of that old building?"

Asks Sammy.

"It's a long story." Replies Robert. "Hanieh has escaped Isis. She is at the rooftop of the next building around hundred yards away."

"Yeah. I have her in my scope."

"I came to get her. Was that you dropping them dead on the desert?"

"Yeah, it was me," replies Sammy. "with my own rifle. I finished working on it. My God dude. Good job."

"It's a long story. I tell you later."

"I don't know why is Nelly not moving. I guess she's in total shock. I'll watch around from here and tell you if there are any Isis people. Go and get her to me here dude. You know I cannot with a limp leg."

"How did you see me?"

"I noticed something moved in my scope. I saw you when I looked closer. We do not have much time Robert. An Isis asshole may get to see her exposed any minute. Go and get her to me. For some strange reason, none of the Isis even bothered to check my building."

"They probably think your building is still under construction and no one lives in them. I'll get Hanieh. We go together and fetch her, watch me though. See you in a bit. You got it."

Robert switches back to Hanieh after he finishes talking with Sammy and tells her what Sammy wants him to do,

"Listen baby." Says Robert. "I'll have to go get Nelly, bring her to you, so we can all go to Sammy's apartment. Apparently, it's the safest place now in Al Darrah. You look at me from the rooftop where you are on and come down when you see me bringing Nelly, getting close to you, ok?"

"Ok my love. I will. Nelly is obviously in shock. Tell her Hanieh is waiting for her. Or let me talk to her. But do not disconnect the line. Stay with me though."

"Sure. We will stay connected, but I can't focus while talking. I'm moving now."

Robert walks downstairs and peeks around and begins running towards Nelly after he makes sure it is safe. The distance between the building he is on and Nelly does not seem that long to him at first. But when he begins running, Robert

notices the distance that seemed not more than fifty yards is in reality around one hundred and fifty yards or even a bit more. Robert runs as quick as he can and reaches Nelly a moment later. Nelly does not even look back to see who is getting close to her. She is still seated in the same position without moving. She is literally in absolute shock. After reaching Nelly, Robert slows down a few yards away from her and approaches her very slowly.

"Miss Nelly." Says Robert approaching. "Nelly. I am Robert. Hanieh's boyfriend. I know you are in shock, but those murderers will see you and get you if you keep sitting here and expose yourself. Hanieh is waiting for you. I'll take you to her. Get up please, let me help you."

Robert offers her his hand to help her get up. But Nelly suddenly begins screaming after she notices a man getting close to her.

"Stay back." Yells Hanieh in Robert's handsfree Bluetooth.

"Do not try touching her. She's sick. Let me talk to her."

Robert takes out his handsfree Bluetooth device and throws it towards Nelly.

"Miss Nelly, place that device into your ear." Says Robert. "Hanieh, your friend, is on the line. She wants to talk to you, please. We don't have much time. Those animals will see us any moment."

Nelly slowly and cautiously picks the device after a long disturbing pause. She places it on her ear.

"Hello Nelly." Says Hanieh. "It's me Hanieh. Look at your right side, look at that yellow brick building's rooftop."

Nelly turns her head towards her right and begins searching the building's rooftops. To be seen by Nelly, Hanieh has to stand up to her waist and expose herself.

"Look. Look." Continues Hanieh. "Listen to me. Sammy is the one who saved you. He lives in one of those five story buildings if you look ahead. He is waiting for us all. Get up Nelly for God sake. They'll kill us all if those bastards get back and find us here."

"They will return." Murmurs Nelly. "My mom, my brothers, my dad, grandma. They killed them all."  
"You stupid bitch." Screams Hanieh angrily. "I said get the fuck up and follow Robert before getting us all killed. Snap out of it."

Nelly suddenly seems to have snapped out of the shock after hearing her friend scream at her. She gives Robert's Bluetooth device back to him. She wants to get up when Robert offers his hand again and she sits on the ground again and pushes herself back.

"I told you do not try touching her. God damn it." Yells Hanieh.  
"Oh. Yeah. Yeah. Sorry. Sorry."

Nelly has still not recovered fully from consequences of her rapist attacker when she became fearful of men again after what she has gone through that day. Nelly gets up again finally after Robert apologizes and tells her he is never going to touch her again.

"Just follow me miss Nelly." Says Robert. "Please try keeping up."  
Robert begins running towards the building where Hanieh is at after constantly looking around and on a high alert. Nelly is also running following Robert. Hanieh walks down the stairs and gets out of the rooftop. Hanieh, Robert and Nelly reunite inside the building moments later.

Hanieh hugs Nelly as soon as seeing her. She and Nelly cry in each other's arms for a moment. Robert disconnects his call with Hanieh. He and Hanieh hug each other and he kisses Hanieh and tries calming her and Nelly down.

"I want you both to stay here and hide." Says Robert. "Listen very carefully ladies. I will go towards the main street first. I will signal you to come after I make sure we'll be safe. I will signal and Hanieh should run towards me first and miss Nelly will do the same. She should come to us next. Got it you both?"

Hanieh and Nelly nod and assure Robert they have understood what Robert wants them to do perfectly. So, Hanieh and Nelly stay inside the same building. Hanieh keeps the entrance door ajar and checks what Robert is doing and where he is stopping.

Robert arrives the main street and peeks at both sides of the main street discreetly. He does not see any move. So, he signals and gives Hanieh the green light to go.

Hanieh glances at Nelly and tells her she is going to be doing just fine before she leaves her and runs towards Robert. Nelly is still shaking and terrified after what she witnessed Isis did to her parents, brothers, grandma and other innocent people with them.

Hanieh makes it to Robert and it is Nelly's turn to go and join them after Hanieh gives her the go. While sobbing and wiping tears off her cheeks, Nelly uses all the courage left in her and begins running towards Hanieh.

Sammy who is watching their surroundings, suddenly notices an unusual movement farther away. He calls and tells Robert about it immediately. The Angel Sammy can see from fifth floor of his building is not visible to Robert. So, Sammy asks him not to change position until he makes sure he has actually noticed unusual movements and is not imagining stuff. Sammy begins scanning that particular area from his rifle's scope while Robert is asking Hanieh and Nelly to lay down inside the street's side ditch and hide there as he and Sammy have suspected some of Isis members are around.

While scanning the suspected area, Sammy suddenly sees two Isis members, both with big bellies come out of a house. They are pulling their pants up and fixing their military belts, laughing and giving each other high five after two teenage girls come out of the same house, crying, confused and probably in pain with parts of their clothes tore open. Sammy knows immediately what has happened to the two innocent underage girls in that house with the two animal members of the Isis.

"There we go." Says Sammy.

"What?" Asks Robert, whispering.

"There are two of them coming with two teenage girls towards you from your Ten o'clock. They are still in the street, but like I said, you cannot see them. You will have to walk forward to reach the intersection, take position and take them out. I doubt if my bullets would reach them from here. Bastards. They have apparently raped those two girls."

"I'll send them to hell. How far do you think they are away from the intersection?"

"Hard to say. Four to six hundred yards maybe."

"Ok. I'll not talk any more, I'm going. Tell me if you see any other one."

"You got it."

Robert moves closer to where Hanieh and Nelly have hidden. "I'll be back in a few seconds." Whispers Robert. "Do not, I repeat, do not move. Just sit and wait for me to get back."

"Ok." Reply both Hanieh and Nelly terrified.

Robert makes a move towards the intersection. He hides himself behind parked vehicles at the street side and tall grown plants until he reaches the intersection. He moves to the sidewalk, places his rifle's barrel on the plants.

"I can't see them dude." Whispers Robert. "Give me their position."

"They are exactly behind the yellow bus." Replies Sammy. "You will have them in your scope in a few seconds, take position now."

Robert looks around him and sees there is a hunchback vehicle parked facing the intersection where Sammy told him Isis animals are approaching from. So, he slowly crawls to the outside of the sidewalk, steps over the street side plants and lays himself and his rifle on the top of a hunchback vehicle, while lays comfortably at the rear side.

"Two seconds." Says Sammy worried.

"Hamm." Replies Robert.

He takes three deep breaths, closes his left eye and focuses on his scope after he sees the two Isis aching those teenage girls, laughing and talking.

"Robert." says Sammy.

"Hush." Whispers Robert in respond.

Robert takes three deep breaths, places his finger on the trigger and takes a shot. The bullet hits one of the Isis men on his shoulder. He throws himself behind a car parked near him. The other man runs to the other side and hides behind another vehicle too.

"Shit. Shit. Shit." whisper Shouts Robert. "I strangely missed his fucking heart. I forgot this rifle is not mine and I had not tested it for its accuracy."

"That's exactly what I wanted to remind you before taking your shot." Replies Sammy.

"You pushed me and I took the damn shot."

"I wanted to suggest let them get closer. I'll take them both. I promise."

"I know you will."

Hanieh and Nelly hold each other's hand tight in the ditch and are shaking. They have no idea who has fired the shot they heard. Who has been shot and who is alive.

"I know this rifle's bullet hits the target around twelve centimeters to the right in six-hundred-yard range bro." Says Robert while scrawling back to the side walk slowly.

"What the hell are you doing dude." Asks Sammy worried.

"Wait. God damn it. Let me focus dude." Replies Robert.

He scrawls back towards Hanieh and Nelly. But he changes direction and pauses for a second.

"Tell me if it's safe to cross the street." Asks Robert.

"You are good to go." Replies Sammy, checking the area.

Robert runs to the other side of the street. He enters a building and Sammy does no longer have him in his scope. But he sees Robert on the rooftop moments later.

"Great idea." Says Sammy.

Robert jumps two buildings' rooftops until he gets to the rooftop facing the intersection. He places his rifle's barrel on the pavement and takes position very slowly and quietly. He has both men in his vision, but he knows hitting one man would again give the other enough time to figure out the bullet direction and takes shelter once again.

"Sammy listen to me." Whispers Robert. "On the count of three I want you to take a shot at the man to the right side of the street. So, I can finish the wounded man. This will confuse them both. I'll have enough time to target the second one. Just I want to confuse them. So, it does not matter whether your bullet even reaches him."

"You got it." Replies Sammy.

He focuses his rifle's direction and waits for Robert to say three.

"Ok ready?"

"Yup."

"One, two, three."

Robert takes a shot exactly one second after he hears Sammy pulls the trigger and takes a shot. Robert's bullet hits the man on the Adams apple and he falls down. Confused and terrified, the second man stands up to run, but he has heard two shots and does not know which direction to run. That's when Robert takes his second shot and hits the guy right on his heart. The man is still standing when Robert takes the second shot on the man's testicles.

"Great job man." Yells Sammy. "Bravo."

This part is to explain what happens to the two teenage girls after Robert takes his first shot and hits one of the Isis guys on his right shoulder.

The two violated teenage girls suddenly stop right at the middle of the street, confused and scared. They are still in shock and terrified after what those animals did to them, and now one of the rapists has been shot and has hidden along with his comrade leaving those girls.

One of the girls who happens to be smarter one, finds out what happened as a golden opportunity to escape. She takes a few quick steps trying to run, but sees her friend still standing and looking confused. So, she runs back towards her, shakes her and says something that Robert cannot hear. Sammy has their every move under surveillance.

The second girl is still hesitant for the first few seconds, probably thinking Isis rapists are going to shoot them down if they run. But she decides to follow her friend. So, they both take off and begin running. They disappear between cars and houses soon after they begin running.

Sammy sees Robert crawls back and disappears from the rooftop he was at. Robert appears down the building seconds later, while Sammy waiting to see him, checking the building from his rifle's scope. Robert stands inside the building and looks at where Sammy's building is, as if he can see Sammy, since they have been on the phone with each other all that time.

"So?" Asks Robert.

"So, what dude?" Replies Sammy.

"So, is it safe for me to get out and go attend to Hanieh and Nelly?"

"Oh, sorry. Wait a second."

Sammy scans around. He cannot see everywhere of course. But he does scan wherever he has vision and gives Robert the go. Robert exits the building and walks back towards the ditch Hanieh and Nelly are hiding. He reaches and crosses the street and reaches them. Sammy can hear him instructing Hanieh and Nelly to be quick and do as he say. He reminds the girls they are heading towards Sammy's building using the same method they did before Sammy saw the two Isis rapist animals.

Hanieh and Nelly get out of the ditch and follow Robert to a building he had seen its door is open. Sammy again hears Robert's instructions.

"Hanieh will run towards the next building where I'm heading, after she sees me reach there, and confirm with Sammy if it is safe and only after I signal her." Explains Robert. "Miss Nelly will be the next, implementing the same method. Clear?"

"Ok. Sure." Say Hanieh and Nelly together, terrified and shaken.

Sammy can only hear Robert, Hanieh and Nelly's conversation as he cannot see the ditch, they have been hiding in. He suddenly sees Robert telling the girls he is going. He hears Robert asking him if it is safe for him to make a move going towards the building? But Sammy has no idea which building Robert is talking about. So, he asks Robert to stay hidden until he is given a proper location and direction of the building Robert wants to run to. It takes Robert a while to make Sammy understand where he is heading. But Sammy does not have a clear view of the building's surroundings.

"Wait dude." Says Sammy. "But I don't see many angles from up here."

"Dude." Replies Robert. "We don't have much time."

Other Isis shit members would have definitely heard our gun firing and I have no doubt they are heading the direction to investigate. I have two girls with me man. I'm going."

Robert starts running. Sammy sees Robert get out of the blind spot moments later and running towards the building he had in mind. He makes it to the building a few seconds later. Sammy's heart is pounding like hell. He has no idea why? But he whispers and says:

"Oh shit. Just be quick. God damn it."

"Chill-out man. I'm fine."

Robert arrives at the building and Sammy tells him he cannot guarantee if all blind spot angles are safe for Hanieh and Nelly to follow him. But Robert is willing to take the risk for Hanieh and Nelly to join him as he suspects any number of Isis are getting there any moment. So, he signals Hanieh. Hanieh makes it to Robert safe and they signal Nelly next, luckily everything goes well.

Robert, Hanieh and Nelly continue sneaking from house to house and building to building until they already are quite close to Sammy's building like around nine hundred yards. But Sammy again cannot see if it is safe enough for them to change building. He can see and scan an intersection from three angles only and cannot see anything from one last angle. So, he tells Robert to wait as he may better listen, so he might



hear anyone getting close from the angle he cannot see. But Robert disagrees again as he has two girls with him and is under a lot of stress and anxiety.

"Fuck it." Replies Robert. "I'm going."

He begins running quietly again and Sammy is released seeing him making it to the building. He sees Robert signaling Hanieh, and Hanieh running towards Robert. Sammy takes a deep breath when he sees Hanieh is only around twenty meters away from the building where Robert is at. But he suddenly hears a gunshot and sees Hanieh falling down the ground.

Neither Sammy nor Robert speak for a moment. Until Sammy hears Robert yelling quietly.

"Who shot her? What's going on Sammy?"

Sammy hears Robert breathing heavily and begging Hanieh to get up and join him.

"Calm down man." Yells Sammy. "They'll spot you and shoot you with no mercy. I cannot see all the angles. But what I can see from here is clear."

Hanieh is trying to stand up while in pain. She is shot and a bullet has hit her ankle. She is crying and scrawling towards Robert when Sammy sees Robert loading his rifle.

"What are you doing?" Yells Sammy angrily.

He sees Robert getting out of the house and running towards Hanieh to help her get to safety.

"No." Yells Sammy now.

Robert runs towards Hanieh crying.

"I'm here my love. I'm coming."

Robert runs towards Hanieh. Sammy suddenly hears more gun shots and sees Robert getting shot twice. One in his stomach and one on his right chest almost at the same time.

"NO." Yells Sammy now, bursting into tears.

Sammy can only hear Hanieh's scream despite the fact she is around six hundred yards away. The sound transfers via the Bluetooth device.

Sammy is in total shock. He does not take his eyes off one of his two best friends. He has one eye closed to see through his rifle's scope, but his tears do not make that easy for him.

For a moment Sammy takes his eye off his rifle's scope. He has to wipe his tears off his face and dry his eyes. Sammy looks around with an unarmed eye and cannot see anything. He keeps on calling Robert's name, but he can only hear Hanieh's screaming from his phone, since he is still in contact with Robert's Bluetooth hands free.

He hears Robert coughing moments later after Hanieh screams her lungs out and sobs quietly.

"Robert! answer me." Begs Sammy, crying.

Robert is now in Hanieh's arms, as if she has forgotten her gunshot wound. She has Robert's head on her chest and her own head on Roberts. She is kissing Robert's head when Robert coughs blood again.

"They got me." Says Robert, whispering and in pain. "They got me good. Don't let them get my girl. Don't."

"Wake up." Cries Sammy, yelling. "I won't. I promise. But fight man. Fight. I'm coming for you."

"Don't. I'm done." Says Robert before coughing blood for the last time.

Looking at Sammy's direction, Robert takes his last breath and died. Sammy knows he is gone when he hears Hanieh crying.

"No. No. Oh God No."

Sammy leaves his targeting position. He wants to go to his best friend when he hears a motor cross comes out of the street which is in Sammy's blind spot from the window of his room. Sammy takes position again and looks at the motor cross going towards Hanieh and Robert's motionless body. He targets the driver and takes a shot. But his rifle makes click sound and Sammy knows it is out of bullet and he has to reload it. Hurried, angry and sobbing, Sammy pulls his rifle in to reload. But glances at what is going on there with Isis killers and Hanieh every now and then while reloading.

The two Isis animals who shot Robert reach Hanieh. Those two are the motor cross riders who were initially following Abu Mahdi to go and investigate the sound they had heard which sounded like a gun fire. They stopped following Abu Mahdi's aimed pick-up truck after one of them noticed a female jumped from a rooftop to another. They were looking to find and capture the girl in the streets quietly, when they noticed she is getting out of a building and running to a certain direction. So, they shot her at her leg to stop her since they were quite far from her. But they saw Robert running to help her and shot him twice. They still have no idea Nelly is still in the same building Hanieh has run out of.

The two Isis animals reach Hanieh. The gun man gets off the motor cross and grabs Hanieh from her dress collar to get her off Robert's dead body. He pulls her a meter or two towards the motor cross, pushes her on the ground.

"Make a move and I'll rape you here now." Says the Isis gun man while the driver laughs.

He opens a small aid box fixed to the bike.

"Leave her my friend." Says the driver. "She's bloody and blood is dirty in Islam."

"Leave her? Leave this beauty? Leave such a nice boob? Such a young pussy?" Replies the gun man touching Hanieh's wounded and weak breast and private parts. I can wait for her ankle to recover my friend. I will fuck her as much as I have strength. I will sell her to a brother and earn some God given cash."

The gun man places his rifle on the ground next to Hanieh and dresses her wound quickly.

"Well." Replies the driver, laughing. "Everyone would fuck her when she's recovered."

Sammy can hear all their conversation as the handsfree Bluetooth is still on Robert's ear. What he sees, glancing at them and hearing what they are saying, make him in hurry move to reload and send them to hell. Sammy is in a lot of stress, anger, anxiety and sadness, he has difficulty inserting bullets into his rifle's magazine. Bullets keep on falling down. He suddenly hears the Isis gun man asks the driver to leave their motor cross on its stand and go help him lift Hanieh and sit her on the motor cross between them.

Sammy's hand is shaking now, as he knows he has only a few seconds to reload, take position and take a shot. He drops the magazine and inserts one bullet into his rifle's chamber and takes a quick position again.

The two Isis criminals have Hanieh seated on their motor cross by now and the driver is starting the motor cross. Their motor cross is exactly facing Sammy's building. Sammy has the driver in his scope and knows he only has one shot at getting them. The motor cross moves a little when the gunman who is seated at the pillion sees Nelly seated behind a door.

"Stop, Stop, Stop." Yells the gunman and Sammy can faintly hear him. "They are two. Wow. What a beauty. Stop."

The driver stops the bike though. Sammy notices Hanieh bringing her head up slowly and looking towards where Sammy is. He suddenly hears Robert's voice echoing in his ears asking him to not let them hurt or get his girl. Sammy knows immediately what Hanieh means by looking at his direction. Tears formed in Sammy's eyes.

"I won't let them get her, buddy." Says Sammy, taking a deep breath before taking a shot.

Sammy targeting the Isis, notices Hanieh smiles mildly.

"A gun shot sound jolts those two Isis before they stop and capture Nelly too. It is Sammy's bullet buzzing towards them. The bullet hits the driver between his eyebrows and exits from the back of his head, enters Hanieh's throat and exits from the back of her neck, enters the gun man's left as he is looking to Nelly at his right side and exits from his right artery. Sammy releases his breath out after he witnesses, he has not missed the target using his single bullet in the rifle.

"I'm sorry Hanieh." Says Sammy, crying quietly. He lowers his head for a second, looks at his scope and sees the driver and Hanieh are immediately dead and the gunman's body is on the ground. He is kicking while blood splashes out of his ugly neck artery.

Sammy knows well what was going to be Hanieh's fate if he had let them take her. He saved Hanieh by shooting her from months or even years of torture and abuse. Sammy hopes he has fulfilled his promise to his best friend's last wish. Sammy knows Nelly is still at that house. Nelly cannot move after she saw what happened to her friend and her boyfriend. She is shocked in the most severe way. She sat on the ground behind the door after what she witnessed. She laughed like crazy on the state of nervous breakdown, murmuring she was going to kill herself. She just held her ears and screamed when she came eye to eye with the Isis gunman and figured he wanted to get her.

\* \* \*

Unaware of the terrible events happening outside in Al Darrah's streets and roundabout since Isis's sudden attack, Sammy was in his room, machining his rifle's metal part, doing the final touches while having earphones of his iPod in his ears and listening to his classical music loudly, like he always did. He had left his cell phone on his bed and could not hear anything obviously, not the gunshots, rockets being launched, and not his cell phone if it rang.

Sammy was listening to his favorite classic music while working on the metal piece, so the sound and vibration of his industrial mini-machine would not bother him. He had

connected his earphones to his iPod, inserted them into his ears, played the music and began working anytime he had to work on the machine. His mind was busy thinking he was going to meet Nelly a few hours later. He was worried a bit thinking how it was going to go and was quite excited at the same time while working on his mini-industrial machine. He thought about the brand-new tuxedo he had bought, particularly for that purpose, putting it on for Amer and Sara's engagement party the same evening and kept on practicing the lines, the best sentences and how he was going to open the conversation with the girl of his dream in the best and most gentle and charming way.

Sammy finished machining his rifle's part, but he still had his iPod's earphones on, still listening to his music. He removed the metal piece from the machine, while happily listening to the classic music. He picked the cotton cloth like Tom had taught him, deepened the metal piece into the oil container he had prepared before, washed the piece off metal tiny cutting and chips and began wiping the piece clean. The music had reached Sammy's favorite part. So, Sammy began waving his head in a dancing or trance motion, enjoying every bit of it.

After he made certain that metal piece was clean and ready, he lifted it up to check it against the light for one last time when he suddenly noticed the wall clock at the top of his machine was showing the time five forty-five P.M., and suddenly realized it was time for him to look at Nelly crossing the intersection near his house, going back home from her guitar class, even if he knew he was going to meet her in person a few hours later that evening. He had recently used the scope Tom had given him as a present to look for Nelly crossing the street and intersection. So, he placed the metal piece on his workbench while still having his earphones on, picked his cane and his rifle and went to the window.

Sammy placed the rifle on the edge of his window, closed one eye and looked into the scope's lens. He focused on the intersection where Nelly crossed. But he noticed the strangest scene he couldn't believe. He couldn't believe what he saw. The music ended at the same time and Sammy took out his earphones one by one slowly while shocked by what he witnessed and heard. He saw a number of people lay on the streets and sidewalks, soaked in blood, motionless. Men, women, young and old seem to have been shot, stabbed or beaten to death. There was no sign of Nelly. It took Sammy a while

to digest what he could see. Different scenarios crossed his mind. Is Isis there in his town already? Or there is some other logical explanation Sammy didn't know. Confused and shocked, he could hear yelling and screaming from far and near distances. He constantly changed his scope's zoom so he would see different distances clearer. That's when he noticed an armored pick-up truck that had a black flag raised on the antenna of it moving fast on the dirt deserted old road going towards the west of Al Darrah. He looked further to his right using his rifle's scope and noticed a civilian pick-up truck was moving fast approaching the hill.

Sammy knew well what that damned flag meant. He knew it was only Isis terrorists and rapists that used such an ugly scary flag. Sammy focused back on the Isis armored pick-up truck again to make sure he had seen everything correctly. He was right. It was without a doubt an Isis pick-up truck chasing a civilian pick-up truck. In his mind, Sammy could picture what has happened to Al Darrah and it's nice and innocent people while he was listening to his classical music and shaping the metal piece, he needed to complete his rifle with.

Sammy focuses his scope's lens back to the escaping civilian pick-up truck and saw the driver seemed driving as fast as possible. In the front seat of the civilian pick-up truck, Sammy couldn't see anyone as it was going to the west that was Sammy's right side and it was not possible for him to see anyone. But Sammy could see a lot of civilians had piled up at the back of the truck.

Sammy's heart was beating faster and faster. He was hurried, worried and he was thinking about lots of what may have happened. His hands' began shacking. He had gotten extremely nervous.

Sammy used all his concentration to focus his scope's lens farther to see the people at the back of the civilian pick-up truck better. He finally did focus and he went to the state of shock once again. He saw Nelly at the back of the pick-up truck facing another female, both crying their eyes out. Sammy could no longer take his eyes off her. He did not know what was going on exactly. He began breathing heavily and his hands began vibrating. He figured the Isis armored pick-up truck was chasing the truck Nelly was in. He had read, heard and seen in the T.V. what Isis animal members were capable of doing and could imagine the reason why they were chasing the truck Nelly was in. To analyze the environment, Sammy turned his scope and weapon to the far east end of the town for a

quick second. That's when he noticed a few tanks, other armored pick-up trucks, motor cross, etc. near where the roundabout was and he couldn't see more as the roundabout was completely out of vision.

Sammy turned his scope back at the Isis truck and then back at the truck Nelly was in. He knew the civilian truck was Nelly's father's truck. He had seen picking her and her little brother up a few days ago. The Isis armored pick-up truck was getting closer to the civilian truck fast like watching a horror movie where he could predict the next scene. Sammy held his breath for a moment, worried and fearful, not knowing what was going to happen in the next few seconds.

Sammy could see fear in each and every one crumpled at the back of the civilian pick-up truck, even from that far of a distance. Confused and terrified, Sammy witnesses the civilian pick-up truck rushes onto a road bump suddenly, Nelly went air born and got tossed out of the truck.

Sammy was frozen, unable to move. Fear and apprehension had sucked all the power out of him, making him watch what happens without moving a muscle. Isis resembled the ultimate meaning of brutality and aggression. It was people like them he believed who were responsible for the death of his father a few years ago.

Sammy saw Nelly's father reduced speed after Nelly was thrown out of the truck. But Nelly's father drove again less than a three second later, continuing on his way. Sammy was furious after seeing Nelly getting abandoned. Sammy knew the Isis armored pickup truck was already very close to Nelly and could not under any circumstances allow them to touch the girl he loved.

As if something had suddenly woken Sammy up from a deep and long sleep. Sammy laid his rifle on the wall next to the window, got up luridly while shaking out of anger and worry. He had to protect his honor. He had to protect the only girl whom he had ever loved that much and stop any asshole Isis even try touching her. While having all these thoughts in his mind, Sammy ran towards his workbench, forgetting about his limp. He fell down hard on the floor after taking two long and fast steps. This reminded him he needed to use his knee strap to maintain stability. But there was no one to do it for him. He got up and fell again. So, he crawled to his workbench quickly and picked the rifle's metal part. He stood up, picked the bullet box, held it right under his arm and

jumped back towards his room window one legged. He talked to God all these times, begged him to let the metal piece he had finished machining finally fit his rifle.

Sammy reached the window and sat on the chair under it again before trying to install the rifle's metal part. He glances at where Nelly is while using his rifle's scope again and sees Daniel's pick-up truck has stopped on the peak of the hill and Isis armed pick-up truck also stops about a ten to fifteen yards from where Nelly has landed after getting tossed out of her dad's truck.

Sammy got the rifle off the window immediately while tears of anger and hatred rolled down his cheek involuntarily. He was soaked in his sweat and had turned red. He tried installing the rifle's metal part, but the part seemed still whether big or had another issue as it did not fit in.

Sammy begged God constantly asking for help. He murmured repetitively, angrily and horridly. The part did not fit the rifle, no matter how hard he tried and how sincerely he prayed. He burst into tears, worried what was going to happen after Isis rapist murderers reached his love.

Sammy lifted his rifle and laid it on the window again to see or check what was going on now. That's when he witnessed an unbelievable screen. He suddenly saw the heavy machine gun on Isis truck opened fire at Daniel's truck stopping at the top of the hill and ripping apart every single breathing creature in the truck into pieces by each bullet hitting them. Sammy's mouth was half open. He was now only breathing through his nostrils.

This was when Sammy lost it completely. He knew the reason why Nelly was kept alive. At the back of his mind, a beautiful and gorgeous girl was left alive for a reason. All those thoughts crossed Sammy's mind in a matter of milliseconds. He had witnessed how Daniel, Nelly's brother, mother, grandma and other defenseless innocent people were executed in that brutal and cruel manner. So, he pushed the metal part once again and he used so much force as he was furious. This helped the metal part finally makes a click sound and at last fits the rifle.

Sammy placed the rifle back on the edge of the window again immediately and loaded its magazine with bullets he had while looking at what Isis was going to do next. He had lost count of the bullets he had loaded and he knew it was time to load and try the rifle, hoping it was going to finally work when



he saw Abu Mahdi getting closer to Nelly. He inserted the magazine to the rifle, loaded the rifle and aimed at Abu Mahdi.

"Remember breath first." Heard Sammy what Tom's told him. "Do not be so certain about your first shot, zoom the scope according to the distance."

Sammy adjusted the distance and accuracy of his rifle while a tear rolled down often, breathing deeply and remembering all that Tom had and his target shooting competitions taught him. All formulas Tom had taught him played like a playback in front of his eyes, remembering what Tom taught him and hearing his voice.

"Leave the emotions out before taking a shot. Leave anger out specially. You have one objective, one job, one target. Adjust your target's moves with him in the scope, synchronize your breathing with the target now. When you are sure you'll get him, take the shot Sammy."

"Now." Whispered Sammy as if he was responding to Tom's voice. Sammy took the shot after the tip of his rifle moved up and down slightly by Abu Mahdi's breathing rhythm, and after praying the rifle would finally work and would shoot actually. It was the biggest thing Sammy could wish for. His rifle worked and his bullet had ripped Abu Mahdi's lower jaw apart, throwing it yards away before he had the chance to grab Nelly's body.

seconds later, Sammy had killed every Isis member who companied Abu Mahdi, like flies and mosquitoes, and immediately thought of getting out, reaching Nelly and getting her to safety.

After Sammy took his last shot on Abu Mahdi who was still alive and sent him to hell, Sammy saw Nelly looking at his direction, walking uphill to see the burning bodies of his parents and siblings. To stop her, Sammy had to shoot a bullet or two in front of her feet and make her understand she cannot proceed further as he didn't want Nelly to see that brutal ugly scene. Sammy didn't want that scene to be the last thing Nelly sees of her family members.

Still shaken by what he witnessed, a bit glad his rifle worked and did not let anyone touch the girl he loves, Sammy was nervous other wicked Isis members were nearby, would reach that location and take Nelly after he wiped them all out. So, he turned the rifle and the scope to the right and the left

to see if any other Isis member was around and to make sure no one else was around Nelly and there were no other threats.

While scanning the area, Sammy suddenly noticed an unusual movement on the rooftop of a building closer to the residential area. Thinking it was an Isis member, he focused his lens to take the person out, but he notices the person was his best friends, Robert. Sammy burst into tears after seeing Robert around and near him for a while, but he got himself together abruptly, thinking he had no time for weeping and moaning. He figured the situation was way more dangerous and complicated for him to have enough time to whimper and mourn. So, he stopped, went and picked his cell-phone from the top of his bed, called Robert and scanned the area for them until Hanieh and Robert get shot, Robert lost his life and Sammy had no choice but to finish Hanieh along with her two Isis captors.

After shooting the Isis, Hanieh and her Isis captors all with a single shot, Sammy fell on his knees crying loudly. He was devastated, screaming and asking God, why was he kept in a situation in which he had to make such a difficult decision. But he stopped seconds later, thinking he had no time for moaning and crying as the love of his life was still out there and in danger.

\* \* \*

Back to present, Sammy bursts into tears. He lost one of his best friends. All the memories he had with Robert plays in his mind like a movie. But seconds later he figures he has no time for moaning as Nelly is scared and lonely in an unknown environment and an empty house. Sammy still has no idea about where his mother, aunts, Amer, Sara and everyone else are and what has happened to them. Sammy contacts his mother's cell-phone but she does obviously not answer her phone.

\* \* \*

Sammy gets up with difficulty, takes three deep breaths and looks around to find his knee strap. He grabs it and wears it. There was always someone to help him tighten his knee-strap, but he has no choice now but to do it himself. So, he does his best and fastens the strap to his knee as tight as he can, loads his rifle's magazine full, wears his shoes and wipes his tears off as he does not want Nelly to see her in such misery. Sammy thinks of his mom, Amer, aunt, Sara and others all the time since he got involved with that

unfortunate event. But he still does not know or at least does not even imagine they were caught, hurt or killed. He thinks they have been hiding somewhere and he is determined to find them now. He picks his cell-phone from the top of the window at his room and dials his mother, cousin Amer, aunt and other girl cousins again. But all telephone lines have already been cut apparently as a result of rockets hitting the roundabout and the transmission building on which antenna was burnt in fire and the antenna collapsed as a result.

After he removes his apron, Sammy hangs his fully loaded rifle on his shoulder and exits his apartment without having any particular plan in mind. All he knows is that he has to rush to Nelly and save her as quick as possible. He wants to take the stairs down as usual when he surprisingly notices the elevator's light is on, unlike all other days of the year when the elevator was out of service and has a notice of out of service stuck to its doors. He enters the lift with hesitation and doubt and presses "G Floor" reluctantly. His heart is beating faster and faster every second goes by. He has no idea who or what awaits him on the ground floor after he exits the lift. Sammy is already soaked into his sweat, thinking he is going to face a number of Isis terrorists. He takes his rifle off his shoulder, wraps its strap around his wrist and points his rifle's barrel towards the lift's door. He is breathing heavier and heavier the more elevator gets closer to the ground floor.

The elevator's door opens moments later after a ding sound and Sammy tiptoes out pointing his rifle's barrel quickly to the left, right and all directions he feels he is vulnerable from. He figures soon there is not only no one at the ground floor, also the building seems evacuated way earlier than any Isis member can reach there. The building's front thick glass door is broken.

Sammy exits the building quickly and carefully, and pauses for a moment. He scans the surrounding with unarmed eye first and uses his rifle's scope after he cannot find anyone around. He can clearly hear screaming and shouting sound mixed with gun shots coming from the east side of the town where the roundabout is. He can hear the terrifying sound despite the fact that the roundabout is around two kilometers away.

Sammy brings his rifle up now and looks around using his rifle's scope, scanning around while a thousand thoughts circle around his head. Thinking how to get to Nelly as soon

as he can, without being spotted by Isis terrorists. Thinking about his mother, aunt, Amer, Sara and all others who have to accompany them to the Sheikh's office to marry them. Sammy sets his objectives quickly, as he knows he does not have much time. He knows Nelly is the first he has to rescue, thinking Amer would have certainly taken care of his mother and others to safety. He sneaks around and checks the sides of the building. He suddenly hears another sound he hadn't heard before.

Sammy follows the sound reluctantly and is surprised to see the sound is coming from Hitler, Mr. Al Aarafi's yellow color Volkswagen. The driver's side door is open and the radio is on and Sammy knows he is listening to people talking in the radio. It is apparent to him that Mr. Al Aarafi has run away along with his two wives after finding out that Isis is in the town already, leaving his favorite toy "Hitler" the way it was. Sammy enters the yellow beetle Volkswagen and turns the radio off immediately before its sound attracts any Isis animal to the vehicle and that particular area. But he suddenly notices the car key is left in the ignition too. Sammy knows Mr. Al Aarafi has been working on his Volkswagen for a long time trying to get it to run. But he had no idea how far he had to go. Sammy turns the key inside the ignition hopelessly to just give it a try, throwing an arrow in the dark. But the vehicle starts to Sammy's wondering and amazed eyes. He cannot believe what just happened. This gives him a sparkle of hope. He has not been driving for a long time. But he has no other means or quicker means to reach Nelly and save her from possible threats. He puts the vehicle in gear and drives it towards the intersection first and the building he knows Nelly is hiding in next very carefully and cautiously, checking all sides, breathing heavily and on high alert.

Sammy begins calling Nelly's name when he stops in front of the building. There is no respond. Sammy calls Nelly again and again. Nelly can hear Sammy's voice and does not want to respond as Sammy's voice is still not a familiar voice to her and she can barely trust anyone anymore after what she has experienced. She cannot even imagine it is Sammy who is there to rescue her. So, Sammy gets out of the vehicle, leaving it running. He looks around both with unarmed and armed eyes several times before he reaches the door, he knows Nelly is behind. He calls Nelly's name once again from behind the door.

"I have a piece of glass in my hand." Says Nelly with a terrified and shaky voice. "I'll cut my wrist and kill myself if you try to get closer or if you touch me."

"Ok. I'll not come closer." Replies Sammy with a soft kind voice. "My name is Sammy. We've actually met a few..."

But Nelly knows who Sammy is. She remembers what Sara and Hanieh told her about him. She knows he is the same guy she was told who had a feeling for her. So, she interrupts Sammy.

"I know who you are. The cemetery." Replies Nelly, opening the door slightly. She glances at Sammy while Sammy looks away cautiously.

"Why are you here?" Asks Nelly while tears roll down her cheeks.

"I'm here to get you to safety." Replies Sammy. "But please cooperate and hurry up before those evil animals get here. They'll be here soon you know."

Nelly opens the door wider and Sammy sees Nelly's beautiful but broken and scared face for the first time after the cemetery incident and his heart pours down despite all what has happened.

"Look. We are from the same town. I swear I'm just trying to help. It's going to be a disaster if any of those mother... arrive and see and spot us. So, trust me. I'm not going to touch you. I'll not get close to you like you asked. I'm going back to the car and I'll wait for you to come and sit inside. I promise I will not even look at you if you don't want me. Just hurry up."

Sammy walks back towards the vehicle slowly and carefully when he hears a piece of glass drop on the hard concrete floor. He gets to the vehicle and sits inside, and Nelly remembers Robert and Hanieh told her it is Sammy who shot Isis people before they could even touch her. She remembers again when Sara and Hanieh revealed to her Sammy had a crush on and had a very strong feeling for her. She gets up after dropping the piece of glass, which she kept to cut her own wrist with, and runs towards the vehicle, opens the door and jumps in.

Sammy gets heavy on the gas and drives towards his building as fast as he can. He bursts into tears again suddenly without any effort when he sees his best friend, Robert's motionless

body on the road. But he knows he has to let it go as he has another mission, to save Nelly who was going to end up dead like Robert and Hanieh. Sammy stops the vehicle and sees Hanieh laid on the floor dead with open eyes. He notices Hanieh is dead with a shallow smile on her face.

"Put your seat back and lay low if you don't want to see these." Says Sammy, crossing dead bodies and bloody scenes.

"No. I'm ok." Replies Nelly.

"No, you are not. Please lay low and listen to me."

Nelly pushes her back seat back and lays low looking at Sammy.

"Thanks." Says Sammy.

Sammy arrives at the entrance of his building. He pushes the break.

"Please run inside and wait for me." Says Sammy looking ahead.

"I've already checked. No one is inside."

"Why?" Asks Nelly. "Where are you going? When are you coming back?"

"I'm not going anywhere miss Nelly. I'll be back with you in a few seconds."

Nelly opens the door reluctantly and sneaks into Sammy's building, stepping on broken glass. She is scared. She waits near the elevator. She is worried that Sammy is not going to come back to her.

Sammy drives the vehicle a bit further after Nelly gets out. He knows there is a step point near the building. He drives the car there, puts the car gear on neutral, switches it off, gets the key out of ignition and pushes the car down the hill. Nelly, on the other hand, is scared of being left alone, gets her head out of the broken entrance door and looks at all what Sammy does.

Sammy begins running and limping back towards his building's entrance. He enters and comes face to face with Nelly.

"Why did you do that?" Asks Nelly.

"What?"

"Why did you push the car down the hill?"

"So those terrorists would not know which building we are in, in case any of them spotted us while me bringing you back. Don't worry. The car will automatically come to a halt ten or twenty meters further. I've turned it off so it will not run out of gas in case we need it."

Sammy leads the way and takes Nelly inside his basement storage room, where he had let Tom, Freddy and Al stay in hiding.

"No way anyone can find us here." Says Sammy, assuring Nelly.

Nelly walks inside the basement storage room reluctantly in the beginning. But she convinces herself nothing worse than Isis rapists and terrorists can happen to her in that basement storage. Besides, Sammy knows what he is doing, she thinks.

Nelly is not speaking a word, but Sammy can say how she feels looking at her body language. So, he keeps on talking, saying things that would bring hope back to Nelly's mind. Nelly's tears do not stop even for a moment since she witnessed how her parents, siblings and others met their end. But Sammy talks and talks saying things that make Nelly feel safe in that basement storage with him. Nelly feels a bit more comfortable after she notices Sammy's eyes are wet and teary too. She can say Sammy has been crying too and this makes her feel not alone. Nelly is convinced Sammy is her best choice at that particular moment.

"I know I'm talking so much and I'll stop after telling you this." Says Sammy with a low voice. "At the moment, you and I are the only ones in the town who have the safest place. You should cooperate with me, so I can give you absolute safety somewhere far from here. It's going to take time and effort. I know and you should too. So, we, you and I should stay here together in this basement until it's time.

"Time for what?"

"Time to go."

"Go where?" Asks Nelly hopelessly.

Sammy pauses for a second and remembers his American friends telling him to get to Jarabulus in case something went wrong.

"Jarabulus." Replies Sammy.

"Jarabulus? Why Jarabulus? What is it there in Jarabulus?"

"It's a long story. But I promise to get you there safe and sound. I promise you'll be in absolute safety there."

This is when Nelly and Sammy look at each other eye to eye and Nelly sees sincerity and sadness in Sammy's teary eyes.

After Sara and Hanieh told Nelly that day about how Sammy felt about her, Sammy's face and figure have come to Nelly's mind several times. Naturally she tried to remember everything about Sammy, the way he talked and how he looked. But it has never crossed her mind that Sammy, a man, specially a Muslim man, would be emotional and crying type.

Nelly's tears begins rolling down her cheeks again. Maybe because she has finally found some shelter and a man to take refuge to, even if she hates men for the horrible experience she had, and even if that man is a Muslim. This is the first time Sammy and Nelly get eye to eye after Sammy made a vow, he is going to protect her, keeps her alive and takes her to safety. But Sammy has no courage to continue looking into Nelly's eyes. He looks down after he sees Nelly's tears rolling down again and says,

"I'm terribly sorry for what happened to your family. I really am. I want you to know that right now, I also have no idea what has happened to my mom, my cousin Amer, Sara, his fiancé and all others who were supposed to go to legalize their marriage at the Sheikh's office. I tried contacting them but to no avail. Apparently, all phone lines have been disconnected or something."

"Why did you only save me?" Asks Nelly, crying and screaming at Sammy. "Why did you not do anything before those bastards kill my three little brothers, my mom, dad, grandma and all? Why?"

Sammy knows Nelly is still in shock, influenced by anger, hatred and disgust and gives her the right to be that angry, even at himself. So, he takes a long pause.

"Miss Nelly." Replies Sammy in a low voice calmly after her crying sound is lower. "I had a head phone into my ears, listening to a classical music, unaware of what was going on outside. I put my iPod's earphones in my ears. Every time I work on a mini-industrial machine, I have it on because it helps me, so I will not be affected by the sound pollution and the vibration the machine produces while I am machining. The rifle you see in my hand now, was not completed before today. I had to machine a piece of it and I have been doing the machining for months. I still had my earphones on, listening to music, machining this rifle's part when I noticed it was five forty-five.

Sammy swallows his words and stops talking. He has his head lowered but can still see Nelly is staring at him, waiting to hear the rest. He is reluctant to admit that he checks her crossing the intersection. Sammy is thinking what to make up or tell Nelly the truth.

"And?" Asks Nelly. "Five forty-five what?"



"I go to my window every day at five forty-five with my binocular and ....and...."

Sammy can still see Nelly is curiously staring at him, waiting for him to continue talking. He wants to admit he goes to his window every day to see her crossing the intersection at first, but changes his mind, thinking this is going to give Nelly the impression he wants something in return for saving her, so he changes his mind.

"And wait to see if Robert is near the house already."

Sammy pauses again, clears his throat, stands up and continues:

"This time I went to my window, using my rifle's new scope as it was more accurate and could show a farther distance. That's when I saw first people bleeding in the town's main road and sidewalks as far as my scope could show me. I suddenly saw an armed pick-up truck chasing a civilian one. It took me a while of course to digest what I witness and figure out what was exactly going on. I suddenly noticed the horrible looking Isis black flag waving on the radio antenna of the armed pick-up truck and knew it is Isis terrorists trying to capture passengers of the civilian truck. I zoomed my scope and saw you at the back of the truck, terrified and crying while facing another woman I could not see her face."

Sammy's voice begins vibrating. His hands begin shaking and Nelly is watching his every motion. Nelly has stopped crying already. She is listening to Sammy quite carefully.

"I hoped the part I was machining for a long time was finally done. I prayed it did. I wiped the part and tried installing it back to this damn rifle, but it did not fit. I tried and tried harder, but I swear to God it did not fit."

Sammy turns his face away and Nelly knows he does that for her not to see his tears dropping down. Sammy clears his throat once again and pauses for a moment. Nelly does not say or ask anything. She has no doubt in Sammy's sincerity.

"You don't know rifle's, guns and shooting and stuff." Continues Sammy. "I do. I do quite well. It takes a while to fit a rifle's part, especially if you has recreated it yourself, modified and made changes to it. It takes a while loading bullets into its magazine one by one. The part did

not fit no matter how hard I tried. How sincerely I prayed. It just didn't. I used all force in me to fit the part into the rifle when I saw you were tossed out of the pick-up truck. I had to load the bullets and it took time. I witnessed when the asshole opened fire at your whole family too. I swear the part did not fit at first."

Looking still away, Sammy's tears roll down again. He and Nelly get quiet for a few seconds. Until Sammy wipes his tears with his shirt sleeve.

"My rifle and I were ready on position when that evil terrorist tried to grab you. I did my last little prayer for the rifle to actually work before I took my shot. Before he even had a chance to touch you. You know the rest."

Nelly who was looking at Sammy faces other direction, lowers her head and pauses for a moment. There is a moment of silence between them.

"I was going to them." Says Nelly calmly after a tear rolls down her pretty cheeks. "Why did you shoot in front of my leg?"

"I did not want you to see the remains of your family in that horrible estate. I did not want that scene to be the last thing you remember of them."

Nelly knows how Sammy feels about her. She also knows Sammy has no idea that Sara and Nelly have told her how he feels about her and he does not know she already knows. Nelly is really surprised by Sammy's shooting technique, mentality and powers. She glances back at Sammy and whispers,

"Thank you."

She says it so quietly that Sammy does not even hear her.

Sammy tries to establish contact with his mother, cousin, aunt and anyone else he knows who were with them going to the Sheikh's office. But all their cell-phones seem to be switched off. So, he walks to the end of the basement storage, where the toilet and shower are situated. He takes some wooden boxes and cardboard boxes and uncovers a secret door which is a square opening where Sammy's father had thought of. A square exit entry door that only a single person can enter a secret room after bending and crawling. Sammy's father had

improvised a secret little room to hide all what he thought should be hidden.

Sammy opens the metal square little door and tries getting in, but he can only push himself in till his waist. The compartment is so narrow and tiny that he would hit the front wall. He could enter the secret compartment before. He was a kid and had a slimmer and shorter body than now. His father used to hide his classic hunting rifle in there and would ask Sammy to enter and grab it for him years ago. Sammy remembers why his dad hid the hunting rifle in that compartment. There was a new law which the government set by which no one was allowed to hold, possess, or use any kind of weapon, and Sammy's father had to hide it in that secret compartment, as he did not want to give up his most valuable toy. Besides, he had planned to give Sammy the hunting rifle as a present before he died long later.

Sammy pulls his father's old hunting rifle's box out of the compartment slowly and quietly. Nelly cannot see what Sammy is up to. She can hear a faint sound of stuff being moved. The little square metal door is at the end of the basement storage room. She is just waiting for Sammy to finish what he is doing.

Sammy comes back towards Nelly and stops a few yards away from her.

"Miss Nelly." Says Sammy. "Will you follow me please?"

Nelly is initially reluctant. She has no idea what Sammy is having in mind for her. She finally decides to stand up and follows him with hesitation. Sammy leads her to the end wall of the storage. He stops and points to the square metal door with his finger.

"What is it?" Asks Nelly. "So? A little door."

"Can you enter the compartment please." Replies Sammy.

"What?"

"Please get your head in and look inside."

Nelly shakes her head and asks, "But why?"

"Please. Trust me."

Nelly bends and inserts her head into the compartment on all fours, glances in it quickly and gets her head back out.

"So what?" Says Nelly a bit annoyed. "Tell me."

"I want you to listen to me carefully please." Replies Sammy calmly. "Even if Isis evil members suspect there maybe still people hiding in this building, come and search everything and everywhere up to the fifth floor, they cannot find this door. No one would think there will be a secret door in a hard-to-find storage basement."

Nelly is listening carefully and curiously. She can guess already what Sammy is about to tell her. They probably need to fit themselves in for the night, she thinks.

"My dad improvised this compartment to keep his things hidden. Things that were announced forbidden, like his hunting rifle's box, alcohol, etc. I'll be leaving you here in this storage basement in a few minutes when it is darker. I'll have to find my mom, cousin and other relatives. I'm in fact certain she's at my aunt with my cousins. I'm going to go to get her too."

Sammy opens a little drawer, takes out a set of keys and gives them to Nelly and tells her they are the basement storage's spare keys.

"Lock the door behind me after I leave." Continues Sammy. "If you hear anything or anyone, just crawl into the compartment I showed you and close the door from inside. I've arranged the boxes in a way the compartment's door will not be easy to spot. No way any of them would find you."

Nelly gives a deep meaningful look at Sammy. All cells of her body and even her soul want to beg him not to leave her alone. Agony and fear begin appearing on her face in an obvious way.

"You mean you want to leave me here alone and go?" Asks Nelly with an innocent and shaky voice. "Why? What should I do? Oh my God."

"Listen to me." Replies Sammy with a serious tone. "Listen. I will come back for you. No matter what it takes. I promise. I need to find my mom and others. They may need me too."

"You are insane?" Says Nelly now in a more serious tone. "You are crazy. Didn't you see what they did to my family? Didn't you? I believe you should wait until things settle down. What will I do without..." Nelly stops here and does not continue as it will be admitting the fact that she needs Sammy.

"I mean I'll die alone here in this basement if they find, spot or shoot you down. I'll be facing a horrible death. Do you understand?"

"Look at me." Says Sammy very seriously. "Look at me."

Nelly looks into Sammy's eyes for the second time with an innocent vulnerable face.

"I know you are scared." Continues Sammy. "I'm too. But I promise. I'll come back for you no matter what. I'm sure my mom is worried sick, thinking what happened to me. Look at me. I'll come back for you."

Nelly turns her face angrily, knowing she cannot convince Sammy not leave her. She has no other choice, but to trust Sammy like he asks her to.

\* \* \*

Hadji Mazen is now seated on a chair which his people have arranged for him. He has ordered his people to separate girls and young women from all other guys and sort them out based on their age. Hadji Mazen's people have done what he has asked and have made every girl and boy sorted by age to sit facing him while he calmly drinks his favorite Arabic coffee.

No one amongst captured girls and boys speak a word about their situation anymore. They are all in shock, mourning loss of their parents, relatives or grandparents who were all executed in a most terrifying manner in front of their eyes. Religion does not matter, like it has never mattered amongst people of Al Darrah. But captive's religion does not matter to Hadji Mazen and his satanic underdogs. All boys and girls have witnessed death of a dear beloved one, dying under heavy shoes of an Isis tank or stabbed and slashed to death. Boys and young men are angry, desperate and helpless. Girls and young women, terrified and shaken, await their bitter fate in hands of Isis cruel members.

Hadji Mazen finishes drinking the Arabic coffee, clears his throat and looks at his captives and then around, carefully.

"Whose restaurant is that?" Asks the Isis commander, pointing his ugly finger at Mr. Zahir's restaurant."

Everyone is quiet. No one among captives replies.

"We will arrange our food one way or another." Continues Hadji Mazen. "It's your own people who will die of hunger."

One of Mr. Zahir's sons stands up reluctantly and scared, while his pants leg is being pulled to sit him back down by the person who sits next to him. But he does what he thinks is best for his fellow Al Darrah friends and neighbors, fellow citizens. He gets up and raises his hand slowly. His father, Mr. Zahir, was killed earlier as he was over fifty-five and had to die amongst the elderly group.

"Well." Continues Hadji Mazen. "What's your name son?"  
"Ehsan." Replies the boy very quietly as he is terrified.  
"What the fuck? Talk properly and clearly you piece of shit."  
"Ehsan." Says Mr. Zahir's son louder and clearer this time.  
"Ok Ehsan. I congratulate you. You are not going to die yet. We need you. Get the chef, his assistants and any other mother fucker working in that restaurant and begin cooking. We are going to be hungry in an hour or two, move it."

Hearing what Hadji Mazen said, six other men who work at Mr. Zahir's restaurant stand up too. After getting out of captives crowd, Hadji Mazen sends two of his followers to the restaurant with them to watch them in case they plan to escape or poison their food.

"Get." Yells Hadji Mazen. "Make variety of dishes. I don't like to have a single meal choice."

Samad, Emad and Damdam, three of Hadji Mazen's known and trusted team leaders begin begging him and asking him when they can choose their bride or sex objects for the night in a joking way.

What they asked makes Hadji Mazen look excited and happy. He puts a big smile on his face. His scary yellow and uneven teeth which make him even look more like a monster appear.

"Yeah. Yeah. Now you are right." Replies Hadji Mazen. "You guys have a valid point. Give it a few more minutes. Oh. No. We cannot decide these important things. We cannot choose properly with an empty stomach. Can we?"

Every member of Isis burst into laughter, approving what their commander just said.

Captive girls are shaking as they know what that means, while honorable young men get angrier and angrier. They know a

number of Isis rapists are going to abuse a single young women or girl, times and times again until morning and are going to kill them if they disobey.

"Well." Continues Hadji Mazen with a loud voice. "So, we have food coming. Now. Who drives and owns a bus, van, trailer or anything that can transport people with?"

One of Al Darrah's coward men stands up immediately and raises his hand. But Hadji Mazen orders him to sit down for now. He takes out his walkie-talkie and contacts his commander, Al Allawi.

"Assalamo alaykom sir." Says Hadji Mazen. "We have cleared the town already. But we are just waiting for your order to demolish. We got rid of all older ones. We now only have two captive groups, boys and girls. With your permission sir, I have decided to transfer them all back to the ammunition and arms cellar storages located at the same industrial area we came here from to incarcerate them for now. I have separated females based on their age and looks. Some good-looking young boys too of course."

Hadji Mazen is laughing. He continues talking to Al Allawi. "Sir, I had no idea there were these many beautiful girls and young women. I swear to God even their younger boys look like little girls. I think we will stay at the same storage facility tonight. I am going to select your prize sir first, keep them untouched and, with your permission, allow my guys to choose a number of girls and boys as their brides. Because they are exhausted. I will present you with your type of pleasure objects when you arrive tomorrow my master. We will advance as planned."

"Whatever God decides." Replies Al Allawi, laughing excitedly. "Good job. God is proud of you. Profit is proud of you and I am proud of you. have fun tonight. Create your heaven there. The real heaven. What Islam has promised us will come and it will be even better, more beautiful, with youngest heavenly angels ready to do all what we ask for after we die."

Al Allawi changes his tone to a less serious and preaching, begins laughing.

"But don't let your guys take all the boys and girls ha." Continues Al Allawi while laughing and talking in a joking tone. "Anyways. What you said about the demolition. That is

our task at hand now, isn't it? How about banks though? have you found any money?"

"Not really sir." Replies Hadji Mazen with a sorry tone. "I sent the guys to look for banks and any financial institution. There's only one bank here. That's all, master. It's a quiet little town. No financial institutions of sort. Guys searched the bank, no one inside of course. They saw a little safe box open and empty. All policemen had run before we captured them. There are no forces defending this little town, sir. Nothing. Nothing. Only good-looking young boys for you and beautiful young girls also."

Hadji Mazen and his commander Al Allawi's communication ends after Al Allawi likes Hadji Mazen's promise and laughs. Hadji Mazen asks for his trusted group leaders and shares with them what he has decided and has approval from by Al Allawi. So, he asks to tie all girls hand and all boys hand separately and get them ready to be transferred back to industrial area's arms and ammunition cellar storage facilities they had robbed earlier that day, before attacking Al Darrah. He calls Ma'arouf, the coward, goosey and ass kisser man, who stood up and raised his hand when Hadji Mazen asked if anyone has any transportation vehicle and asked him what kind of transportation vehicle he owns. The number of military vehicles Hadji Mazen has as his war asset, and disposal are obviously not enough to accommodate all those innocent captive young men and women. Ma'arouf tells Hadji Mazen that he owns an intercity bus which he parked at a lot near the old dusty road. He explains his work as a bus driver is in fact transferring passengers from and to Al Darrah from other cities and towns. Ma'arouf suggests Hadji Mazen can use his tanks, pick-up trucks and motor crosses to transfer the rest of the captives to the storage facility as he knows his bus can only accommodate only so much.

"You think so, huh?" Asks Hadji Mazen, picking his nose.

"Don't you really have any sense to understand it's impossible to transfer the remaining people with tanks and motorcycles? That they want simply fit? You are not that smart. Are you?"

Ma'arouf is now scared to death. He looks down before getting the Isis crazy maniac commander angrier than he is inside.

"I have two brothers too sir." Replies Ma'arouf, still shaking and still looking terrified. "They both own bearing trucks.



You want me call them? They can load people instead of waste material and..."

"What the fuck are you waiting for?" Yells Hadji Mazen after kicking the guy on his balls. "Why didn't you open your fuckin mouth earlier you looser? Do it now."

Ma'arouf tries to stand straight as he bends out of pain after getting kicked in between his legs. He looks around the male captives and spots his two brothers who are seated next to each other terrified, waiting for their fates to be decided. They look scared and unhappy for the fact their brother Ma'arouf is getting them involved with what they actually do not want to get involved with.

"Masoud, Mahmoud." calls Ma'arouf.

Ma'arouf's brothers initially decide not to respond, asking him not to get them involved using facial gestures and signals.

"You know I will have them cut your balls off if you are not able to do what you said you would. Don't you?" Asks Hadji Mazen angrily and ready to kick and punch him. That's when Masoud and Mahmoud, Ma'arouf's brothers, decide they have no choice but to cooperate, otherwise their brother would die. So, they both get up at the same time and walk towards Hadji Mazen and their brother Ma'arouf slowly and fearfully. Hadji Mazen asks Damdam, another trusted associate, to escort Ma'arouf, Masoud and Mahmoud to their vehicles accompanied by two other motor cross riders to go and drive their vehicles back to the roundabout. So, he would push all his captives in them and transfer them to the arms and ammunition storage back at Al Darrah's industrial area. Samad and Ayad are already tying all girls hands and the other is doing the same with boys group. Some of the boys and young men, and girls and young women have begun praying to the God they believe. No one knows what they pray for. They may have asked God to give them strength, patience or even begging God to do something, probably kill them so they would not suffer and die gradually. They are all dead spiritually and this is quite obvious looking at their faces.

There is a young man whose wife is amongst women captives. He notices Isis members touching his wife while trying to tie her hands to other young women and girls.

The man looks up and spits upwards angrily instead of praying sincerely. Hatred and disgust can be clearly felt in his gestures. The Isis touches his wife's boobs and rubs himself to her while the husband can do nothing but witnessing. The woman's name is Rana. Sammy's close cousin. The one who helped Tom dressing his wounds.

Some others have a more spiritual looks on them, as if they are absolutely convinced, they spend last hours or minutes of their lives. They get prepared to meet their makers. Some just look around and have already accepted their bitter dark fate. Girls and younger women though, have much more to fear and scared about in comparison with the men. It is not much longer after what they have heard Isis does to women and girls of an Iraqi town, called Sinjar. They have heard and read recently about fate of Yazidi girls, younger women and female in general. So, they expect nothing less than what they know has Isis done to those innocent Yazidi women. The only thing is they do not know how to escape or at least get killed, out casted or excluded somehow.

Witnessing what Samad and Ayad do, tying men and women's hands, Hadji Mazen reaches for his walkie-talkie once again and calls Abu Mahdi. But he hears no respond again. Thinking there might be something wrong with Abu Mahdi's walkie-talkie, Hadji Mazen decides to contact him on his cell-phone, but there is still no answer. So, he gets agitated and asks his people yelling if any of them knows where Abu Mahdi is or why he is not answering. But Isis people around Hadji Mazen comfort him by saying they believe firmly Abu Mahdi is without a doubt naked, raping a young girl and that's why he is not answering. So, Hadji Mazen still does not think anything of it and let it go for now. He has no doubt Abu Mahdi is committing one of his many crimes and is going to show up soon, probably having a few young girls as captive.

"Listen up." Yells Hadji Mazen, addressing his underdogs. "We will soon head back to the storage facility at that industrial area near here we came from. But I want the tanks to go up the hill again and fire missiles towards different town's sections, demolish some buildings and houses, so anyone who has been hiding would run out. Armed pick-up trucks roam around for a while and kill anyone in the street. I don't want any breathing creature alive before we head back."

All captive girls and boys are ordered to stand up after their hands are securely tied, so they would be ready to get on any

transportation they are given to. Young men and women glance at where their mothers, fathers, grandma or grandpa are laid dead and some begin praying for their soul while crying quietly. A man takes a step forward towards Ayad and begs him to let him see his dead parents' faces for one last time, as he had a fight with them the night before and stayed at a friend. The man pleads. He knows where his parents are laid and begs Ayad to let him say how sorry he is. But being a cold stone hearted animal, Ayad begins laughing and gets angry immediately after the young man insists. So Ayad takes a little pocket knife out of his trousers' pocket and pushes the tip of it against the young man's cheek. He cuts the young man's face right under the eyelid, forming a wound shaped like the man's lower eyelid. The young man gets angry and begins yelling at Ayad. But his hands are tied and cannot do much. His protest gets Ayad even angrier though. Ayad makes an equal cut to the other side of the young man's face while his comrades yell execute. Girls scream and curse. But Ayad is not hearing any of it.

Calm, kind and loving people of Al Darrah have lived in harmony and peace, loving and respecting one another, regardless of religious believes, culture, education, color of skin or language for a very long time. No one can even imagine such a horrible fate for their town or its nice innocent people and fellow citizens.

To escort Ma'arouf, Masoud and Mahmoud, the three brothers, to get their bus and semis, Damdam and his three-motor crosses accompanying him have to go to almost the most western part of the town. Somewhere around two miles farther from the roundabout, where Hadji Mazen has committed a genocide. Where the three brothers have parked their vehicles is a bit farther from Al Darrah's residential area, schools, police station and storage cellars. They have chosen Al Darrah's main street. They cross the flowers intersection and reach dream intersection, where Sammy's apartment is located at their right side around four to five hundred meters to the right. Where one of the motor cross riders suddenly notices one of their own motor crosses laid on the ground and calls others to investigate the scene. They all drive towards the motor cross on the ground, stop, get down and see two of their comrades also dead near Robert who has a sniper rifle near him. They see Hanieh also dead between their other two comrades. They begin yelling and calling Allah Akbar. One of the terrorist Isis members takes a few steps and stands by Robert's motionless body. He bends to check Robert's rifle

and sees Raqqa police logo on the bottom of the rifle which reads Al Darrah division below it. He calls Damdam and shows him what he discovered. Damdam looks around for a moment, ponders a bit and reaches for his wireless walkie-talkie and contacts Hadji Mazen immediately.

"Allah o Akbar sir." Says Damdam.

"God bless you." Replies Hadji Mazen. "What's up?"

"Sir, we have lost two brothers. We found them right now."

"Allah o Akbar. But where? How?"

"Somewhere at this end of the main street. They have been apparently targeted and shot by a police sniper in civilian outfit."

"Aha." Continues Hadji Mazen.

"It looks like they were bringing back a good-looking bride with them, and it seems the cop has shot them all with a single bullet. Because the cop has killed our brothers and their prize all together. What do you want me to do sir?"

"But how do you know he is a cop in civilian clothes?"

"From his rifle sir. It has logo of Raqqa a province with Al Darrah division written below it sir. It's obvious that he was a sniper. He was killed by our brothers, I guess. He's dead too. I don't know how sir. But his rifle is a sniper rifle."

"Ok. May God have mercy on their soul. They wanted to bring a young bride and they became martyrs. Now they'll be given ten youngest virgin angels in heaven as we are promised. Continue your mission. Look for Abu Mahdi also."

Damdam and his motor cross riders continue their way while praying and in fact envying their dead comrades as they have no doubt they are now in heaven, having fun and sex with virgin teenage angels.

They arrive at the parking lot moments later. Ma'arouf and his brothers drive their vehicles, being a transportation bus and two loading trucks, and are on their way back to the roundabout when Damdam suddenly notices a black smoke billowing up from an area in the deserted.

Damdam asks his armed pick-up truck and others to stop. He orders one of the motor cross riders to go and investigate what is that black smoke coming from while they all wait for him to return. The Isis bike rider drives quickly towards the black smoke. He arrives at the scene seconds later and sees Abu Mahdi's truck on fire and all of his team scattered around, all shot dead in a very unbelievable way. He drives back to Damdam, his group leader, quickly and shares what he has

witnessed. Damdam asks the other two bike riders to stay with Ma'arouf and his brothers while he goes and see for himself what his comrade claims.

Damdams armed pick-up truck stops only yards away from Abu Mahdis burning in flame truck. He gets off his vehicle while being escorted by the bike rider comrades. Damdam spends a few minutes. He walks further and sees a body he has difficulty to identify. But his bike rider gets his attention to Abu Mahdis lower jaw and what he was wearing that day. Damdam reaches the body's clothes, takes out his wallet and is certain that the body belongs to his old friend, Abu Mahdi. Damdam sits by Abu Mahdis body for a moment moaning and praying. He reaches back for his walkie-talkie and contacts the commander once again.

"Sir." Calls Damdam, crying.

"What again?" Asks Hadji Mazen.

"Apparently... actually I am now with the body of martyr brother Abu Mahdi." Continues Damdam, crying.

"What?" Yells Hadji Mazen.

"I think it was the same sniper sir. He has killed our brother and comrade Abu Mahdi... and all his soldiers."

Hadji Mazen is furious. He makes a long pause and Damdam thinks he has lost connection with Hadji.

"Sir. Sir." Calls Damdam twice.

"Yeah. I'm here. Wait." Replies Hadji Mazen quite angrily.

"Yes sir. Waiting."

"You mean a police man killed all these comrades of ours with a single sniper rifle? I cannot swallow that."

"Yes sir. It seems so. He got himself killed somehow."

"I'll demolish the whole fucking town." Yells Hadji Mazen.

"I'll collapse all houses and offices on their heads to get them all out. All policemen or anyone, any other fucking person who is hiding. Come back here now. Immediately."

"Yes sir. We're on our way. Over."

"Over."

Hadji Mazen has become frantic after hearing Abu Mahdi and a number of his soldiers have been shot dead. He orders all tanks to take positions, reload and wait for his order to fire.

It is not long when Ma'arouf's bus arrives along with his brothers' loading trucks. Samad and Ayad supervise girls groups and guys groups getting inside the bus and trailers. Girls are told to fill the bus and guys are forced to climb up the trailer. The only thing that keeps Hadji Mazen happy

at that particular moment is the big number of young women and girls. That is so important and pleasant to him that he forgets about Abu Mahdi's death soon after.

Everybody is ordered to drive back toward Al Darrah industrial area, except those who are kept at Mr. Zahir's restaurant to prepare dinner for Isis terrorist members. Hadji Mazen orders all guards at the kitchen to deliver the dinner to the arms and ammunition storage after their food gets prepared. Everyone and every Isis vehicle begin driving towards the industrial area. That's when Hadji Mazen issues an order and yells "fire", ordering tanks to open fire to demolish the town.

All tanks fire their rockets to different spots of Al Darrah all at once. Sammy is sitting far from Nelly, at the end wall of the basement storage, when they hear blasts and the whole ground begin shaking under their feet. Blasts continue and ground shakes times and times again after that. Nelly keeps on screaming while holding her eras and Sammy does his best to calm her down and tell her the building, they are in is newly built and is not going to collapse easily. Sammy is scared himself, but he has only one objective in his mind. Taking care of Nelly and he did not set that objective because he is in love with her. He did it because he has seen with his own eyes what Isis did to her family and knows no one deserves to witness such a cruel brutal scene.

Tanks fire their rockets one after another and Isis members yell Allah o Akbar and cheer when the rockets hit a target and demolish the surrounding buildings. Al Darrah houses were mainly traditional built and are not actually strong enough to hold themselves against such a wild attack.

Sammy tells Nelly to sit at the corner of the room and hold her head between her knees. He does the same himself at the other corner while dust and debris fall off the ceiling with any rocket exploding.

It is not long before a black smoke begins covering Al Darrah's sky. The town looks like a place, ruined by a heavy war. There is no longer any sign of poplar and yellow trees. Al Darrah's Arabic, beautiful and traditional looking houses are almost demolished. Office buildings, Al Darrah hospital, municipality, all. All were ruined in a matter of a few minutes by Isis tanks, and Hadji Mazen witnesses what the order he has issued did to the beautiful town of Al Darrah

while standing on the park of a not very high heel using his army binoculars.

Sammy is waiting for the sunset. Waiting for it to get dark, so he can get out and look for his mother, Amer, his cousin and others. He and Nelly are seated separately, each at one end of the long basement storage. Sammy can understand Nelly's state of mind and actually thinks to give her some space. Nelly is mourning loss of all his family members separately, sobbing quietly, drawing crosses on her chest, while Sammy cries quietly too, mourning loss of Robert, his best friend. The scene Sammy had to shoot Hanieh along with the other two Isis galley slaves has not left his thoughts even for a single second. He thinks Nelly had been spotted by one of Isis motor cross riders and would have without a doubt been taken captive if he had not taken quick action. They are both drowning in their thoughts and concerns when Nelly begins moaning strangely. So, Sammy gets up and thinks of an alibi to get to the other end of the storage room to investigate if she is alright. He walks towards the little fridge at the little kitchen, peaking at Nelly and sees her holding her head, crying quietly and moaning in a strange way every now and then.

Hadji Mazen orders to seize fire after he makes absolutely certain that he has successfully demolished the town and when tanks fire last round of rockets.

"Are you okay?" Asks Sammy. "Would you like some soda?" Nelly shakes her head meaning No, and says her head hurts while wiping her tears off her face.

"I have some Panadol upstairs." Continues Sammy. "Wait. I'll go get you some."

"No need." Replies Nelly quickly, looking at Sammy. "Don't leave me here. I'll be fine. Ok. Get me some soda. Just don't leave."

"It's going to take me a minute only." Replies Sammy. "You'll feel fine five minutes after taking a pill."

"I said no need." Yells Nelly sounding a bit bossy. "I will have some soda. Give me any pill you have right here. That's if you have any; otherwise, you are not going up to get me pills."

"Ok. Ok. Calm down. Let me think. I should be having something here."

Sammy pours her a glass of soda, hands it over to her and begins searching for a medicine to ease Nelly's pain. He

remembers he was once told by his mother she had forgotten her pills down at the basement storage after she had her appendix removed. She was well already and she did no longer need those pills. She was taking her pills with her wherever she went of course. But she left them at the basement storage as Sammy was told and did not bother to go to get them. She said she did not need them anymore after all. So, Sammy searches the whole storage and suddenly remembers his mom used to store unwanted beauty products inside the mirror covered washroom cabinet. Sammy was right. He finds almost the full bottle of his mom's painkiller in the same cabinet and goes back to Nelly immediately, holding the painkiller bottle.

"Here." Says Sammy in a convincing tone. "This is the painkiller my mom was given by her surgeon after she had her appendix removed. I know it may be too strong for a simple headache. I still believe I should go up and get you a headache pill. Like I said, I will be back before you know it."

Desperate and in pain, Nelly shakes her head again, refusing to let Sammy leave her. She raises her right hand and snatches the bottle from Sammy's hand, opens it without even reading what is written on the bottle, takes one out and is stopped by Sammy before she takes it with the glass of cola in her hand.

"Wait though. Maybe take half and see if it works first." Suggests Sammy. "Like I said, I'm convinced these pills are strong for a headache. Ha?"

But Nelly looks Sammy in the eye and puts a pill in her mouth, trying to be stubborn like children and does against what Sammy suggests. She swallows the whole pill still looking into Sammy's eyes and puts the cola glass down.

Sammy is confused why is Nelly acting like children and trying to prove she does not want to listen to his advice? The advice that would benefit her, as Sammy does not want to see her harmed in any way. So, he gets up and walks back to his corner at the basement shaking his head, pondering. They both keep quiet moments later. Nelly's tears roll down every now and then while she looks as though she is in deep prayer, while Sammy is confused whether to worry for her mom's well-being or whereabouts or be happy he has love of his life seated near him in one room.



Sammy and Nelly hold their heads between their knees when tanks fire the rockets. Sammy can see Nelly getting more and more scared and shaky and moves closer to her, simply for her to be psychologically comforted and supported. Sammy is not farther than two or three feet from Nelly. He stands up and wants to ask Nelly to change the location where she is seated when the tank's last rocket hits the neighboring building and the impact is so severe and loud that makes Nelly quite disoriented and Sammy almost falls down on the floor. But Sammy gets himself together in a second. He cannot see Nelly clearly as dust and debris block his view, even from the distance he is standing away from Nelly. He suddenly notices the heavy big bronze statue is falling towards Nelly. She is still shaking terrified and has her head between her knees when Sammy takes one or two quick and long steps towards her calling her name, hugs her and pushes her away. The heavy bronze statue lands precisely where Nelly was seated, making the statue's head hit the wall behind Nelly and make a hole so big in the wall that if it indicated Nelly's head, it was going to crash and kill her instantly if she was not hugged by Sammy. Nelly who had been praying all the time while tank rockets hit Al Darrah, stops drawing cross on her chest and whispering, begging Jesus Christ to save her. Those rockets were the last intended arms to demolish Al Darrah. Rocket impacts end while Sammy and Nelly lay quite close to each other. Nelly gives Sammy a deep and meaningful look after she witnessed by her own eyes what would have happened to her if Sammy had not saved her again.

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Hadji Mazen takes his military binocular off her eyes after he orders cease fire when he makes certain he and his orders to his tanks have made enough damage and were successful in demolishing a little beautiful town. He waves at all his units and orders them all to move back towards Al Darrah's industrial area and Al Darrah's arms and ammunition storage facilities.

Guys and girls in Ma'arouf's bus and his brothers' loading trailers witness how their houses, apartments, offices, schools and most importantly places they had grown up in were demolished. Some of them though, regardless of their gender or age or religion, show no heart to see what happened to their town and houses of their memories. Some others cry, curse, swear and build hatred towards Islam and Muslims, even good Muslims.

The shock of realizing she was just about to die by the bronze statue has made Nelly stop crying and appreciating life a bit more. She feels she is beginning to have a headache. She sees Sammy sitting on a box. He had been sitting on the same box thinking since he saved Nelly's life once again and since tanks had stopped launching rockets on Al Darrah. It was the second or third time Sammy had saved Nelly's life. But Nelly was still disoriented and shocked not to realize that. But that was actually not what Sammy was thinking about after risking his own life to save Nelly's.

All that Sammy is thinking after getting Nelly to safety earlier was his mother first, his cousin and other family and relatives.

It is around five minutes to eight P.M. Sammy knows the whole guests were supposed to be attending Amer's engagement party little by little if all disasters had not happened to Al Darrah and its innocent people. Sammy remembers how excited he was, thinking he would wear his new expensive tuxedo, go to Amer and Sara's engagement party and gets to see Nelly face to face and expressing his true feeling towards her. He has Nelly a few feet away seated from him. But Sammy never wished to spend time with girl of his dreams under such a disastrous circumstance. Sammy thinks of Rana, his other cousin, Amer, Sara and many people he knows and likes after worrying about his mother's fate. He prays he would go to Amer's place and find them all safe and sound hiding.

Sammy remembers the scene when Robert was shot. He remembers shooting Hanieh along with Isis terrorists and tears roll down his eyes without even noticing it himself. All memories he and Amer had with Robert are playing in his mind like a movie. He remembers Robert when he was laughing, excited, happy, sad, joking and everything else. Nelly who has been quiet, notices Sammy is crying. She wants to get up, go to him and comfort him for a second. But she thinks she better let him be. She figures it is better for Sammy's manly ego not to be told how to feel. So, she pretends as though she has not even noticed him crying. Sammy, on the other hand, gets up and goes to the bathroom before Nelly sees him in that emotional state. He has made up his mind. He washes his face, looks at the mirror and figures he would go to the rooftop a few minutes later, scan undemolished areas of the town first and heads towards his hiding place. Sammy's tears roll down while thinking about all what happened that day and

what he has to do next when he hears Nelly's footsteps getting closer to the bathroom. He immediately runs the water, washes his face and gets himself together. The footstep sounds stopped right outside the washroom and there is a pause.

"Are you okay Mr. Sammy?" Asks Nelly without any emotions felt in her voice. "It's been a long time you've been in there. So."

Sammy exits the washroom immediately after clearing his throat, drying his face and eyes with his t-shirt and trying to act as if he is fine.

"Yeah. I'm okay." Replies Sammy when he gets out of the washroom. "I remembered my best friend, Robert. I remembered Hanieh and what I had to do. It's not fair you know."

Sammy's voice has a special vibration to it and it is quite obvious he is trying hard not to cry. Nelly has realized that clearly.

"He was way better in target shooting than I am." Continues Sammy, looking at his own hands. "He had no opportunity to sit properly, focus, concentrate, target and shoot today. Yeah. He was way better than me in targetting, in life, in understanding stuff. He was better than me in everything else miss. But he had no chance to focus. I swear he would have hunted them down like flies. At least twenty or thirty of them before they had a chance to shoot him down. He was accurate. But again, he had no opportunity. He had Hanieh with him."

Sammy notices what he says, reminds Nelly of all that happened. He notices Nelly's eyes are getting watery again. So, Sammy apologizes and chooses not to continue talking.

Black smoke has covered Al Darrah's sky completely. More than sixty percent of Al Darrah buildings have been destroyed and there are huge cracks on the walls, broken windows and partly destroyed ceilings visible on the stronger buildings which have still been standing. Hadji Mazen, his armed pick-up trucks, motorcycle riders, military vehicles, tanks and a bus and two trailers carrying young men and women as captives finally arrive Al Darrah's industrial area. Hadji Mazen arrives at the arms and ammunition storage facility first while everyone else follows him. He asks his driver to stop in front of the two neighboring cellar storages. He looks like he has found a perfect prison for his defenseless

captives. There are also two little office buildings at both sides of each cellar and it is the best condition structure for him to execute his evil plans for the night. Every other Isis member get out of their vehicles after Hadji Mazen gets out of his tank in front of the two cellar storages. It takes a while for everyone gathers around him.

"Females will be kept in the cellar at the right and males at the left one." Yells Hadji Mazen after he makes sure all his soldiers and team leaders are close enough to hear him. "Make them all understand, I'll remove their heart out of their chest in case they even think of escaping. We will stay here tonight. We will camp here. For tonight of course. Some of our people will stay at office building in my right and others may stay at the one on my left."

Hadji Mazen glances at his wrist watch and smiles. "The party begins when the dinner is here already. I don't want any single virgin girl in the morning, except those whom I choose initially of course. Remember, I choose my boss's prizes first. You can have the rest. I know you guys have not raped for around seventy-two, seventy-three hours and are all craving to choose your one-night brides. But you will amend tonight. From what I see, there are too many of good-looking girls and boys. So, don't worry. They're enough to satisfy us all. So, take a rest, relax, eat, drink and use drugs as the night is young and we are blessed with a bus and two trailers full of them. You will start choosing your tonight's brides after, only after securing them inside cellars first. I'll issue an order about young men and useless boys in the morning. That's all."

All Isis members who gathered around the Isis monster commander begin cheering, whistling, and applauding. Their cheering sound gets louder after Hadji Mazen raises his rifle in one hand and his dagger in the other and yells Allah Akbar.

Girls and young women and men can clearly hear Hadji Mazen's dirty speech as Ma'arouf and his two brothers are ordered to switch their vehicle's engine off while the commander speaks. Girls and young women begin crying and pleading after Hadji Mazen's speech is over, while men get furious and mad. It no longer matters to them whether they know any of the girls in the bus. They all think their blood have been sucked out of their skin and their honor is about to be ruined. One of the men has been turned red out of anger and zeal.

"We should do something." Says the young man. "It's better I die with honor rather than live with shame."

Some men approve what he says and some others say they do not want to die as they have no doubt whatever they attempt is going to result into their execution as they have no weapons and no means to defend themselves.

One of the more courageous women opens the bus's window wide open.

"Are you not Muslims?" Yells the young woman. "How can you have sex with any of us while we are not even halal to you? Do you represent Islam or rape and torture?"

"Do not worry sweetheart." Yells back Hadji Mazen replying. "I will personally read the special verse to make you my temporary wife as per Islamic guidelines. We will be halal to one another. It only takes a minute or two make you my new temporary wife."

All Isis members laugh and cheer again.

"You'll take your dreams to your graves with you." Yells back the young woman. She asks another woman to kneel in front of her. She removes her tongue, bites it and jumps. Her jaw lands on the head of the other girl who was kneeling. The young woman's teeth cut her tongue the way it hangs only connected by a piece of flesh or a wane. That's when she grabs the tip of her tongue and pulls it hard, separating it from her throat. The young woman's tongue bleeds so much that she passes away before even any of Isis members notices. Other girls and women scream and cry. But Isis soldiers raise their guns and take a few warning shots to make them quiet without knowing what the young woman has done.

\* \* \*

Nelly is standing, leaning to a wall near the bronze heavy statue staring at it, thinking it would have surely crushed her skull killing her if Sammy had not grabbed and saved her when Sammy approaches and stops two three feet away.

"Miss Nelly." Says Sammy quietly.

Nelly raises her head and glances at Sammy, waiting for him to continue.

"I need to go now. I'll have to go to the east side of the town, somewhere near the roundabout. I'm sure you know Amer, my cousin and Sara's fiancé. They had their engagement party scheduled for today. My mom had been staying with her sister, Amer's mother, as she is not well and needs help to prepare for her son's engagement party. She has been staying with her since Robert and I got back from Beijing targeting tournament. Amer is my cousin. He and late Robert are my best friends you see. I have no idea what happened to my mother, Amer or even Sara, his fiancé. We have scheduled to leave Al Darrah and go to stay at a port city called Al Latakia tomorrow. That's said to be the safety city in the whole country at the moment. I guess fate had something else in store for us. I'll go anyway and be back soon."

Nelly bursts into tears again, shaking her head to the left and right. Begging Sammy her eyes not to leave her with.

"Miss Nelly please." Continues Sammy reluctant to go. "You don't know me yet. I said I promise I'll come back for you. If you knew me, you would believe me. Just give me some time. I'll come back."

Nelly lowers her head for a second, pondering. She knows well Sammy has a feeling for her. Sara and Hanieh had revealed Sammy's secret to her before. So, Nelly does her best to trust what Sammy says, thinking he is at the least going to come back for her because he is in love with her.

"You just need to do me a favor though." Says Sammy. "There's no one here except you miss Nelly."

Sammy has fixed his knee-strap on the top of his trousers. He sits on a chair and shows his knee-strap to Nelly.

"I can't actually walk without fixing this knee-strap or using a cane." Continues Sammy feeling embarrassed and ashamed of his limp leg. He thinks Nelly is without a doubt feeling sorry for him or think low of him.

"But I need you to fix my knee-strap tight please. Because the way I'll be walking after going out looking for mom and others, would be way different than a usual walk-in sidewalk or a park. I have to have my knee-strap as tight and strong as possible, so I would be able to escape in case I'm spotted by those animals out there. I need it to be fixed properly, so I can run if it comes to that. You can see here six leather

straps which you should fasten them tight one by one. Just like closing a belt."

Sammy pauses for a second and remembers Nelly was very clear earlier that she is not to be touched by anyone. Sammy knows well how Nelly thinks of men, and can figure the reason why she is so afraid of getting touched. He can guess it was resulted by the rape attempt on her.

"If you feel disgusted and have gooseflesh," continues Sammy. "I can give you the dishwashing gloves. They're at the little kitchen, hanged over the sink. But I need to fix the knee-strap before getting out there. So, tell me..."

That's when Nelly begins fixing his knee-strap, interrupting him and not letting Sammy finish what he wants to say.

"Like this?" Asks Nelly. "Is it too tight?"

"Yes thanks." Replies Sammy, shaking out of excitement and disbelief exactly. "No, I'm ok. It's not too tight. This is actually how tight I need it."

Sammy feels something strange in his heart for the first time. He is thinking Nelly has allowed herself to touch him, a man, a Muslim man, despite the hatred she has established towards men after the rape attempt on her. Sammy can feel Nelly is not as cold and unkind as he thought, or it is the circumstance which made her feel she has no other choice and has to touch Sammy's knee and knee-strap. Sammy thought she has a kind and gentle heart inside her that needed to be hidden for obvious reasons.

Nelly fixes all Sammy's straps patiently and properly. Sammy stands up after his knee-strap is tightly fixed. He thanks Nelly and walks towards a drawer in the little area designed at the basement storage as a kitchen and tries opening it. It is difficult to open the drawer as some heavy stuff had fallen on it after the rocket hit Sammy's neighboring building and pressed the counter down a bit. Sammy finally is able to pull the drawer open. He takes out a map of Syria and its neighboring countries. He calls Nelly and she walks towards him slowly. Sammy finds a magic-colored marker and begins talking.

"Miss Nelly," says Sammy. "I know you are not in your best of emotional state of mind and soul. Believe it or not, I'm not either. But we can't stay here for long. So, we will move towards Jarabulus city like I told you earlier. We'll move

sometime before midnight probably, depending on how I see the outside situation."

Nelly is staring at the map without saying anything.

"We are here," Continues Sammy, making a little circle on the map with magic marker. "and we need to get there."

Sammy makes another circle on a spot near Turkish border.

"You need to have enough energy to walk miss Nelly. So, please open this little fridge here after I'm gone and eat something. You can find some canned food, soda and some crackers. Even if you have no appetite and are still shaky. This is about survival miss Nelly. We can moan our losses in a later time. But for now, I need to keep you, I mean us alive. So, please eat so you can cope and keep up."

Sammy glances at Nelly, not still looking at the eyes to get confirmation.

She is actually going to do as he said. Nelly nods.

"I'm afraid of what might happen to us on the way." Says Nelly.

"I have promised you to keep you alive, unharmed until I get you out of this hell. And I will do that. Please just trust me and cooperate."

Sammy draws another line and another line towards north.

"My plan is to get you safely to the river bank." Continues Sammy, pointing to Euphrates river on the map. "I'll take you to Jarabulus unharmed going on foot, ***in parallel to the Euphrates.***"

"But why are you helping me?" Asks Nelly after a pause.

Sammy is caught off guard. He has no other answer for her but to tell her how he feels about her. But that is neither the right time to express his emotions nor the perfect situation to do so. So, Sammy looks away and pauses for a few seconds.

"Just cooperate, cope and keep up." Says Sammy and he immediately walks towards the other end of the basement storage. He stops and says while he still has his back to Nelly:



"There are men in this world who help a fellow-citizen without any particular reason. Just because they feel obliged and responsible in time of need without asking anything, anything at all in return."

Nelly now interrupts Sammy.

"Well, I did that and you had no right to save me." Yells Nelly quite angrily. "I think you are the type of guy who wants to be considered a hero in the eyes of the people. Actually, I will attempt to kill myself after you are gone. I don't want to follow you particularly because you are good at targeting. There are hundreds of them out there. We may escape Al Darrah, but we can never escape Isis.

"But you have a third choice which I strongly suggest you make." Continues Sammy looking dead serious, while Nelly looks angrily as if she has made her decision already. "I suggest you die trying at least. Let me be very frank and clear with you. You'll be extremely lonely when I'm gone. You have no means of communication. We both have no one to go to. There's no T.V., radio, internet, phone. I heard you the first time you said, yeah, you'll end your life. But I have a proposal. You want to die alone? Here? In a place, in this tomb, like you call it? I propose you be strong and give it a try. I will give you a rifle, load it with bullets in front of your eyes and hand it to you. I will also give you some pills, dangerously deadly pills by which you can end your life painlessly and effortlessly. You come with me and I will try escorting you to Jarabulus to safety, like I promised. Or you attempt suicide, kill yourself when there's no more hope left in you, like when you see so many Isis animals that you know for sure I cannot kill. You kill yourself using the rifle or pills I give you when you have made absolutely certain that the Isis members will catch you in a matter of seconds as they are so close to you. You shoot yourself dead if it is proven to you that I can't or would no longer be able to protect you. You shoot yourself to kill yourself before any of them can touch you when I'm shot dead. I mean when they have already shot me, you will kill yourself, dying a quick painless death. You can whether shoot yourself or chew one of the pills I'll give you. At least you have tried. At least you have shown those animals you are not only a pretty face. Who knows, you may be able to hunt them down, helping me kill them, at least some of them. Besides, I'm sure suicide is a big "No" in your religion. Isn't..."

That's when Nelly interrupts Sammy again.

"Let me think for a second." Yells Nelly with a softer tone now. "She lowers her head, stands up and walks toward the W.C. Sammy is getting happy and excited feeling what he has told her worked and changed her mind probably. So, he goes to his dad's hidden bunker, gets his rifle's box out, chooses some bullet boxes and takes them to the little dining table and places them on the top of it. He opens one of the cabinets which he has difficulty in opening it, looks for something. He goes back to the table, holding three white capsules. He lays a tissue on the table and drops those capsules on the tissue and waits for Nelly to come back and sit. Nelly comes back out of the washroom moments later.

"Where is the rifle?" Asks Nelly, drying her hands with a towel. She looks quite determined now. Show me those suicide pills too."

But she sees Sammy opening his late father's hunting rifle box and pills laid on a piece of tissue. She sits at the table quietly and observes what Sammy is doing.

Sammy takes out his father's hunting rifle. He loads the rifle and puts it on safety, asking Nelly to sit next to him so she would learn. He teaches Nelly how to take the rifle off the safety mode and instructs her insisting for her to drop its bullets left over all in her back-pack or pockets as she may be needing them in an urgent basis, and it is best for her to have them in an accessible place like her trousers or shirt's pocket. He wraps the tissues around those pills without touching them and brings a small freezer plastic case and puts them in it and ties the plastic's opening and tells her she is only allowed to touch those pills open only when she is hundred percent sure she wants to die. Sammy places the loaded rifle in front of Nelly. She stands up, holds the rifle and takes her seat opposite to Sammy, takes a breath, closes her eyes for a moment.

"So, I will kill myself if..." Says Nelly in a threatening manner. "If..."

But Sammy interrupts her again.

"1- If you feel Isis terrorists are close enough to you that they can harm you. You shoot yourself. But you shoot back helping me kill them first. I mean kill yourself shot dead in the worst-case scenario. 2- You shoot yourself dead if I'm shot by them dead. 3- You take a pill killing yourself, only if you run out of bullet shooting back at them. And lastly, shoot me first if I try getting so close to you, touch you in any manner. Shoot yourself if you wish. I say the last option for you to be rest assured. This between us is nothing but a mutual understanding that I hope and am somehow certain will result into us getting to safety. You can also shoot me and

yourself, if you feel I am not capable of escorting you to safety as I made a vow, as I promised, despite limping and having no army training. Deal. But please listen to what I want you to do no matter what while on the way. Deal?"

"Deal." Nelly says after she nods, staring at Sammy.

Nelly looks up for a moment and makes Sammy wonder what is going on in her mind. Sammy gets up now, heads towards the washroom. He has a mild strange smile on his lips after he turns his face away from Nelly going to the washroom.

He enters the washroom a bit annoyed and angry, trying to figure out why did she had to ask such a question in such a disastrous condition?

Here's when Sammy gets out of the basement storage finally.

Sammy comes back after a moment and sees Nelly is still standing over the kitchen counter staring at the map. He sits on the sofa and begins tightening his shoe laces again. He walks towards the storage entrance door slowly, opens the door lock and pauses. Nelly looks very worried and terrified despite all promises Sammy has made her that she has nothing to worry about and he is going to be back soon. Nelly takes two steps towards Sammy.

"I'm going to find my mom." Says Sammy in a hopeless tone, quietly and while looking at the key inside the door lock. "Remember the square metal opening to the secret compartment. Sneak inside in case you hear an unusual, scary or suspicious sound. Hide in there and wait for me. I'll make three knocks to let you know it's me, so you would open this door."

Nelly nods and Sammy gets out of the basement.

"Jesus Christ will protect you." Hears Sammy Nelly saying after he exits the basement. "Be careful."

Sammy stops for a moment. He and Nelly are separated by a door that Nelly locks after Sammy gets out. But Sammy still hears her since he is only a foot away from the door. He smiles and continues walking upstairs to go to the ground level to exit his building.

Many thoughts cross Sammy's mind before he reaches the building's entrance broken glass door. He was hoping that he would meet Nelly like he has planned and tell her how he feels about her. He wishes he met her in a more relaxed and calmer situation and environment. Now Sammy does not know if Nelly says something nice to him or does something for him which is against her set principles. If It is because she likes him

also or it is her survival instinct guiding her how to act or what to say for her to stay alive or have Sammy protect her and keeping her away from harm. Especially now that Sammy has made a vow to get her to absolute safety without a scratch on her.

Nelly hated men after the terrible experience she had and that is it, Sammy thinks. He has felt it clearly from the way Nelly acts and, talks, behaves and asks questions. Sammy thinks he has to clear it with himself why he is actually helping her. So, he sits on a stair for a second thinking about that. He figures he is madly in love with her and he cannot change anything about it. But is that the only reason he is willing to even risk his own life to keep her from getting hurt and harm? This is the most serious question Sammy has ever asked himself in regards to Nelly since the circumstances have changed. The situation obviously is not suitable for expressing emotions or beginning a relationship. Sammy is even though stupid thinking about it and letting such thoughts enter his mind. Nelly's whole family are horribly executed in the most brutal cruel way in front of her eyes. She is innocent, emotionally disturbed, defenseless beautiful girl who has no one and is going to meet an even more horrifying fate if she is caught by Isis rapist animals. Sammy has offered to help her and he thinks he has to. So, that's when Sammy decides to keep his emotions to himself and does as any other gentleman, or real human, would do in such situations. Sammy's decision is final. Nothing about Nelly and seeing her as a beautiful girl of his dreams. To get her to safety like he promised her and who knows, he may express how he feels about her months or even years after he gets her to a safe place, after she recovers and is in a much more comfortable and safer situation if they are both still alive. Sammy leaves everything in mysterious hands of fate. But now, he has to be a man. Save a woman, a girl from Isis. Nothing else matters.

Nelly, on the other hand, is under this impression that Sammy saved her to win her heart, since she already knows how he feels about her. So, this is her ticket to safety. She can use Sammy and how he feels for her to have a protector, even if he limps and she does not like men, even if he is a Muslim and she hates Muslims. Nelly thinks Sammy does all what he can to show off how capable he is and how safe she would be with him. Sammy is a good sniper and has a plan. So, the risk of being with him is way lower than if she tries to run to safety by herself.

The staircase is very dark. The whole town is in absolute darkness too. The only light can be seen is buildings burning in fire, and the moonlight of course. Sammy is afraid to even switch his key chain's tiny flash light in case some of Isis members are around. He is well aware of his building's floor plan. So, he continues towards the broken main entrance groping. He is on high alert, pointing his rifle forward and turning left and right when he sees a shadow. He suddenly hears someone moving on the dusty ground outside. He gets his rifle ready to the sound and is prepared to shoot. He cannot take any chances. So, he sits on the ground immediately, pointing his rifle towards the area he has heard a sound coming from. Moments later, he is relieved after he sees the shadow of a stray dog crossing the front of the building under the moonlight. His plan is not to take Al Darrah's streets and alleys, but to take the dusty narrow hiking road which lead towards Al Darrah's east side. He wants to get to the roundabout and head towards Amer and his aunt's house to see whether he can find anyone. He has to be very careful in any single step he takes. Luckily, the moon shines from Sammy's front side. So, no moon light from his back or left side of him exposing him to evil Isis members or their guards. Sammy notices few street lamp poles are still on surprisingly in different spots of the main street.

Sammy begins to see and realize what Isis has done to his beautiful town only after a while when his eyes get used to darkness. Some lamp poles are still on and with the moonlight shining on ruins of Al Darrah. Some bigger buildings are still burning in flames. The dark cloud has almost covered all Al Darrah's sky and prevents the moonlight shine on the town. But there are spots on the sky where the clouds of black smoke have been cleared by desert wind and helped moonlight show Sammy what has been done to the town. He can already guess what the fate of its people have been.

Sammy stops for a moment and looks at where Robert has been shot killed. He suddenly bursts into tears, but soon realizes again that he has time to moan later and it is not the right time to get emotional. Sammy has decided to save Nelly and take her to safety. It is his objective and all what he does, has to help him achieve his objective.

Sammy walks slowly and carefully on the hill side hiking a narrow road, going towards east. The further he walks, the more he realizes the depth of disaster. He knows well his

chances to find his mother and others are not that good. He firmly believes his cousin and best friend have gotten his mom and others, run off and taken shelter elsewhere and have no means to communicate and inform him of their whereabouts. At least that is what Sammy actually hopes for.

He reaches the street leading to the roundabout after a few minutes. That's when he notices Mr. Zahir's restaurant is open. The outside lights are surprisingly on. Sammy sits for a moment and sees two motor crosses with a black flag waving on its antenna. He immediately figures a few people in and out of the restaurant are probably Isis members. At least two or three of them if not all. He sees Mohsen, Mr. Zahir's son among them, busy doing stuff in and outside the restaurant. Sammy is seated on the ground and has these movements under control using his rifle's scope. He hears motorcycles start moments later after he tries to hide behind a big piece of rock. He sees Al Zahir restaurant's delivery pick-up truck and two restaurant workers carry two big caldron pots and load them at the back of the delivery truck.

Sammy has no doubt Mr. Zahir and his sons are forced by Isis to cook them food and have it delivered to them somewhere. Sammy cannot, however, see Mr. Zahir himself though. The delivery truck moves escorted by the two Isis motorcycles. Sammy lowers his head, so motorcycles and the delivery truck's head light would not expose him and compromise his hideout.

Sammy looks at them using his scope and finds out they are headed towards east side of the town where industrial area is situated. So, Isis members have not stayed in the town for any reason, Sammy thinks. They have probably headed to another town to kill its innocent people and ruin it into dust like what they did to beautiful Al Darrah. But he thinks at the same time there is no attack to no other town. Not at least that night, as Sammy saw Mr. Zahir's delivery truck loaded big piles of food and was escorted out of the town.

Sammy gives himself the coverage when the two Isis motorcycle riders escort Mr. Zahir's pick-up delivery truck outside Al Darrah. He sneaks out of the rock and tiptoes towards the roundabout carefully and quietly the way even he cannot hear his own footsteps. He pauses when he gets closer to the restaurant to make sure there is no one else inside. So, he crosses the restaurant quickly and comes face to face with one of the scariest scenes of his life immediately after he sees under the moonlight and a little lamp that is hanging

from the front side of a little shop at the other side of the roundabout. He sees dead bodies everywhere all around the roundabout. Men and women, mostly unidentifiable. It is a horror show for him. Sammy begins puking after he takes a few more steps. He is walking on clotted blood of those innocent people. He is about to slip on their blood and fall down and hits the ground a few times.

Sammy can see a lot of dead bodies lying on and around the roundabout, on the sidewalk and at the middle of the roundabout where is designed by grass, trees and flowers under the moonlight and the lamp which is hanging from the ceiling outside a shop further down.

Sammy is shocked to see those many dead fellow citizens laying on and around the roundabout. He is not crying even. He is so shocked that he is simply walking between dead bodies trying not to step on them. To identify some of the bodies, he nods lighter. He thinks of using his cell-phone's flash light in the beginning. But afraid of getting exposed to an Isis evil member, he changes his mind. But his curiosity still tickles him to do so.

There begins a strong wind, and Sammy thinks it is one of other desert quick storms. He covers his mouth and nose inside his t-shirt's collar and waits for the strong wind to end. He waits a few minutes. The strong breeze moves the dark cloud of black smoke little by little, making the moonlight shine stronger. Everything and everyone's identity is getting exposed to Sammy every second goes by. Sammy can gradually identify his neighbors, school teachers, Mr. Zahir, etc. from a reasonable distance. He still needs to investigate further. All dead ones, Sammy notices, are of older age. He could see some younger ones lay dead on the Al Darrah's main street, alleys and sidewalks while hiking towards town's east side using his rifle's scope whenever he stopped to look around and make sure he is not being followed or spotted. But he is flabbergasted to see all those older men and women lay dead on the floor. Sammy is panting and pondering what may have happened to his mother and others if he cannot find them among dead men and women on the roundabout.

The wind loses its strength and speed little by little. Al Darrah's sky becomes clear enough for Sammy not need to flash light identifying those dead bodies. He is severely shocked and speechless to imagine how people whom he knows, his follow-citizens met their ending. His hands are shaking so as his knees. He begins walking among them and the only thing

gives him hope and a bit glad is the fact that he thinks his mother, best friend and cousin and those companied them to register Amer and Sara's engagement are not amongst those dead ones whom he has so far seen.

Another thing that surprises Sammy is the fact that most of the dead people he has so far seen at the side of the roundabout were killed by stab wounds. He can barely see anyone shot. He sees no bullet wounds on any of the victims. In rage and cursing, Sammy has both his hands on his head and fingers between his hair, shakes his head in disbelief and looks at the genocide Isis animals has committed against his fellow-citizens. No victim carried any kind of weapon. Not even a Swiss army knife and Sammy keeps murmuring: "But why? What is your crime? Why? You had no weapons. You were defenseless."

That's when Sammy's head turns towards the other side of the roundabout and notices a woman's white cloth. The white under moonlight attracts Sammy's attention and pulls him towards itself. So, Sammy changes the direction, stops wondering around aimlessly and walks towards the white object or clothe he has seen. He gets closer to the white cloth and stops abruptly after noticing the white shiny cloth was worn by a young woman, whose body has been crushed almost flat from waist up. The young woman's hair color looks familiar to Sammy. Her left hand was not crushed. She was wearing a white shiny gown that is usually worn by newlywed women on their first day of their marriage or engagement being legalized. Sammy gets closer and looks at the ring the woman has on her finger and stops breathing for a moment. Sammy knows he is bending on the dead body of Sara, Amer's fiancé. He remembers Amer showed him the engagement ring which he had bought her. Half of Sara's shiny white gown was completely soaked in her blood and Sammy can only see her lower part of the gown. Sammy notices strange wheel marks on her upper body and on the ground, a wheel print made on the asphalt by her blood. Like a person who has seen a ghost, Sammy takes a few steps backwards shaking. What has crushed Sara's skull, right hand and torso until her waist is still a mystery to him. But that still does not look to have made Sammy's main concern. His heart begins beating faster, thinking what his mom's and other's fate would be if Sara met such an ending. Sammy has to get his cell-phone out of his pocket and uses its flash light. He has not much time and he needs to find out what has gone at the roundabout and what has happened to his mother.



So, he takes out his cell-phone, switches its built-in flash light, pointing it to the ground and checks all dead bodies. Sammy almost knows each and every one who has been killed in Isis's mass execution. Sammy's heels hit the edge of the roundabout center after he gets shocked seeing and noticing the horrific scene of identifying Sara's corps. Panting heavily, Sammy looks back and sees some dead bodies at the center of the roundabout too. So, he takes one step up and enters the green area at the center of Al Darrah's little roundabout. He walks further and sees the most horrifying scene he has never seen even in the violent movies he has watched till. Sammy gets closer to a body he sees. He sees his cousin, Amer's body. Amer's eyes are still open, looking up at heavens. His chest was opened wide with a sharp object. Sammy sees a piece of flesh on the grass next to Amer and finds out it is his heart removed out of his chest and cut into half. Amer's father, mother, Yamen and mother and one or two other bodies he has never seen their faces have been beheaded and killed. Sammy is speechless when he sees heads sawed off and laid near Amer's body.

Sammy closes his eyes for a moment, kneels before his cousin's body and kisses his head, murmuring something. He gets up and stares at his best friend's body for quite a long time, remembering their childhood moments and memories he had with him and Robert. A single tear rolls down his face.

"Go buddy." Whispers Sammy with a vibrating voice. "Go. Robert and probably Robin, Sara and Hanieh are waiting. So are your mom and dad."

Sammy remembers the secret Amer revealed to him and Robert. He remembers Amer telling them Sara is pregnant. Sammy stops talking, takes a deep breath and continues:

"You'll have your engagement party up there, while both of your parents present. You'll have no more fear and worries of what will happen next. Sara's belly will become bigger and bigger. One day, you'll be told you have become a father. Let me know dude. Let me know if it's a boy or a girl. Sleep buddy rest in peace."

Sammy has no doubt something terrifying has happened to his mother. So, he walks out of the roundabout center and goes to the other side of the roundabout he has not checked yet. He prays all the time to find a sign of his mother or something to indicate where she is. He would probably find a single

person alive to tell him what has happened to all those elderly people and where has his mom run to.

Sammy points the flash-light at the dead bodies at the other side of the roundabout, hoping to find a clue about his mother or her whereabouts. He notices almost everyone has been crushed in a quite ruthless way. Exactly the way Sara's half torso has been crushed. It is that he figures the strange wheel marks on the bodies and asphalt are as a matter-of-fact Isis's tanks tracks which had run over elderly innocent and defenseless people. That is the only logic explanation Sammy can think about.

Sammy stops between elder people crushed bodies carefully not to step on them. He suddenly notices part of a dress he is most familiar with. His heart seizes beating for a moment. He has no courage to look at the woman wearing the dress. He looks at the woman's face finally and sees what no one should. He sees his mother's face turned blue. She has one eye shut and her other eye still open. She has turned dark grey. Her lower torsos is crushed flat from stomach down and she has a few bullet wounds on her chest and other parts on her upper torsos.

Sammy's whole body goes numb suddenly. His knees lose strength and can no longer support his body weight. He feels dizzy and collapses down, landing on the pool of blood which has been squeezed off his mother. He opens his eyes moments later facing his mom's face. Sammy gets closer to his mother's face and bursts into tears, crying as loud as he can. It does no longer matter to him if any Isis member is around and is going to actually hear him. He hugs what is left of his mother's upper torsos, places his face on his mom's and begins smelling her, apologizing for not being there to save her.

"Get up mom." Screams Sammy loudly. "Get up. Please. Get up and tell me this is a nightmare. Please mom. I'm sorry. I could not hear. I had that down head phone in my ears. Mom. Mom."

Sammy begins shaking his mother and what is left of her body.

"Mom Robert is dead. Amer is dead. Sara was pregnant and now dead. Hanieh is dead. Aunt Zinat is dead. Mom don't you die. Mom. Tell me these were all nightmares when I open my eyes. Just like when I had nightmares when I was a kid. Mom. Mom."

Wake up. This is just a nightmare. Oh God. No. No. Please. Wake me up. Wake my mom up.”

Sammy passes out again. Almost half of his upper body and part of his lower body is soaked with his mother’s clotted blood already. Sammy gains consciousness a while later. He begins to digest and believes his mom is gone, as are all others around her. Sammy has no idea he has passed out for around twenty minutes. He is no longer thinking about Nelly and the fact that she waits for him desperately at home.

Sammy closes his mother’s open eye, takes out her necklace, kisses her goodbye and covers her whole body with an Arabic women’s hijab he found left on the floor. It belonged to an elderly woman who has also been killed in that mass execution.

After saying farewell to his mom and snapping out of shock and denial, Sammy goes towards Sara and takes out her engagement ring. The one he knows Amer had bought her. He goes to Amer’s body and removes his engagement ring to.

“I will keep these rings and my mom’s necklace until I take my last breath.” Says Sammy sobbing. “Please take a good care of my mom, your aunt, buddy. Thank you for being there for me all the time. Rest in peace.”

He stands at the center of the roundabout again, kneels looking up and prays for the souls of his mother and other loved ones. He heads back towards his home and Nelly. Sammy thinks about everything that had happened that day while he was listening to his classical music, machining his rifle part and convinces himself that his life has been spared by destiny for a purpose and the only purpose he can think of, is to save Nelly and get her to safety. It is the scenario written and played by the universe for him. So, he weeps all the way back, remembering every emotional moment he had with his mother since he was a young kid.

\* \* \*

Nelly has become stressful and anxious. Sammy told her he was going to come back way earlier. But there is still no sign of Sammy and that is beginning to worry her to the extremes. She has no means of communication and cannot contact Sammy or anyone else, since all telephone lines are disconnected due to Isis tanks and rockets. Negative thoughts begin forming in her mind. She keeps on remembering the scene, when her parents,

siblings and others were shot dead by the Isis heavy machine gun. She has begun feeling alone and helpless in the world, and now Sammy has probably abandoned her, or was shot and she is on her own. Minutes pass and still there is no sign of Sammy. A Muslim man whom she has to depend on and be with all the time even if she has no feelings for him, because she is still afraid of men and hates them as a matter of fact in order to survive upcoming threats and possible rape attempts on her. Nelly thinks how pointless her life has become in a matter of a few hours. She feels there is no point for her to continue living and figures it is better she joins and reunites with her family. She begins losing hope and thinking of ways by which she can end her life.

Sammy has almost arrived back at his building when he thinks he has to say a proper goodbye to Robert too. He has done it with Amer and his mom. He figures he is not going to forgive himself later if he does not say goodbye and takes a memorial from him to remember him forever, like he did with Amer, Sara and his mother. He thinks he would hide and get to Robert quickly, says his goodbye to him, takes a memorial item from him and does the same with the girl he loved, Hanieh. So, he changes his route and goes towards where Robert has been shot killed and Hanieh who are not far away for him.

Sammy is extra careful while going towards Robert's body. He is dirty, dusty and bloody. Sammy would do it or lay down pretending to be dead with any single suspicious sound he hears. On the way to Robert's location, Sammy can see signs indicating how brutal and cruel Isis had acted against his fellow-citizens. He witnessed people, women and men stabbed to death along with their kids, older ones like grandma and grandfathers. It is an unbelievable scene to Sammy. One of the store owner's face is cut open in front of his store, a man's almost amputated hand, which is only connected to his body through a single thin vein. Someone else has been apparently killed after his Major artery was slashed by a sharp object, a dagger or some sort or a machete even. It is evident shop keepers had not enough time or opportunity to shut their shops down before they were caught off guard. Shops' doors were still open. At least those shops that were still not demolished and destroyed by Isis rockets. Some citizens were killed execution style, shot at the back of their heads and had fallen face down, while their hands tied from behind. Sammy cannot believe what kind of an animal was capable of such a mass murder. What kind of God they pray and what family and culture they have been raised in.

Before reaching Robert, Sammy has to cross the spot he had shot the two Isis members and Hanieh at the same time. He sits near the Isis motorcycle and looks at his room's window far away. That's when he realizes how powerful his rifle has turned out to be. The bullet he had shot had passed through three people easily despite being shot from hundreds of yards. Looking at what Isis evil members have done to his fellow-citizens, hatred overwhelms Sammy. A sense of revenge takes over every single cell in Sammy's body.

Sammy reaches Robert and kneels before him like he did Amer. He kisses his forehead and says a few words to him, thanks him for making his life more interesting and supporting him, being there for him at all times. He takes off Robert's necklace which has a cross pendant, wears it on his own neck, says goodbye and heads towards Hanieh where she was shot by him along with the other two Isis rapist and terrorists. Sammy begins apologizing and crying moments before he even reaches Hanieh's body. He closes Hanieh's eyes and sees she had left this world happy. She seems having a mild smile on her face. Sammy apologizes for shooting her and tells her he thought it was what she wanted when she looked at his building direction. Sammy has a few worlds for her. He takes out Hanieh's bracelet and stands up. Sammy, despite being downhearted and emotional for him having lost his mother in that most brutal way, decides to do what he told Nelly he would do. He told Nelly their objective is staying alive and getting to safety. He said they were going to have enough time to mourn the losses of their dear ones. So, he stops crying and does his best to decide his next move logically. He remembers he had seen a fast-food restaurant's door was open while walking towards Robert and Hanieh's bodies. He decides to sneak in and grab some food before getting back home as he knows he has to arrange for certain essentials if he and Nelly are going to stay alive. Sammy walks towards the restaurant, walks in and sees two well-cooked chickens on the rolling oven. He looks for a big plastic case. But he finds a back-pack at the staff's changing room at the back. He grabs the back-pack and begins filling it with all what he knows are going to fill his and Nelly's stomach. He puts the two cooked chicken, some readily available salad, some cooked rice, some almonds, cooked beans and canned foods. Sammy walks out of the little fast-food restaurant and realizes he is carrying a heavy load already. The rifle itself is heavy enough for him considering his leg condition and now he has to carry a load of edibles. His knee-strap is beginning to get loosened and that makes it

too difficult for him to carry stuff. But he decides to head back immediately and regardless. He knows well he has kept Nelly waiting for long already.

Sammy pauses before walking out of the little fast-food restaurant, thanks the universe and all its forces for keeping him and Nelly alive. He walks out and heads back to his basement storage.

On the way, Sammy feels he is being followed. He thinks he is imagining stuff and hallucinating as a result to so much grief, stress and anxiety. So, he does not mind the faint footstep sound. But he is still extra careful not to be spotted by one of the Isis members. But Sammy is not hallucinating. An Isis motorcycle rider who had orders to patrol the town as part of the post demolition schedule, had spotted Sammy from a distance, switched his motorcycle off and followed Sammy on foot to find out his hideout. He thought it would not only be Sammy hiding there and there may be some other people too. Sammy hears a footstep several times but ignores it thinking he is just hearing stuff, imagining things and hearing stuff that do not exist actually. Because of that heavy weights of his rifle, the back-pack filled with food stuff and his loosened knee-strap, Sammy has to stop and take a rest somewhere, preferably close to his building. That's when the Isis patrol slips on a piece of stone, falls down and creates a sound which Sammy can no longer ignore. Sammy sees the man armed to his teeth in Arabic thobe, eye to eye around a hundred yards away from him. But the Isis patrol takes off running after he realizes Sammy saw him. But Sammy cannot run after him for obvious reasons and is worried the Isis is going to give up which building, he and Nelly are hiding at. So, Sammy lifts his rifle and aims at the man. But he cannot take a clear shot as it is dark and so difficult to place the guy in his scope's lens. The man disappears behind a wall before Sammy can target properly and take him down.

Sammy thinks quickly. He has no doubt a single Isis patrol couldn't have walked to the town alone, by himself and without a vehicle. Sammy is trying to make up his mind what to do next, when he hears a faint sound of a motorcycle as if someone has just ignited the. Sammy is right and he realizes it for a single second. He makes up his mind. He enters his building immediately and rushes towards the staircase. He throws the back-pack down the stairs as it is getting quite heavy and reducing his mobility. He has to take the back-pack downstairs to his storage, basement anyways. He does not think

of his leg condition, his loosened knee-strap and how tired he has been. He has set his objective. To reach his building's rooftop, as it is the highest point in the town. Sammy's building is situated on a hill top and being a five-story building. Sammy is running upstairs very fast to reach the rooftop. He hopes he can spot the patrol Isis killer from the rooftop and ends him like he did others earlier that day. Sammy reaches the rooftop soaked in sweat, his mother's blood and dust when he takes position and places his rifle on the edge of the rooftop. He begins scanning the area. He can hear the motorcycle engine, hoping the Isis patrol and his motorcycle would cross a lighted area he would be able to target and shoot him down before he has a chance to go back to his unit and reveals where he a Nelly are hiding.

Sammy follows the faint motorcycle's engine sound and looks very carefully into his scope. Moments pass. There is no sign of Isis patrol man, but he can still hear the motorcycle engine's sound getting farther and farther. Sammy takes a few deep breaths and begins imagining the town's layout. He figures the patrol man is surely not taking the old dusty road. He can hear bike's sound getting farther, going towards east side of Al Darrah. He remembers Mr. Zahir's delivery pick-up truck drive towards Al Darrah's east. They have probably chosen a spot somewhere in the industrial area to camp for the night and the patrol is headed towards that direction too. Sammy focuses all his attention and concentrates on a lighted area near the roundabout. His only problem is that he is not actually certain what is his rifle's capability in terms of range. The lighted area is way too farther than where he shot Abu Mahdi and his crew, or two Isis terrorists trying to kidnap Hanieh. Sammy thinks he has no other choice but to try his luck. While thinking about all those factors and while he is considering different factors and analyzing different variables in his mind, he clearly sees the patrol motorcycle appears in his scope for a second and disappears as quickly. The motorcycle crosses the intersection, connecting an alley to a main street when he is spotted by Sammy and Sammy can guess the bike is going to appear and disappear as quickly on the next intersection, connecting on the next alley to the same street. So, instead of waiting for the patrol motor cross to appear and targeting it, Sammy begins adjusting his scope's lens and calculating distance, Isis patrol animal's approximate height, his bike's approximate height while seated on the bike, driving wind speed even if there is no more wind, his rifle's stand and range while remembering scenes when he was at different

tournament, competing in different range category and all formulas, facts and figures he was taught by Tom.

Like before, Sammy breathes in inhales and keeps his breath, preventing himself to exhale. He does that for oxygen to enter his blood stream and reaches his brain cells several times. Sammy calculates everything by the book and according to the window standard dimension of a building he can see, next to where the patrol guy and his bike are going to cross. He calculates how long it is going to take the motorcycle to reach the next intersection which is lighted good enough for Sammy to target and shoot his target properly, how long it is going to take his bullet reaches his target and how much drop his bullet is going to have on that quite long range before reaching his target. Sammy does all the math and calculation only by guessing and listening to the bike's engine sound. He closes his eyes for a second and opens them, targets an imaginary target around three meters higher than where he calculates the bike is going to be after appearing for a second before disappearing as quick. Sammy does all those calculations in a matter of three or four seconds all in all and exhales before pulling the trigger, praying his calculations are accurate at the back of his mind.

Sammy pulls the trigger. His rifle's kick gets him off his rifle's scope. It is going to take a second or even more for the bullet to reach that long of a distance. Sammy looks into his scope to see whether he had a kill shot or he has missed it.

The bullet wheezes, rifts the air and still there is no sign of the Isis patrol riding his motorcycle, crossing the small intersection.

"Please God, please." Whispers Sammy, begging universe forces to let his bullet hit the Isis motorcycle patrol.

The Isis motorcycle appears at the intersection crossing it with a fast speed for a slit second and Sammy's bullet has reached him at the same time. The Isis has his both hands on his bike's handles when the bullet hits him a few centimeters below his armpit, lifting him off his motorcycle and creates a huge exit wound on his right side, taking some part of his intestines off the exit wound. The Isis motorcycle patrol lands yards away while his bike wanders to the left and right for a few meters before it collapses and rolls down on the road a few times.



Sammy is shaking severely. He cannot believe his calculations based on guesses and imaginations and feelings have paid off. He takes his rifle off the edge of the rooftop and crawls back to his building's very dark staircase. He keeps on swearing at the Isis patrol in his heart, wishing Nelly was there to see how accurate his calculations have been and how well it has paid off. Sammy reaches the ground floor. He peeks left and right side of his building's broken entrance glass, still cautious there might be another Isis after the stressful event he experienced and got involved with not more than a few minutes back. He takes the stairs down, picks up his backpack full of food stuff, happy and excited, walks to his basement storage door and makes a three-knock letting Nelly know it is him before getting scared. Sammy does not hear any movement when he enters the basement. He suddenly notices Nelly has gone to sleep laying on the couch taking a nap. Sammy does all he can to stay quite not to wake Nelly up. He needs her fresh and energetic for the time they have to escape Al Darrah, after all.

Sammy lays his rifle on the wall quietly, places the backpack on the kitchen's dusty counter, opens the fridge to take a glass of soda and that's when he notices Nelly has not eaten anything like he wanted her to.

Sammy shakes his head and takes a seat opposite the couch Nelly has laid on, takes a deep breath and stretches his hands, proud of what he just did at the rooftop. Sammy lays back quietly, thinking Nelly is asleep. He is looking at how beautiful Nelly is even when she is asleep. Sammy is appreciating Nelly's beauty when he sees Nelly opens her eyes weakly.

"So." Says Sammy quietly. "I'm back. Like I promised."

Nelly wants to say something, but she can't talk. Nelly does surely not feel fine to Sammy. Sammy stands up.

"Are you okay miss Nelly?" Asks Sammy. "You see? I told you to eat something. I told you I needed you well eaten, well rested and energetic before I leaving. I've brought some good food anyway, please get up and..."

Sammy suddenly notices something falls off Nelly's hand. He gets closer and sees the pain killer bottle he had given her for her headache completely empty. Only then Sammy realizes

Nelly does not look well, has laid down dizzy, unable to talk, because she attempted suicide.

Nelly has taken all the painkiller pills to end her life. Sammy is devastating.

Sammy jumps over Nelly, grabs her shirt's collar and lifts her up like a pillow, limps carrying her to the toilet. He makes her kneel before the toilet bowl, ties her hair at the back, squeezes her cheeks forcing them to her teeth by force and opens her mouth. He inserts his finger and presses down the end of her throat. Nelly is about to vomit. She is awake and wants Sammy to stop and let her go. But Sammy keeps on doing what he was, until Nelly pukes some unresolved white pills and some white liquid. Sammy cleans her mouth with a piece of towel which is in the toilet.

"I got you." Says Sammy anxious and hurried. "Stay here. I'll be just back. What have you done girl?"

Nelly is holding both sides of the toilet bowl when Sammy runs to the kitchen. He is looking for some cold boiled water. Sammy is extremely nervous, but he knows he does not have much time for nervousness and no room for error. Luckily there is some water left in the electric kettle which has been cooled down. He pours a big glass of cold boiled water, adds some salt and sugar to it, steers it while running back to Nelly. He sees Nelly's eyes are open and becomes thankful he has realized what Nelly has done to herself before it is too late.

"Drink this all." Says Sammy.

Nelly shakes her head, refusing to drink the liquid.

"Drink the damn syrup or you'll die." Yells Sammy.

He pushes her head back by force and makes her quaff the whole water in the glass. Nelly wants to puke at the middle of drinking, but Sammy keeps on stopping her, saying wait. Not yet.

Sammy forces her to drink every last drop of what he has prepared. He brings back Nelly to the original position. Nelly begins puking again the remaining of her stomach contents before Sammy attempts to insert his fingers into her throat again. Sammy cleans her mouth again. He helps her stand up.

He can say Nelly is coming back quickly. He washes her face, takes her back in the room and sits her on the sofa. Sammy brushes her hair, ties it at the back and waits to see any reaction from her while he kneels facing her. Nelly opens her eyes again slowly. A tear rolls down her cheek. She closes her eyes and falls asleep.

Sammy does not take his eyes off Nelly for a second since she fell asleep. He only uses the toilet to clean some of Nelly's vomit, takes a leak, washes his hand and gets up to drink a glass of coca cola while she is unconscious.

Nelly opens her eyes again around an hour and fifteen minutes later. But she stands up immediately, asks for a glass of water, and runs towards the toilet as soon as she drinks the water

Sammy runs after her to help her. He is under the impression she is still in the same state physically. But Nelly shuts the toilet door this time, locks it and pukes again.

"Miss Nelly, are you okay?" Asks Sammy, concerned. "Please open the door, so I can help you."

"I'm fine." Replies Nelly a bit agitated after a pause. "Let me be please."

Sammy backs down a little, thinking it is the effect of the pills she has taken. That's why she speaks angry at him and that agitated.

Sammy goes back to the sofa and sits worried, constantly looking at toilet's door, waiting for Nelly to get out. Nelly gets out a few minutes later.

"I'm hungry." Says Nelly, looking away.

"I've brought us 2 fully cooked whole chicken." Answers Sammy quietly. "You've been out for almost an hour and a half. I'm sure the food has gotten cold already. I'll put it in the microwave if the whole chicken fits that is. We can eat and get ready to escape. I've got enough food in that back-pack to last us for a while. We need food and enough water to last in desert. But first, we must eat the cooked food. We can't eat them tomorrow anymore. The heat and all."

Sammy walks to the little dusty kitchen's counter, opens the back-pack and gets the two whole chickens out. He places the smaller chicken in the microwave and switches it on.

Nelly acts like she doesn't really care, and Sammy thinks she is still acting under the influence of the big number of painkillers she had taken, exhaustion and hunger. Sammy wants to have a serious chat with her, talking about his escape plan. But again, he thinks it is still not the right time. Sammy decides to wait until she has presence of mind. Probably she is going to be feeling better after her stomach is filled with some nutrition.

Nelly is now seated on the same sofa Sammy had laid her minutes ago. She looks around and acts like she does not care about a thing anymore. Until her eyes see Sammy's bloody shirt and trousers soaked in blood and dirt.

"Have you been shot?" Asks Nelly. "Did they see and shoot you too?"

"It's not my blood." Replies Sammy.

"Whose blood is it?"

Tears well up in Sammy's eyes, but he turns his back to Nelly, preventing her to see he is about to cry. One of the reasons why Sammy is a bit broken hearted, is seeing Nelly acting like that after what he had done for her and because he thinks what may have happened to him didn't really matter to Nelly. Besides, Sammy does not want to be seen or considered weak in front of Nelly specially. He wants Nelly to rely on him and he knows she is not going to feel about him as a reliable person if he shows any kind of weakness. So, he looks away back at the microwave.

"I need to go up at my place to get some clothes." Says Sammy, clearing his throat. "I'll come back quickly. We'll eat and talk about how I think we should execute our escape plan."

He walks towards the basement's door, opens it and gets out. Sammy bursts into tears as soon as he steps out of the storage. He does it so quietly for Nelly or any possible Isis killers around not to hear him. He weeps the whole way until he reaches fifth floor and enters his apartment. Sammy is getting to believe slowly that he means nothing to Nelly but a fearless protector, savior and provider, until he gets her away to safety, and he is fine with that as he had decided to help Nelly, not anymore because he loves her, but because she is innocent, needs help, helpless, defenseless, and most importantly, he has made a vow to do so. So, he figures not to let her reactions get to him and bother him at all.

Sammy gropes into his toilet first, closes the door and switches his cell-phone's flash light after he makes sure

light is not going to shine out the toilet. He opens the shower and takes the quickest shower in tears, dries his body immediately. He gropes into his room, closes the curtains, and finds some clean comfortable cloth and wear them. He chooses Nelly a comfortable set of clothes which was left by one of Amer's sisters that belonged to when she went hunting with a guy she liked. She hid her hunting clothes at Sammy's or her aunt's house, so her father would not know she liked hunting and went for hunting with a guy as it was a big "No" with a capital "N" for her father. Sammy finds an old backpack he used when he begun companying his father for hunting long ago. Sammy exits his apartment and gropes downstairs back to the basement's storage room, and sees Nelly has set the little dining table, places two plates, fork and knives, waiting under the little lamp that works only with a battery. Nelly is seated at the little dining table waiting for Sammy. She gets up and goes to the microwave at the kitchen and places the chicken over the table. Sammy places what he was carrying on the floor and takes a seat at the table. Sammy joins her at the table and they begin eating together.

"Thank you." Says Sammy.

"Yeah." Replies Nelly. "You are welcome."

Sammy eats quietly, looks down at his plate all the time he is busy eating. Nelly squints at Sammy constantly, trying to figure out what is going on in his mind. She is wondering why Sammy has not answered her question, explaining whose blood he was soaked in. So, she decides to bring the question once again after they finish their dinner. Nelly is still a bit dizzy as the effect of the painkiller pills have not left her body.

While squinting at Sammy, Nelly notices how well-mannered and high-class Sammy eats, especially considering the consequences. She also notices Sammy's hair is still wet and has no doubt he has taken a quick shower. It becomes apparent to her that Sammy is not one of those dirty old-fashioned guys who thinks and acts like other guys of his age. She can clearly see how well he eats, dresses, talks and behaves. Sammy has been addressing her as Miss Nelly since he saved her after Hanieh and Robert incident. Nelly has begun to get to know how cultured and well-raised he is. Thoughts of Sammy being quiet at the dinner because he was mad at her for attempting suicide crosses Nelly's mind for a moment. She even remembers she has not even thanked Sammy for saving her

life again. So, she thinks that she would at least explain to him what events led her to attempt committing suicide. Nelly thinks she does not have any reason to thank Sammy as she had really decided to end her life, because she knew misery and torture awaited her. They both finishes eating moments later. Nelly stands up to take dirty dishes to the sink, but Sammy asks her gently to sit back down.

"Leave everything as it is Miss Nelly." Says Sammy, looking around the basement storage. "We will be leaving for Jarabulus in a while, and we are never coming back. So, it's pointless to even clean up. Sit down please. I need to talk to you."

Nelly sits back down at the table facing Sammy again. She looks not interested, but Sammy has to tell her what he needs to.

"It was my mom's." Continues Sammy after Nelly sits and settles down at the little dining table.

"Your mom's?" Asks Nelly. "What are you talking about?"

"You asked me whose blood I was soaked in before I went upstairs. It was my dear mother's blood I was soaked in."

Sammy's gentle and controlled manner of talking has now pinned Nelly to her seat, waiting for him to continue.

"She was also killed by those bastards as brutal as your parents. I assure you. There were so many dead people. A pool was made of their blood. The roundabout looked like a slaughter house. A tank had run them all, including my mom, aunt, neighbors and so many others, finishing them after they were shot by a heavy machine gun. All bodies were crushed in the most horrific way. My mom though, almost one third of her upper torso was still recognizable. I laid down beside her, on the pool created by her blood, kissed her goodbye. That's why I was soaked in dust and blood."

Nelly is quietly listening to the tale Sammy told her, playing with her nails. Sammy pauses for a moment and that makes Nelly glance at him. She sees Sammy's tears roll down his cheeks while talking, without him noticing it.

Seeing Sammy's tears, Nelly is concerned for Sammy and wants to comfort him. She's confused. She does not know how to act or what to do. And she is questioning herself, asking why she even has to be worried and thinking of doing something for

Sammy? Why is she confused and does not know how she has to react to comfort Sammy? Does she hate Sammy as a man and a Muslim really? All that Nelly feels now and is certain about, is the fact that she does not feel about Sammy the same way she pictured she would all other men. Her female instinct tells her she has to and she can comfort Sammy. She is a girl and knows she can calm him down. Women have that power and she is well-aware of her emotional power and can comfort him if she wants to. But she is confused. She has no feelings for Sammy whatsoever and getting to safety is her ultimate objective. That's when she questions her humanity. He'll take me to safety as he said and that's all what I want, she thinks. But that does not mean she has to be cold and stone hearted towards Sammy all the way. Some forces begin pushing Nelly to pet Sammy, comforts and consoles him. But the fear she has established towards men, especially Muslim men, is stopping her. Until the later feeling wins and she does not show any emotions or tries nothing to comfort Sammy. And that begins Nelly hating herself for being such a horrible person. Acting that cold and heartless towards a moaning sobbing man, who has stopped Isis animal sex offenders before they can even lay a finger on her.

Nelly knows a horrifying fate awaited her if it was not for Sammy's manliness, courage and humanity. But Nelly does not attempt comforting him despite all that. She just sits and listens to the heart-breaking tale Sammy tells her, looking away nodding every now and then, hating herself for acting abnormal and not being able or not having enough strength in her to act and express emotions like normal regular nice people.

"Amer's chest was cut open. His heart was removed and cut into half. I don't know how? But Sara's head was also crushed under tracks of an Isis tank most probably, from head to her waist. So, I have lost everyone. Just like you. We have no one but each other now and we will even lose this if we do not cooperate and if you do not listen to me and do exactly as I say."

Nelly nods after she sees Sammy looking at her waiting for her to confirm she has understood and is going to do exactly as he says.

"Robert and Hanieh, you know, you saw how they met their creator." Continues Sammy. "So, the blood on me you saw, was my mother's. I heard you asked me about the blood I was soaked

in before I went upstairs. But I'm sorry. I was and still am under a lot of emotional distress. So, I chose to answer your question, explain what I saw only after you had dinner and felt better after your idiotic suicide attempt."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Says Nelly. "I will pray for your mother's soul."

Sammy nods, gets quiet and pauses for a moment.

"Thanks." Replies Sammy. "You are very kind."

He suddenly notices tears have rushed out of his eyes, feels a bit embarrassed, wipes his tears off his face and clears his throat.

"Are you okay now? Can you walk? Or you can still feel the effect of the nineteen painkillers you decided to take all together?" Asks Sammy in a sarcastic tone, so Nelly would realize how unhappy he is with her stupid reaction.

Nelly can see Sammy's sarcastic half face smile which in fact comes with an anger seasoning.

"You promised you were going to be back first of all." Replies Nelly, frowning and angry.

"I thought you were spotted and shot dead." Continues Nelly, raising her voice. "Yeah. I had no reason to live. I admit that and I do not regret what I did. Thoughts of dying in solitude, with so very much resources and hundreds of rapists out there begun taking over me when I was already certain you are never coming back."

Sammy is quiet, looking at the floor and listening calmly.

"I have no one left. No hope for what will happen, a good thing that may or may even not happen, no one to hide behind, nothing to eat in a matter of the next twenty-four hours, alone in this God damn tomb. Of course, I felt dying was best option. I didn't still do that yet. I prayed, took a little laydown and thought I was thinking negatively. Until I heard something fell downstairs and people running up the stairs. That's when I was certain my location had been compromised. I was shaking like a little baby rat and you were not here to protect me like you promised. I knew you were running upstairs chased by one or two Isis animals. I took all those pills after I heard a gunshot and thought you have been found and



shot somewhere upstairs. Wouldn't you? Answer me Mister Sammy."

"I don't know for how long I lost my consciousness when I found my mom's partly crushed dead body." Replies Sammy calmly. "And I had no idea I was going to find her amongst all those corpses. I guess that would explain a part of my delay. But that is not the only reason mind you. I said goodbye to her, Amer and Sara, taking a piece off them as memorial."

Sammy pulls his t-shirt's collar down and shows her Robert's cross, his mom's necklace and Sara's engagement ring and Amer's too.

"After taking my mom's necklace and saying farewell to her, I went to Sara's body, said goodbye to her and removed her engagement ring. Then I went to Amer, said goodbye and got his engagement ring too and wished them a good life in heavens. I walked to come back to you, but I had not said a farewell to my best friend, Robert, and Hanieh, his girl. So, I went down to say a quick goodbye to them. I took Robert's cross pendant and necklace and went to his girl Hanieh and got her bracelet to keep for the rest of my life remembering them. I was done and was coming back when I saw a partly demolished restaurant abandoned. Found the back-pack near a locker, filled it with all food stuff I thought would keep me and you alive throughout our difficult journey towards Jarabulus. But that's still not explain what you have heard. There was a motorcycle Isis patrol. I felt someone was following me after I exited the restaurant with the back-pack full of food. I initially thought I was hallucinating. But I was proven wrong when the patrol guy who had parked his motorcycle following me on foot, made an unusual sound and I found out he was following me, thinking where I ended is where so many fellow citizens hid. He took off running after he figured I had seen him. I could not run after him for the reason you know. It was dark and I could not target him correctly and properly. The weight of my rifle, my loosened knee-strap, plus food back-pack's additional weight had made me exhausted. Running to the rooftop to find the guy and shoot him seemed my most logical option. To get rid of some extra weight, I dropped the back-pack before running to the rooftop. That's when you heard some Isis threw something near the staircase. I rushed up to the rooftop and I guess that's when you imagined I was running and an Isis terrorist was chasing me."

Sammy pauses for a second to take a sip of his soda. But Nelly wants to hear the rest.

"Carry on." Shouts Nelly angrily. "What happened next?"

"I looked for him in my scope." Continues Sammy. "I found him and shot him dead and came back to you. Just like I promised I would. That's why I was late. And I'm sorry."

"I don't want to ever talk about what I did today." Yells Nelly. "Do you understand?"

"Yes. I understand."

Nelly gets up angrily, murmuring and cursing at someone or something. She goes to the washroom and makes Sammy wait for a good five minutes. She comes back, sits opposite to Sammy at the table again frowning.

"So, now what?" Demands Nelly.

"Yeah. I was actually waiting for you to come back so I would continue."

Nelly is angry, breathing heavily and Sammy does not have enough strength in him to analyze why. He pauses for a long moment.

"What is it?" Asks Nelly. "Why are you quiet?" Says Nelly a bit calmed comparing to moments ago.

"Are you calm now?" Asks Sammy.

"I guess." Replies Nelly, taking a deep breath.

Sammy thinks of waiting a bit longer for Nelly to calm down completely. But he thinks he has to tell her what he needs to if he wants to succeed getting them to safety before Isis begins figuring out who has shot all those Isis animals, specially the patrol guy. So, he starts talking again.

"I know you are angry." Continues Sammy. "And I know you are very sad, mourning as you've lost everyone. Well, I did too. But please pay a very close attention to all what I say. Because we don't want and we cannot stay here, in this tomb, like you named it, forever.

Nelly is paying full attention to every word Sammy says carefully and seriously, without frowning or showing any further sign of anger.

"I've brought you a back-pack too." Continues Sammy. "So, you'll be carrying certain stuff. Luckily, I found some food to make us last for a while. We would not last even half a day in desert without food and water, you should know. We will leave, walk and hike towards Jarabulus in an hour or two, depending on how the outside situation would be and whether we both are ready or not. Like I said, we'll have to take desert hiking. That would be our safest choice. There's no food in desert. There are only a number of water sources if they are still available. We will hike and hike, **in parallel to the Euphrates**, until we arrive at Jarabulus. The city we are heading towards is somewhere very close to Turkish border like I showed you earlier. You'll be safe there. I'll take you there, and you have nothing to worry about. Just trust me and do as I say."

"Yeah, of course. I trust you. Of course, I'll be safe with you." Says Nelly angrily and with sarcasm. "Sure. I have nothing to worry about. There are, God knows, how many of those animals are spread all over the country, armed to their teeth, and I'm with a guy who can barely walk without his knee-strap, holding an unusual rifle. Huh. Yeah sure. You actually think you can protect and escort me until we arrive Jarabulus? You see now? Why I rather die? Even before trying? How can you protect me considering your physical condition and a single rifle? How?"

"I guess we will see about that until we arrive Jarabulus." Replies Sammy, broken hearted and very much offended, with his facial expressions changing.

Nelly has realized what she has told Sammy and gets so remorseful, very remorseful suddenly.

"I mean. I didn't mean it that way." Says Nelly in a remorseful tone. "But.."

Sammy continues talking without letting her complete her sentence or even apologizes. Tears are gathered in Nelly's eyes hating herself for how cruel she is.

"We have no more time. No time for moaning, for being angry at anyone or anything and no time to waste over something unrelated to our main objective, escape to safety. We need to use all left in us for survival. So, please prepare yourself mentally. I've brought down with me a bunch of stuff my dad and I carried with us whenever we went hunting. I has got desert lighter to make fire if we need a little hiking gas

stove, hunting knife to cut meat, etc., and any other thing that would help us make it to Jarabulus easier, without much suffering.

Nelly wipes her tears while listening to Sammy. But Sammy continues talking without minding her.

"Well. Let me see if I've forgotten something."

"Your knee-strap. Can I see it?"

"No. Never mind. I'll handle it somehow."

Sammy gets up and goes towards the washroom. He takes out his knee-strap before he enters the toilet and hangs it outside where he or others used to hang their towels. The fact is that Sammy didn't really need to go to the toilet. He was quite offended by what Nelly said and thinks about him. What Nelly said is in fact what has scared Sammy and made him lose his self-confidence all his life. Sammy stands in front of the toilet's mirror for quite a long while. He sits on the toilet bowl after closing its cover, angry and disappointed. Nelly knocks the door minutes later.

"What is it?" Asks Sammy.

"I need some strong glue and a stapler."

"You may find them in the kitchen's lowest drawer."

"Yeah. Ok. Thanks."

Sammy stays in the toilet, thinking a few more minutes later. He finally gets out after he chills out a bit, looks for his knee-strap, but he cannot see it where he has hung it. So, he goes back towards the little dining table and sees Nelly has fixed his knee-strap, looking at him.

"We should wait for fifteen minutes at least." Says Nelly.

"I've fixed it, so we'll not be stopped every now and then to fix it."

Sammy nods, putting an artificial smile on his face. He goes to the kitchen, finds two big bottles of water and places them both in the fridge's upper part into the freezer. He takes a seat on the naked dusty ground where he cannot see Nelly.

Minutes pass and Nelly asks him to go and take his seat back at the table. Sammy gets up reluctantly, goes and sits back at the table while Nelly has his knee-strap in her hand. She asks Sammy to turn towards her while seated, so she can fasten

his knee-strap. She begins tightening his knee-strap, looking serious and dedicated.

"I was not born like this." Says Sammy. "I'm not paralyzed or something. I was a kid when a tire burst out of an eighteen-wheeler and hit me on my leg, of course after injuring a big number of people on its way. That's how lucky I was. I can walk even without using this knee-strap or a cane. But I would limp of course. Where I come from, complete physical features do not make a real man, but how he feels and believes inside. There are men who don't limp out there. But they are rapists and animals and I'm not."

Nelly begins feeling ashamed of herself for a moment. Sammy is explaining he was not a mother born paralyzed person or an incapable one, Nelly thinks. She thinks Sammy is justifying his disability and educating her about his condition. After offending Sammy that way, Nelly's intention is to make him feel it does not matter if he limps or if he is disabled or anything like that to her. What Sammy said about the real men, makes Nelly ponder deeply feeling how nice Sammy actually is.

Nelly has fixed Sammy's knee-strap quite well and Sammy is quite amazed of her handwork. Sammy has no doubt in his mind his knee-strap is not going to loosen up for a long time after Nelly ties all its straps. Sammy thanks her and asks her to take back her seat. He goes and brings the girls clothes and the back-pack he has brought with him from his apartment, opens the back-pack, takes all ladies hunting khaki clothes out.

"You should change your clothes miss." Says Sammy. "I'm sorry if they are big, small or have an unusual style to them. We will both wear khaki hunting clothes, so we will not be easily identifiable in the desert. I'll get out now so you would change. We will attend and to the rest of our stuff."

What Sammy says about getting out so she would change has really impressed Nelly. It is against all what she has been thinking about guys in general. What an understanding gentleman Sammy is, Nelly thinks. Sammy opens storage's door and exits. He hears Nelly bumping on the door permitting or inviting Sammy back in as she was finished changing. Sammy enters back into the basement storage and sees Nelly looking great with the hunting clothes. Sammy walks to the bunker at the far end of the storage and brings his dad's antique

hunting rifle along with a box of bullets and he gives them to Nelly.

"You better carry a rifle with you. It's not that heavy like mine. But it may be useful. Trust me. Carry it with you all the time. Here are its bullets."

"But I have never touched a gun all my life."

"You will now."

Nelly keeps staring at the hunting rifle and its bullets for a long while. Sammy empties both back-packs and begins reloading them with some stuff while talking.

"Forgive me to make you carry some stuff." Says Sammy. "I can't carry everything and these are things we can't risk not carrying them with us, specially food and water. We will take a short rest after I'm done getting our back-packs ready. We have a long way to go. But first, we'll have to get as far from this town as possible. We will take the narrow hiking road which beings exactly behind this building and crosses some hills towards the north. I just hope they have not yet found out how many of them I've sent to hell. They will definitely send some back up to find us if they have. We will hike and hide between hills as much as possible until we reach somewhere north. I mean Jarabulus. We are of course going to pass by villages and little farming communities on our way. So, you should carry your back-pack miss Nelly, because I should carry something like a hundred bullets. So, I'm sorry." "Can you please stop apologizing for everything you say?" Asks Nelly in a serious tone. "I owe you my life already and you are apologizing for anything and everything you say. I should help whether you ask me or not. So, stop apologizing."

"Yes miss. Sorry. We should reduce our water intake as much as possible. Of course, not to the point we get dehydrated. We will refill as soon as we reach any village or well. Please tell me whenever you feel tired on the way. Exhaustion should not cause us separate or walk separately. We've got two back-packs which both have special dedicated straps to hold sleeping bags. So, choose your sleeping bag. You can rest on the couch for a while. I would not bother you at all, I assure you. Rest assured no harm would come to you from my side."

Nelly lowers her head after hearing Sammy says his last sentence. She feels she has begun feeling closer to Sammy and trusting him. They have gotten ready and prepared minutes later. Nelly lays down on the couch, relaxed and comfortable,

like Sammy asked her to. Sammy lays on the floor, far from her. He puts his back-pack under his head and tries closing his eyes.

\* \* \*

Hadji Mazen, his ringleaders and their subordinates are seated outside cellar storages where they have imprisoned Al Darrah's innocent younger men and women. They have made a fire and gathered around it drinking alcohol and some using hard drugs. They talk about how many of the innocent virgin girls they are going to rape that night loudly, admitting they use drugs for their sex session to last longer, and they would cum with delay using drugs as a delay medicine. Al Darrah's girls and young women can already hear them, shaking badly out of fear of the fate awaited them that evening.

Some use hashish, some others smoke opium or heroin in between alcoholic drinks they are having. They smoke, drink and use any single liquid or drug that have been clearly forbidden to use in their perfect version of Islam. Some say tales of how they killed innocent people particularly and stole their expensive women's dress fabrics to take them as a present when they become martyrs, go to heaven and are given virgin young girls as present. So, they would give their young virgins as a present from earth.

Hungry, thirsty and terrified, defenseless innocent captive girls and young women are shaking inside the cellar storage, waiting for their bitter fate.

Young men and boys are kept at the next cellar storage. A thin wall separates them from female cellar next door, but they can hear them if they speak louder or yell as the wall between them does not go up to the ceiling. It is a thin wall with around two and a half meters height, just to separate goods or cargos from others. Poor captive guys and younger boys get quite scared hearing any Isis getting close to their cellar as they know well, they are without a doubt going to be killed sooner or later.

Hadji Mazen orders one of his trustees and ringleaders, Samad, to open the female cellar's slightly, gets in and makes them sit in order and in organized rows, so he would quickly walk on the rows and choose his bride as he described poor girls who are going to be sexually assaulted and raped.

All other Isis animals begin cheering and whistling when they hear what their commander orders Samad to do. They know they are soon going to be choosing the girls they are going to rape that night.

Samad gets to work. He asks two Isis soldiers to follow him. He asks the guard to open cellar storage's locked gate, gets in along with the two Isis soldiers following him.

"Listen you all." Yells Samad, smiling. "I want you bitches seat in straight rows. Girls whose ages are between or until fifteen should all sit on the first row, fifteen to twenty on the second row and twenty and more the third. The fifth row would be formed by girls and younger women who are married or are no longer a virgin."

Terrified females begin shaking and hiding behind one another. Younger ones hide behind older ones so they would not be seen or taken away immediately. Some of them begin cursing and swearing at the monster looking Samad and avoid forming rows as he demanded. But they figure they have no choice after Samad takes his machete out and threatens to stab them to death if they do not obey.

All girls and younger women form the rows as per Samad's instructions while screaming and crying as Samad and his two Isis escorts run after, chase and kick them to do so. The whole cellar storage's ambiance is now filled with women and girls begging and pleading to get spared. Captive men and young boys at the next cellar can hear what is going on in their neighboring cellar. They are furious, angry and desperate, however. There is nothing they can do about it. They are hungry, exhausted and possess no arms or ammunition to fight and stop Isis rapists of what they have planned for their sisters, friends, cousins next door.

Samad asks his two escorts to keep an eye on the female cellar. He gets out of the cellar after telling them he is going to go back to them in a short while. Samad asks the guard in the next cellar storage, where males, younger men and boys are being kept captive.

He enters, looks around and sees men's angry face. He feels quite uncomfortable or probably scared. So, he takes his pistol out and orders them all to back off if they want to live.



"All boys until age fifteen come and stand near this door." Yells Samad pointing at the cellar's gate that is being guarded by another Isis soldier.

"Why?" Asks one of the more courageous guys. "Where do you want to take them? Huh?"

"I'll take them for the commander to see and choose them if they are lucky, you big mouth." Replies Samad laughing artificially. "So, they live longer because they may have a tight asshole."

Samad stops smiling suddenly, gets his pistol off safety and walks towards the courageous man, places his gun's fight at his forehead.

The guy is sweating, looking down and is quiet.

"That's what I thought." Yells Samad after he makes his point.

Samad leads the young boys to the female cellar, has the four men's straight rows in opposite and in a different side where female captive are.

The time has come. The time for killing men, women, young and old, Muslim and none-Muslim folks, pretending they all had crimes they had to pay for. They have to advertise Islam and make the world a better place, forcing everyone to convert to Islam. Exactly like what they had done to the Yazidis, whereas their true intentions are to rub hardworking people, rape their girls, daughters, wives and sisters. And this is the fact many of Al Darrah's men and women are well aware of. And now, nothing is going to stop those bastards to put their dirty evil intentions into action. Not being drunk, being high or exhausted and surely without any of their consciences bother or stop them doing so. Nothing whatsoever is now going to stop any of them tormenting their captives, whether male or female, and of course taking so much pleasure raping as many innocent young girls and boys and women.

Hadji Mazen gets up while all his unit members, ringleaders and subordinates yell Allah Akbar, praising their leader to take their favorite step, making pleasure time arrive faster for them. He enters the female captives cellar followed by Samad and sees all cellar lights have been turned on as Samad has asked his two soldier escorts. A row of young handsome boys seated on a row at this left and four rows of females at

his right. It is obvious they were categorized based on their ages.

"Allah is looking at your good work Samad." Says Hadji Mazen. "You are a master. You have become a master. Great job. I wish all my other trustees are so tasteful like you are. Make them all stand up now my brother."

"Thank you, sir." Replies Samad. Allah bless you."

Hadji Mazen smiles and Samad yells, "stand-up you all", ordering every captive to stand up and look ahead. Everybody stands up immediately, terrified. Some were whispering their prayers, some curse and swear at all Isis members. Hadji Mazen starts walking between rows while holding his very sharp dagger. He presses his dagger's tip to any girl's chin who lowers her head whether out of fear or shame, forces them to look up as they are commanded. His dagger tip is going to pierce the girl's chin if she does not raise her head on time. He stops every now and then, checking out a girl or a young woman's body, touches their breasts, button or face. He suddenly stops and clears his throat.

"You go there and stand by the cellar wall, near the gate, if I address you as bride." Says Hadji Mazen in a kind voice.

He walks and checks out the girls for around fifteen minutes before he finally chooses seven girls, mostly between twelve and sixteen. He takes a walk amongst young boys and chooses three of them. Terrified boys are told to stand by the gate too, just like the girls. He separates four girls out of seven and a boy from the group of four, has Samad pushed them forward, ties their hands and ties them all together and holds the end of the rope. He pulls the rope, and hence, pulls his chosen captives outside the cellar.

"Those three boys and three girls are reserved for Mr. Al Alawi." Says Hadji Mazen addressing Samad. "Keep them locked in a room, feed them and have soldiers guard them. I want them untouched when I give them to Mr. Al Alawi as souvenir."

"Yes sir." Replies Samad while promising his commander to do as he ordered.

Hadji Mazen pulls them to the second floor of the office building, next to the cellar. Poor girls can barely breathe and look at the monster in the eye being terrified.

"You'll be fucked by me tonight whether you like it or not." Says Hadji Mazen to the four girls and the young boy. "There's alcohol, drugs, etc., and good will also be here soon. You can get drunk or high if you don't want to remember what I'm going to do to you tomorrow. It's now up to you. I can fuck if you are hungry or not, drunk or not and high or not. I will fuck you no matter what. So, you decide if you want to make it easier for yourselves."

He locks the door, keeping the five victims in a room which only has a window opening to the outside. He opens their tied hands and has them to stand next to each other by a distance of half a meter between them. He opens an alcohol's bottle, takes a heavy sip and gives a long look at his sex objects. Young girls and even the boy are shacking out of fear and dread.

Hadji Mazen takes another sip of his alcohol. He walks in front of his victims and stops in front of a thirteen-year-old-girl, touches her breast, shakes his head thinking they are okay in terms of size. He pulls the poor girl's skirt up and inserts his dirty hand into her panty.

"Oh, dear Allah." Says Hadji Mazen. "You already have a few pubic hairs down there." The girl looks strange, afraid to death and feeling violated.

"But they are not so much. That's how I exactly like it to be, huh? You'll be my first bride tonight." Poor innocent girl urinates after being promised she is going to be the monster's first and wets Hadji Mazen's fingers as a result. Hadji Mazen gets very angry after taking his dirty hands out of the young girl's panty and sees his fingers were soaked with pee. He slaps the girl whose eyes have turned red and commands her to open her mouth. He forces his dirty wet fingers into the young girl's mouth and gets even angrier when she acts as if she has not heard what the dirty old man ordered her to do. Her head suddenly falls back like she is staring at the ceiling, when Hadji Mazen punches her at her forehead. The two girls standing at her both sides are crying whereas the young girl shows no sign of fear or anxiety anymore. Hadji Mazen is yelling at her threatening to do this and that, while the two other girls scream, plead and yell the word "Epileptic". Being an uneducated low life criminal, Hadji Mazen is not getting what the other two girls telling her yelling and slaps the pour young girl again. That's when

the girl falls down on the floor despite being held by her fellow-captives, and her body starts vibrating in an unusual manner and foam begins running out of her mouth while her eyes have rolled back and the white part of her eye which is below her pupils can be seen. It is a horrible scene. Hadji Mazen now gets pissed off after seeing the girl having a seizure, still angry why she has urinated on his fingers. He keeps on cursing and kicking the young girl even when she is having a seizure. Hadji Mazen lifts the young girl off her fellow-captives, takes her to the window while her body still vibrates and throws her out the window. The sound of Hadji Mazen's other captives crying and screaming can be heard from a thousand yards away. Young girl's body is still vibrating, even after she hits the ground two floors lower. A few of her bones seem broken from the strange way she is laying on the ground. She is still on her seizure, unaware of what has happened to her. Her body stops shaking a minute later while the back of her head has been crushed open because of her body's impact hitting the ground. She looks confused. She begins to feel pain moments after she comes out of seizure. But a pool of blood has been created around her head on the ground. She takes her last breath while remembering being hit by Hadji Mazen. She dies smiling. She is not violated. No one has raped her.

All Hadji Mazen's remaining trustees and ringleaders choose a few girls. Some choose young boys and some both after their commander makes his selection and takes his so-called brides to the second floor of the cellar's office building. Their subordinates take turn each and choose the remaining girls, young women and boys. They make two fire circles near the cellars where they keep their captives. They take a few of them. They cannot wait. They take girls and boys to the other office building of the other cellar and begin raping them already. Some have their food so to get drunk or high first. Some have taken girls whom they have selected and have forced them to sit and smoke drugs with them and have fun. They sit the poor girls free after forcing them to use hallucinogen drugs and laugh at them for the strange way they behave. Two young girls go into cardiac arrest due to overdose and die because of the huge sum of drugs they are given.

Three Isis soldiers are high, dancing Arabic strange dance around fire. They have lost control of how they behave under the influence of alcohol, hashish, heroin and other hard-core drugs.

But the young captive men can no longer tolerate screaming and pleading of their female fellow-citizens begging under pressure and sexual assault of Isis animals, begging to stop and appealing Isis monsters not to rape them. Red-blooded zealous men can no longer accept that shame. It does really not matter to most of them whether to die helping their young female fellow-citizens. Cursing and swearing at Isis rapists is the only thing they can do hearing their town's young girls being tortured and assaulted sexually. They are kept in an unusual cellar storage in which there is no window opening to the outside. Not even a small breathing hole. There is a gate only which is locked shot and guarded heavily by the Isis members. So, to protest how the Isis members treat or assault their town's young females, they begin banging on the metal gate, creating some lots of noises to bother Isis members, disturbing them mentally. They are successful up to a point when they get dancing Isis members disturbed and unhappy. But red-blooded Al Darrah's young zealous men's intention is not only to disturb Isis by creating noise, sound pollution, but they have decided to attack drunk and high Isis members as soon as any of them unlock the cellar's gate to come in and try get them quiet. They want to attack Isis disoriented, drunk and high members, disarm them and kill them all, using their own weapons. And they are ready to die executing their plan or pay for the consequences in case they do not succeed. Getting killed to save their honor and their town's young female fellow-citizens is much more valuable to them than sitting and hearing women and girls being tortured that severely. So, they keep on banging on the cellar's metal gate until two Isis members lose their tempers. One of them who can barely talk as he is so drunk and high gest closer to the gate.

"Shut the fuck up." Yells the Isis member barely able to pronounce what he wants to say. "I'll open fire and kill you all with my machine gun you know. Or, I can actually throw a grenade in and get rid of the noise all at once. So, shut up."

He burps and gets quiet. He glances at his two comrades.

"Dirty evil men. They worship Satan. Shut up. Don't bang on the fucking door. Hahaha. Don't you know we are busy fucking your women?"

The man and his drunk and high comrades burst into laughter, an evil laughter mixed with lust and meanness. But what he orders Al Darrah's captive men is the worst thing they can

ever hear, even coming from an asshole drunk Isis member. He is right, captive men think. They are literally fucking their women. What the drunk Isis guy said, pisses the men off all the more. There is not enough oxygen for them to breathe and breathing is getting more and more difficult every second goes by. But they would not give up or stop trying. They keep on yelling and banging on the metal cellar's gate, creating so much noise so that the door will be unlocked open for a moment by the same drunk, high Isis soldier. Now they can execute the plan they have in their mind finally. But the dizzy Isis guy backs off, retreats and goes back to join his friends and comrades who are still sitting around, enjoying their drugs, alcohol and company of a number of innocent underage-preteen Al Darrah's girls. That's when another Isis member is walking and swinging to his left and right under the influence of a drug, laughing for no reason. The loud banging sound on the huge metal gate begin bothering his calm so much that makes him stop laughing. He stops for a moment outside the metal gate while holding his two ears. His eyes have turned very red and he begins panting. The sound pollution has really gotten into him. After raping two innocent girls, he has used so much hallucinatory drugs that he can barely talk.

One of Al Darrah's male captives can see someone standing at the other side of the door from a little hole on the gate created for the purpose of inserting bolts and knots of some sort. So, he demands silence in the cellar, asking everyone to hush. He begins challenging the Isis guy verbally, not realizing how high the Isis guy is and the fact he cannot even remember his own name. The Isis guy walks towards his comrade who has the key to cellar's lock after the captive young man speaks to him. The Isis guy picks the key from the top of a piece of block in front of his comrade without him even noticing. They are all whether busy raping, drunk, high or both. The Isis man who is obviously high, still has his army belt with a few full rifle magazines, grenades and of course a dagger hanging from it. It seems he still has presence of mind even after raping two pre-teen girls. He walks back towards the metal gate of the cellar storage, opens the lock and that is exactly what Al Darrah's captive boys and young men waited and hopped for. They rush outside the cellar like an army of bees. One of the young men notices the Isis man has grenades on his waist. So, he attacks the man and easily wrestles him and puts him down, takes his grenades off him. The Isis man is so high he has no idea what has happened to him.

Another Al Darrah's young man who in fact knows how to use a rifle and arm a grenade, pulls a grenade's pin and arms it. He throws the grenade towards the drunk and high Isis guys still dancing around the fire. He yells at the young girls sitting around the fire terrified and asks them to run. Poor girls are confused after seeing their younger male fellow-citizens broke out of the cellar. But they run each to a different direction before the grenade is exploded. The grenade has landed right near the fire where the three Isis terrorists are dancing. The explosion tears the three Isis members into pieces, throwing each piece in different directions. That's when one other of the Isis terrorists who is looking at the picture and video clips he has recorded, realizes what has happened. He is looking at his cell-phone laying down at the back of an armed pick-up truck, under a heavy machine gun. He jumps up after he hears the grenade's explosion. The explosion now even pulls Hadji Mazen and his ringleaders out of the office buildings too, thinking they have been attacked on surprise. Al Darrah's boys and young men are advancing towards other vulnerable Isis members scattered around, when a heavy machine gun opens fire at them. The Isis man has gotten up and taken position behind the heavy machine gun at the back of the same pick-up truck and opens fire at Al Darrah's men, and they fall down after getting shot one after the other. He shoots every single red-blooded zealous man who has raised to protect their town's girls and younger women, saving them from being assaulted constantly and gang-raped by Isis animals. There are four of Al Darrah's men who are not shot amongst all those captives, which they are arrested and kept in prison again.

After yelling, cursing and shouting at cellar guards and others whom he thinks could have prevented such an outburst, he keeps fate of the four remaining Al Darrah's men to Ayad. He is quite relieved that there is no more attack attempt on him and his unit.

Ayad asks for the four Al Darrah remaining male captives to be brought to him. He assigns two Isis soldiers to film what he is going to order, so they would upload it on the internet later for others to learn what would happen to them if they mess around with Isis. The four young men are dragged by Ayad. He orders a few soldiers to tie their hands to a tank and their legs to the other, so he would order tanks to move in the opposite directions. So, Isis subordinates tie four men's hands to a tank facing right and tie their legs to another

tank facing left side, while two or three others film the whole event using their smart-phones and one with a handy cam.

"Ready?" Asks Ayad, talking to his walkie-talkie.

One of the four young Al Darrah's men begin reciting his deathbed Muslim prayers when Ayad runs towards him and kicks him in his mouth, the way the young man keeps quiet after a few of his teeth are tossed out of his mouth. Another young man is crying.

"Oh." Says Ayad, laughing sarcastically. "Now you cry, huh? You may be aware of the fate waiting for you."

"It's not that." Replies the young man courageously. "This is tear of the happiness."

"Happy you mother fucker? You are going to die." Yells Ayad. "That's exactly what I'm happy for, you asshole. You killed both my mom and dad a few hours ago in front of my crying eyes. I said to God to send me to them if you know you asshole are all going to meet a horrible fate and will all end-up in depth of hell. Hahaha."

Hearing what the courageous young man said laughing, makes Ayad loses his temper.

"Drive." Yells Ayad into his wireless communication device.

The four young men's hands and legs get separated from their torsos, making a horrible screeching sound. But no one hears any of them cries, pleads, begs for mercy or say he is sorry. All Isis present begin cheering and yelling their God's name, saying Allah Akbar, as if Al Darrah's young men were given justice by their makers and not by their leader's order. Hadji Mazen asks everyone to have their dinner and go to bed already. He calls Ayad and orders him to stay awake for a while longer, guards the premises using some of his soldiers, heads towards Al Thowrah and reports to him back when he reaches any town, village or civilization on his way, so he would understand what lays ahead in advance. Hadji Mazen emphasizes on knowing if there are going to be any armed men or women on Ayad's way towards Al Thowrah, being police, civilian fighters, military, army or even Nat forces. So, he would plan a strategy to attack or defense before moving towards Al Thowrah himself.

Hadji Mazen heads back to his room and continues raping and torturing the captives and sex objects he has chosen earlier.



Every Isis member acts normal and goes back to what pleasure they were having, without any of Al Darrah's young men's dead body does not even matter or even existed and there is no pool of blood in front of their dirty eyes.

The fate of Al Darrah's young captive men were of course not the fate they had hoped for. But they all died happy knowing that they did at least attempt to break out. They did and killed a few of those bastards for crimes they were committing. Al Darrah's young captive men died with a winning feeling in them. They all knew actually the whole world know already that the war with Isis is never a fare war. They fought cowardly, whereas so many others fighting them, expected to see Isis to consider and respect rules of war. But that is not the case. Isis kill their war prisoners on spot, accusing them of being Satan worshippers, traitors to holly profit and Islam as the latest and the most complete religion. Isis members were armed to their teeth when they attacked Al Darrah. But Al Darrah's citizens were armed with kindness and hospitality and did not deserve to meet their makers in that terrifying way.

This is when you say a separates male and female captive's cellars. Ad it later.

One of the red-blooded zealous young men hears his sister pleading after she is chosen by one of Hadji Mazen's ringleaders. A thin wall separating captive men and women is so thin and short that he can easily hear and identify his very young sister's voice. For other fellow-captives not to notice what is happening and him having so much shame, the young man sneaks to a dark corner at the far end of the cellar and uses his own belt, hangs himself not to hear his sister's plead for help and begging to be spared.

All Isis animal finish having their dinner after it was delivered to them by Mr. Zahir restaurant's delivery pick-up truck. Some get assigned as guards and everyone's hope and dream comes through. It is the time for rape, drink, alcohol, use drugs and party time. They keep on raping girls they have chosen all night long. The loud heart-breaking sound of screaming, yelling, and pleading for help and begging for mercy can be heard from hundreds of yards away, but there is no one to help them.

\* \* \*

Sammy gives Nelly a pair of spare keys to the basement storage before they exit the building.

"You keep these." Says Sammy. "I will go ahead for around twenty meters, take position and scan our surroundings and I'll give you a signal so you can follow and reach me. I will guard you until you reach me. Listen carefully Miss Nelly. I gave you a set of keys. Nothing is going to happen. But run back towards the basement if I tell you. That is if I figure our location has been compromised or discovered, which is not quite likely at this hour and with the dark. Run back to the basement, enter, lock the door and hide in the little bunker I showed you. Ready?"

"Yeah." Nelly says, reluctantly nodding.

Sammy opens the basement door, points his rifle forward on high alert and walks upstairs. He signals to Nelly. She closes the door and walks upstairs and joins Sammy. Sammy crawls outside the building, scanning the area from his scope's lens. He signals Nelly and she joins him second later quietly. Sammy sneaks towards back of the building, stops every twenty meters, signals Nelly after checking the area and making sure it is safe, signals her and she moves and joins him second later, following the same formula and procedures until they both arrive the rear side of Sammy's building where there is a little hill. They sneak behind the little hill and are relieved when they have completed an important stage of their escape mission. They now have to head north as quick as possible. Nelly walks as fast and careful as Sammy. She has adjusted her steps with Sammy, walks as fast so she would not fall behind, as Sammy has instructed her. She has prepared herself mentally for a long hiking journey. They walk towards north with a reasonable speed pace, considering all factors Sammy has told and they have discussed about earlier. Sammy and Nelly get farther and farther from Al Darrah. It is minutes later when a blast echoes into desert. Both Sammy and Nelly hear a faint blast. The sound is produced by the grenades Al Darrah's young men threw towards Isis members who were dancing around fire, killing them, tearing them apart. They both stop walking for a moment. Sammy asks Nelly to sit. He scans the surroundings and asks her to stand up again.

"What was that?" Asks Nelly, scared.

"I'm not sure." Replies Sammy. "They're probably demolishing our town flat. The sound echoes. So, I cannot say for sure

which part it came from. It's not important anyways anymore. Don't worry Miss Nelly. Let's go."

\* \* \*

Almost all Isis members have gone to sleep, even the guards. Guarding Al Darrah's captive men was the only reason that kept them awake and alerted. There is no caution or concentration after they shot them dead with a heavy machine gun. Every one of them sounds asleep. Drinking alcohol and using drugs are not factors to ignore of course.

\* \* \*

Sammy and Nelly have decided not to talk to one another much until they are far enough from the town, knowing faintest sound is going to easily travel in the flat desert, audible to the people they are avoiding. So, they do not talk much and whisper if they feel it's necessary to mention something.

Nelly has focused all her attention at the desert ground she is walking on. She is terrified of reptiles such as snakes and scorpions, so she uses the moonlight to focus on where her next step is and where she lands her next step. Sammy walks a step further still thinking of those whom he has lost. He has accepted the truth that he is never going to see his mother, Amer, Robert and others, but still he cannot stop thinking about them and how they died. Nelly's presence has evidently helped a lot in him snapping out of denial and accepting the reality.

Sammy is quietly thinking of the games life has been playing or at least got him involved in. He thinks he should have been at Amer and Sara's engagement party, wearing his tuxedo, worrying about what he has to tell Nelly, how to express to her the way he feels for her. He thinks he should have been there that evening, probably being pushed by Robert or Hanieh to go ahead and talk to Nelly and get it over with. But he has left his home and his town, running from Isis criminals along with Nelly, the girl he wants to talk to for the first time and gets face to face with her and tells her how much she means to him. And of course, while they have both lost every single member of their immediate family.

Sammy thinks for a moment he would have probably turned his head every now and then, glanced at Nelly's beauty if it had not been dark and if he and Nelly had been going elsewhere with a different circumstance. But again, he blames himself for even allowing such thoughts enter his mind considering

their miserable situation. He has promised and made a vow to escort Nelly and gets her to safety unharmed, whether she believes in his abilities or not. And now, he has begun allowing his heart beats for Nelly and her indescribable beauty. Sammy has begun doubting whether he has made a vow, he is going to keep his vow, accepts all challenges and danger on the way, take Nelly to safety because he has felt she needs help after witnessing all her family members died in that terrifying way, or it is because he is madly in love with her and cannot bear even imagining her being touched by Isis or any other man for that matter?

"I'll be a man, a real human and help her get to safety. I will tell her how much I love her, probably days, weeks or even months later when I am recovered, so I would not decide under these crazy and sad circumstances." Whispers Sammy to himself in a quiet way so she would not hear him.

What Sammy knows and is quite certain about is the fact that he is ready to escort her to safety for days and weeks, just so he would. He can look at her beauty whenever he wants. Looking at Nelly gives him energy, but he feels all the energy have been sucked out of him when Nelly looks back eye to eye with him. The only thing makes Sammy happy now, is having Nelly by his side even if she has no idea how he feels about him, Sammy thinks. And even escorting her, saving her, protecting her and getting her to the safety is not about him and her having any relation or are not having an official relationship. That is the only thing keeps Sammy going, after he found out he has lost all people he loved that day.

Sammy and Nelly cannot let themselves think much of those they have lost, simply because they have both gone into survival mode, focusing only on not getting spotted and killed. Fear of death and endeavor for survival would keep people quite occupied and would prevent them of getting distracted. Especially when one has an objective and the objective is simply to stay alive.

Sammy notices a few lights quite farther away after they walk for around eight to ten kilometers. Sammy knows there is a little village around ten kilometers, with a few small cottages that housed around nine families that are all ranchers having many sheep and cows.

"I guess this is the village my uncle Khalfan was talking with my dad about." Says Sammy, pointing at the lights,

showing them to Nelly. "My dad's best friend I mean. His name was Khalfan. So, I used to call him uncle Khalfan. They used to go hunting, my dad and uncle Khalfan. They said I was still too young for them to take me with them. One day, they came back home after spending the whole day hunting and they brought with them a big ball made of pure butter, taken prepared from sheep milk. The butter was in a sheep skin of some sort."

"What?" Asks Nelly. "Yak. Butter in sheep skin?"

"Yup. That's how nomads do things. They slaughter a sheep, skin it and use everything inside the skin. I mean literally everything. They eat its meat, cook its head and legs and eat it. God, it's delicious. have you tried that?"

"No. OMG. Stop talking about yak stuff please."

"They take the sheep's whole stomach and intestines and mostly feed their cattle dogs with it." Continues Sammy, having a mild smile on his face knowing Nelly cannot see him as she walks behind him. "So, anyways, they milk the cow, or sheep first. They make yogurt with the milk. I know the process, but I'll just tell you about butter now. They mix a little water with the yogurt to make the yogurt thinner, I mean dilute it. They pour the mixed yogurt and water in a long bag like sac called goat skin and tie it tight. Now there are two people, mainly women, who would seat each at one end of the goat skin and shake the goat skin pushing the sac towards each other, sometimes for an hour or even more, depending on how fat the liquid is, until the fat gets separated from that liquid. That fat is in fact the butter, the pure sheep or cow butter. It's full of protein."

Nelly is speechless. What Sammy tells her, really interests her. But she pauses for a second.

"Ow. Really? But how do you know all these?"

"I guess I read a lot about stuff."

"Good for you. I didn't honestly know how pure butter is produced till now. So, what happens next?"

"Oh. Yeah. Carrying an animal skin, my dad and uncle Khalfan entered the house and my mom asked what it was they carried home. She initially thought it was the game they had killed or hunted that day. But uncle Khalfan explained he and my dad had come across some nomads which were travelling on camels, taking their cattle's with them. They, the nomads I mean, were travelling like they do twice a year, heading whether towards winter quarters or summer. They had become friends

after my dad offered them coffee and gave them a bowl of pure water as souvenir.”

“What is that winter and summer thing now?” Asks Nelly eager to learn more.

Sammy can no longer control or stop himself from bursting into laughter. He bursts into laughter and he laughing makes even Nelly smiles a little bit.

“Nomads travel to a warmer area in winters. They do not have heaters, gas or radiator heaters like us, city or town people. So, they need to go to a warmer area. They will be warmer and there will also be grass and plants for their castles to feed. Sometimes they are on move for months, you know. They’ll come back to the same place when winter leaves and it is warm enough both for them and their animals.”

Nelly is genuinely amazed with the level of Sammy’s knowledge. She admires him but says nothing to him.

“Yeah. So, I want to say I think those lights belong to the places where the same nomads live in now in this season. I guess we better not show ourselves even to them nomads Miss Nelly. I have no doubt Isis will visit them soon and will threaten them extracting information from them and there’s a possibility that one of them would rat us out if we are seen by them. We better change our walking direction slightly. We need to rest soon. So, we will camp a kilometer or two away from the village. We will take a rest for a while and continue ahead soon after that.

Sammy changes his walking direction like he has told and Nelly follows him as usual. Moonlight seems brighter near the village. And this makes Sammy glad. Sammy turns his head and looks at Nelly, like he wants to say something. But he changes his mind. But he needs to clarify something with Nelly anyhow. Nelly has noticed Sammy is reluctant to say what he wanted.

“Look Miss Nelly.” Says Sammy. “We cannot stay away from each other for obvious reasons. I mean I don’t know how to... say that. Because you know miss Nelly, I mean...”

“Oh my God. Would you please tell me what’s happening in your mind? You sound like you are about to say something, but again you will not. You’ll swallow your words. Tell me what is it? Please. We are not in a situation to feel shy or something for God sake.”

"Yeah. You are right. But... you know. Ok listen. We cannot use a flash light or make a fire. We'll have to use moonlight if we want to do anything. I have brought us the only camouflage blanket I had. It's a big one. We can both sleep under it without any Isis even imagining to be able to spot us you know. I guess what I mean to say is that we have no choice but to sleep next to each other under the camouflage blanket if we want to be hidden from Isis and even those naïve nomads."

Sammy has begun sweating, thinking Nelly might take his proposal in a different or a wrong way. He does not want Nelly to think he uses the camouflage blanket as an alibi to get them closer to each other while sleeping. Sammy's heart has begun beating faster while waiting for Nelly to show any reaction.

"Ok. Now what's a camouflage blanket now?" Asks Nelly exhaustedly.

"It's a blanket that would make whatever under it covered and make it look like desert from a far distance. We use it to hide from Isis identifying and look out members that would be possibly sent around."

Nelly pauses for a moment, keeps quiet for a while without asking any further questions. She wants to camp and see for herself what Sammy is talking about.

"Let's camp first. I want to see the blanket you brag about."

Sammy finds a flat lot between two hills, around seven to eight hundred meters away from the village and thinks it is the best spot to camp for the night. He sits facing the flat ground while Nelly stands back.

Sammy looks at Nelly behind him and sees she is standing under the moonlight on a mounted ground and asks her to change her position as there is a possibility for her to be spotted by a nomad.

Nelly says "yes sir" sarcastically after she frowns at Sammy. Sammy smiles bitterly. Nelly sits next to Sammy. They have both taken their rifles and back-packs off their shoulders and backs. Sammy takes his water thermos and holds it towards Nelly. Nelly grabs the thermos and quaffs the water despite Sammy warning her in advance they have to reduce their water intake as much as possible. But Sammy is shy to bring it back

to her attention, especially he knows Nelly does not like to be told what to do and what not. Nelly gives Sammy's thermos back. Sammy takes two sips only.

"Oh my God. That's it?" Asks Nelly. "We have come all this way walking and you are not even that thirsty?"

"Of course, I'm very thirsty." Replies Sammy. "But I'm considering if we run out of drinking water tomorrow, rest of the way will become a living hell for us both."

Nelly pauses for a moment feeling embraced.

"But we will find the well where those nomads get their drinking water from before leaving this area early in the morning." Continues Sammy when he notices that Nelly's facial expressions change because of embracement.

"Are you sure there will even be a well?" Asks Nelly. "Do they really have a well?"

"Of course, they do. Where would they get their drinking water supply? They are at the middle of nowhere with no pipelines to supply their water or cables to supply their power. So, they use good oil for their lanterns and that's those lights we see and a well supplies them all with a natural drinking water."

Nelly pauses again, pondering, asking herself how can really Sammy know so much about the world around him? So far, she has begun to and has been almost convinced that Sammy is a well-read living encyclopedia, decent in terms of treating a girl and not acting like many other men she considered a pervert. Good thoughts about Sammy begins forming in Nelly's mind, especially after she realizes Sammy has brought up nomad's well, so she would not feel bad having quaffed the water out of the thermos without minding Sammy's instructions earlier in regards to being quite frugal consuming their limited amount of their drinking water.

Sammy pulls out his camouflage blanket which he has unfortunately packed it, laying that right at the bottom of his back-pack. Under moonlight gropingly, he requests Nelly to bend and get farther from him while tiptoeing without letting anyone spot her. So, she crouches and goes a few yards away. Sammy lays on the desert sands and covers his whole body, sneaks under the camouflage blanket, so Nelly would see what he has been talking about. That's only Nelly realizes what a camouflage blanket is good for and why Sammy has insisted implementing it in order to stay hidden. He signals Nelly to get closer and she does.



"Ok you see?" Asks Sammy. He crouches and crawls near her. "My dad and I used this camouflage, desert sand looking blanket, whenever we went hunting." Whispers Sammy. "Sometimes you should stay hidden for minutes or even hours to make the animal think it is alone. We left some food nearby, depending on the game we wanted to hunt and shoot it as soon as it got close to us trying to eat the food, we had left it."

"It's ok Mr. Sammy." Replies Nelly also whispering. "I understand we or our current situation is critical. We are in grave danger and hiding us and keeping us alive is your primary objective. It's okay with me. We will sleep under the same blanket, keeping a distance from one another."

Nelly has some doubts of course since she can still not trust any man hundred percent. She is a bit reluctant still. But she knows Sammy is right and has a point. So, she decides to agree sleeping next to Sammy, but be extremely cautious. But Sammy feels a bit relieved after what Nelly says, thinking he is happy that he has not given her an uneasy feeling, proposing them both to sleep under a single blanket, considering her history and hysteria. He asks Nelly to look for a few dried bushes, cuts and brings them to him. Sammy and Nelly both glance at the village and notice the number of lights they have initially seen have been reduced. Only two or three lights can be seen. They know almost everyone has gone to sleep at the village.

The only sound which Sammy and Nelly can hear is the faint sound of sheeps or cows moaning and baaing. Nelly gets to work and brings back a few dried bushes she has pulled off the ground. But Sammy and Nelly know sun is coming up in a few hours. They need to rest a bit before moving again. The ground mat Sammy and Nelly have to lay down on is in Nelly's back-pack. She takes it out and they spread it on the desert sands, each holding two corners of its single side. They lay their back-packs on the ground cloth and sit on the mat. Nelly takes out two canned beans, two pieces of bread and a can opener. Sammy opens Nelly's canned bean for her and gives it to her. She begins eating quickly before Sammy can open his. Nelly keeps on remembering what Sara and Hanieh told her about how Sammy feels about her. Sammy begins eating a few seconds later. They are now both quiet thinking back about the loved ones they have lost and challenges ahead of them before making it to Jarabulus. The destination Sammy has set his mind on for an unknown reason to her. They both realize that thinking,

moaning or getting emotional is not going to change anything. They separately come to the conclusion that they now have to pull all their focuses and efforts to their main objective being escape to safety.

Sammy gets up and installs dried bushes which Nelly has brought to his camouflage blanket, so it would look even more natural, exactly like desert's ground. He sees Nelly has crawled into her sleeping bag already. Sammy lays his rifle between himself and Nelly, pulls the camouflage blanket over them and secures it with its designated nails. It is not a difficult task as the nails penetrate the sand easily. The blanket is perfectly secured. Nelly has laid facing away from Sammy. Sammy is still seated, having his leg's knee-strap opened. He does not lay down still and that makes Nelly think why? She suddenly gets panicked, doubting why Sammy waits for her to go to sleep first. She remembers those two suicide pills Sammy has given her and has her hand on the rifle Sammy has given her. She figures she is going to shoot Sammy if he tries anything. But it is going to take long for her to pick the rifle, shoot herself or Sammy in case he tries getting close to her. She figures suicide pills are her best choice for the worst-case scenario. She slowly reaches for her hunting shirt pocket. Her fingers touch the tissues Sammy has kept those pills inside, pulls it out without him noticing it and inserts them under the back-pack she used as a pillow. She is going to take a pill if Sammy has any plan of sexually assaulting her. She feels a bit more comfortable and prepared, waiting for Sammy to make a move.

Moments pass, Sammy is still sitting and not making any unusual move or attempt. And that has made Nelly wonder why he is not sleeping and what he has in mind.

"Why are you not sleeping?" Asks Nelly in a curious tone.  
"I will, miss Nelly." Replies Sammy. "I'm guarding, awake, so you would go to sleep comfortably. Don't worry. Nothing is going to happen to you while I'm here with you."

Nelly does not talk after she thanks Sammy and says good night. Tears well up in her eyes, cursing herself how stupid and crazy she is. She is about to burst into tears loudly. But she keeps her mouth shut, takes the pills out and puts them back into her pocket, still cursing herself for thinking that way about Sammy. Sammy has kept himself busy awake despite feeling exhausted, considering the problem he has to tolerate in regards to his limp leg. So, she can go to sleep

safe and sound, but she and her dirty heart and mind thought he is planning to do something evil and sexually assault her, Nelly thinks. She blames herself and asks Jesus for forgiveness, before she falls asleep.

Sammy covers himself with his sleeping bag and tears roll down his face quietly when he is convinced Nelly is in a deep sleep already. He prays to the universe for his mom, Amer, Robert, Sara, Hanieh and everyone else he has lost and finally falls asleep while sobbing. Nelly opens her eyes minutes later when Sammy tries covering their whole bodies under the blanket. But she pretends she is asleep. She notices Sammy works very carefully so he would not touch her waking her up. Nelly monitors every move Sammy makes by what she hears him doing. She is somehow beginning to feel safer when Sammy is around. What would have happened to her, where would she have been and what a horrifying fate would have awaited her if it had not been for Sammy protecting and watching over her? she thinks. Nelly goes into deeper thoughts and is convinced Sammy has committed murder shooting many men dead particularly because of how he feels for her, she thinks. Sammy has even allowed himself to kill because of how much he loves her. Sammy has killed the Isis ringleader, the horrible looking monster she did not know who was called Abu Mahdi, a known and famous Isis terrorist with a dark history of rape, murder and genocide. Thinking about how much she is being loved causes she feels safe and lucky. Nelly falls asleep happy deep inside and as she can no longer stay awake.

\* \* \*

As per the orders Hadji Mazen has given him the night before, Ayad, another cruel and brutal Hadji Mazen's ringleader, heads outside cellar storage office buildings to search and identify areas between Al Darrah and Al Thowrah town. Everyone sounds asleep at the storage office buildings except a few guards, who are napping still drunk or high.

Ayad has two armed Isis subordinates following him on a motor cross, a driver who drives him on another armed pick-up truck and two heavy machine gun operators riding at the back of the pick-up truck in his unit ready to attack in case they are threatened by any possible fighters. It is the dawn of the next day and he has a deadline to report back to his commander, Hadji Mazen.

Nelly wakes up suddenly. She cannot hear the baaing or moaning of the village's cattle. She glances at her wrist-watch and

sees it is a quarter left to six A.M. She figures the nomads have taken the cattle to graze, probably to a farther point, farther away where there is enough grasses or plants. Nelly gets out of her sleeping bag quietly, glances at Sammy who is still in a deep sleep. She sneaks out of the camouflage blanket after pulling one or two of its nails off the desert ground, crawls and doubled-up crawling to one of the two heels they have slept between the night before. She raises her head, peaking at the village. But she cannot see anyone in or outside the cottages. She notices what she has actually sank out of the camouflage for. She sees a well around ten meters away from the last cottage. She has around seven to eight hundred meters distance to the village and Sammy is still asleep. She snaps back to her sleeping bag and back-pack to get a cookie pack out, so she and Sammy would have it as breakfast when he wakes up. She thinks of drinking something with the cookies when she suddenly remembers how she has almost finished the water in their thermos the night before and feels guilty again. Sammy is going to wake up any minute and they have to repack and continue their journey towards Jarabulus, escaping the danger area as soon as possible. Nelly takes her rifle out and begins checking it out to maybe figure out how it is going to operate. She suddenly comes up with a stupid idea. And that is to take the thermos to the well and fills it with water before Sammy wakes up or nomad shepherds return. She figures she is not going to be considered useless first of all and she can retrieve the water, the precious water she has drunk the night before carelessly.

So, she crawls next to Sammy quietly and carefully. She grabs the thermos from the mat next to him. She takes off her own thermos she has finished all the water in a while, walking away from Al Darrah. She climbs the little hill and runs towards the well after she makes sure it is safe. Nelly feels like she is a commando for a few seconds and she has no idea why. She has crouched and stopped every six seven feet, looks around to make sure no one is coming. She reaches an open area in front of the village seconds later. She begins walking very slowly, watching where she puts her feet taking step. She is careful not to step on a bush or a stone or something and creates an unwanted sound, waking nomads up attracting them to herself.

She finally makes it to the well. Nelly opens each thermos's covers and keeps them aside. She throws the bucket inside the well. But she has difficulty in pulling the bucket back up as it has been filled with water and has become way heavier than

she initially thought. She drops the bucket twice as she can no longer lift it back up. But she is not going to give up. She keeps on trying until she can successfully pull up a half bucket of water. She fills both thermos and crouches back towards the two hills where Sammy is.

Nelly is on her way back when she suddenly goes pale and numb. She sees an armed pick-up truck followed by a motor cross, both having the devilish black flag raised on them. She suddenly remembers the scene where her whole family were killed. The truck looks exactly the same as the one that had opened fire at her innocent family members. She is terrified and confused. She cannot run to Sammy as she does not want Isis murderers to find out she has company. She does not want to lead them to Sammy and she cannot stay there either as she has no doubt what those animals are going to do to her.

Nelly feels her knees have lost their strength and are no longer able to hold her weight. Her whole body goes numb and her face has turned pale. The horrible scene, when her all family members were brutally shot, is going to be repeated, she thinks. She suddenly loses control of her actions and she begins screaming Sammy's name.

Ayad and his subordinates get closer and closer every second goes by. Nelly suddenly makes her decision and begins running towards the only person she knows might be able to protect her. She screams Sammy's name from the top of her lung while running the seven or eight hundred meters distance she has ahead of her before she reaches Sammy.

Sammy opens his eyes, thinking he is dreaming Nelly is yelling his name. He thinks Nelly's screaming his name, asking for help is part of a dream he does not remember. He changes his position in his sleeping bag, but he hears a vehicle and a bike-motorbike sound approaching from a distance. Sammy has just realized what may have happened. He jumps up sitting quickly, looks around and sees Nelly's sleeping bag is empty and there is no sign of her. He thinks he is one step ahead as he has reloaded his rifle's magazine full the night before and before he runs away from Al Darrah along with Nelly.

Nelly knows well Isis vehicle and motor cross are going to reach and get her before she even makes it to Sammy. She has lost hope of Sammy hearing her and tries anything to save her. For a very short moment, she thinks of taking her own life before Isis criminal and rapists arrive. She remembers those

suicide pills Sammy has given her along with that hunting loaded rifle. But she has left both her hunting rifle and suicide pills back at where she and Sammy have camped for the night. She desperately runs, screams and yells Sammy's name.

Sammy can so far hear Nelly screaming his name and vehicle engine sound approaching, getting closer and closer. Sammy's eyes suddenly catch his father's hunting rifle and becomes quite angry that she has not even carried her rifle with her where the hell ever she went. While still invisible to both Isis members approaching and Nelly, Sammy lays next to his camouflage blanket, holds its corner with his left hand, while holding his rifle in his right hand and begins rolling on the ground, therefore wrapping his whole body inside his camouflage blanket. He crawls up the shorter hill and sees an armed pick-up truck escorted by a motor cross. Even Sammy is reminded of the similar scene he has witnessed a day back which has resulted in Nelly's parents and siblings to be killed in that brutal way.

Knowing for the fact that Isis is going to catch up to her, Nelly cries loudly and yells Sammy's name still. She has already lost hope that Sammy is going to hear and rush to rescue her yet again. Everything is happening in a very fast pace.

Ayad notices a female is running towards a different direction rather taking refuge, heading towards her cottage.

"Do you see that woman?" Asks Ayad, looking at his driver who is driving the armored pick-up truck. "What's wrong with her? We normally see women run back home when they see we are coming, huh? But she seems have lost her direction. Why is she running away from cottages though?"

"The fear has taken her brain away from her." Replies the driver before he bursts into laughter. "She's suffering from brain fart syndrome."

Ayad and his driver burst into laughter again. They can't still see Nelly's face or age clearly. They are still around thirty second away before they reach her. Ayad takes up his army binoculars and holds it against his eyes. The motor cross driver who has also noticed a female ahead near the village, drives to the side of the vehicle Ayad is seated to point and show him to bring his attention that he has spotted a woman. Ayad who has noticed the driver driving parallel and close to him smiles and orders him to overtake and drive ahead of him

by signaling the motor cross driver. Ayad's armed pick-up truck and his subordinates escorting his truck have now about fifteen seconds before they reach Nelly. Ayad is amazed by Nelly's beauty after he checked her out using his binocular.

"Ya Allah." Says Ayad to his driver. "Look. Look. I have never seen a girl this beautiful in my life."

Ayad hands his binocular to his driver and asks him to have a look at Nelly after he holds the steering wheel so the driver can use his both hands and use Ayad's binocular to look at Nelly.

"Wow sir." Replies the driver after checking terrified Nelly out. "You are right."  
He bursts into laughter excitedly.

"Or maybe we are dead and she's a heavenly angel like we are promised by our Islamic leaders and Quran."

Ayad is now looking at Nelly's every step running and crying. He pulls his side's window down, hits the pick-up truck's roof twice. "Open fire. Scare her so she would stop." He orders the two heavy machine gun operators at the back. "I don't want her shot or harmed in anyway. Be careful."

He hears the machine gun going off, opening fire on the ground on Nelly's path. Nelly stops suddenly, screams and sits on the desert sand hopeless and helplessly. Sammy is aiming now. He has just woken up in that hurry emergency way and has to still get his mind, thoughts and everything that he needs together. So, it takes him a while to plan a strategy to target and hunt down the six Isis members getting closer to Nelly and now have opened fire at her. Sammy becomes extremely angry. He uses all what he has in mind, the targeting expertise and all formulas Tom has given him, to finally aim and pull the trigger, of course he has to think about him and Nelly's next move too. He is initially aiming at Ayad when his vehicle is far away, knowing Isis high ranking ringleaders would always sit at the front, right next to the driver, and shooting the Isis ringleader first is his primary objective. But he loses it when he sees the heavy machine gun operator opens fire at an innocent and defenseless girl at the middle of the desert. Sammy can guess what and why they have opened fire at her and is determined to stop them.

"Lay down on the ground." Whispers Sammy before he pulls the trigger, hoping he would do it anyways, despite the fact they

cannot actually see one another. Luckily everything is happening quite fast in a matter of milliseconds. Sammy has taken position and has sneaked hiding almost near the top of the shorter hill and the higher heel blocks his view. Therefore, he still has no idea whether Nelly has been shot or still alive. That is what causes his anger and makes him gets himself together and gets to work.

Ayad is still on his binocular, checking what Nelly does after his machine gun operator opens fire at her. That's when he hears a pop sound. Sammy has finally taken a shot. His bullet hits the heavy machine gun operator right at the middle of his chest, lifts him up and throws him off the pick-up truck. The truck is of course on the move still when Ayad hears the second machine gun operator yelling.

"Someone got Mohammad." Yells the second guy, hitting on the truck's roof furiously.

Ayad looks back into his binocular again after he becomes so nervous and shaky. He looks back for a second and sees Mohammad, his machine gun operator, lays dead yards away from his vehicle. He looks into his binocular again and Sammy's second, third and fourth shot hit him at his right nipple, middle of his chest and his left side of his neck, when his blood splashes out and of his driver's face and body, making him panicked and extremely scared. Sammy's bullets stitch Ayad's body to his seat. He looks at his chest, body and holds the bullet wound at his neck, probably because he thinks he is still able to stop bleeding. He looks at his driver's bloody face, grabs him smattering at him asking for help. That's when the driver begins losing control. He is trying hard to make badly wounded Ayad to let go of his sleeve and let him stop the vehicle. But Sammy takes his next shot and hits the driver at his right shoulder. The driver loses control of the vehicle. The road is not a standard asphalt road though. It is a dusty sand road with lots of ups and downs. The vehicle's front tires hit a bump made by sand and the vehicle rolls over from its head, throwing the second machine gun operator so hard that he lands yards away ahead of the pick-up truck. The truck lands on the guy once before it comes to a stop, surprisingly landing on its four wheels. That's when Sammy hears Nelly laughing and cursing at the Isis members.

"You thought you can get me? Touch me? You bastards?"  
Sammy is relieved for a moment knowing she is not shot.



"Lay down on the ground Miss Nelly." Yells Sammy. "It's not over."

The motor cross riders have stopped after they see what happened to their team leader and his vehicle. They seem quite confused and or still deciding whether to continue with the mission or run for their lives. They finally decide to run away. But it is too late. Sammy has the one sitting at the back in his scope and is not going to let them get away. Besides, he needs for later what they had. So, he is quite careful taking the last two shots.

The bullet rips off part of the guy's ear before hitting the motor cross driver at the back of his head. The motor cross collapses, obviously after its driver was shot by Sammy. The guy sitting behind him though, begins taking his shirt off holding his injured ear every few seconds. Sammy looks in his scope to see why is the man taking his clothes off? The Isis guy takes everything off except his dirty briefs. He picks his white underwear and begins waving it facing the village with his left hand and holds his ear with his right.

A number of older men, women and children have come out of their cottages after they see what happened and feel safe. They are staring at the Isis surrendering criminal. But Sammy does neither know nor has any plan to obey rules of war. Not a war with Isis especially. He takes another shot and hits the man on his right hand, making him drop his white surrendering undershirt. He hears the man screaming and moaning out of pain. Sammy does still not finish him. He gets up. Nelly and everyone at the village can see for the first time where he has taken position. He limps towards the man freely, knowing he is naked and has no gun on him. Sammy is almost ten yards from him when he suddenly backs off running four steps to reach for his pistol, thinking Sammy has run out of ammunition. The guy jumps to reach for his pistol, but he is shot by Sammy on his heart before he has a chance to try his luck. He looks at each and every one of Isis members he has killed to make sure all of them are dead when he hears Nelly's screaming, calling his name happily and running towards him. Sammy is so happy to see Nelly that happy and excited. He walks towards village's well, the direction Nelly is running towards him from. Sammy limps back towards where Nelly is.

Thirsty, a bit sleepy, hungry and tired, Sammy limps towards the village's drinking water well, when Nelly reaches him excitedly. She opens her arms first to hug Sammy when she

reaches him. Sammy is speechless. He does not even think Nelly is going to hug him. But he pretends he is okay and acts in a normal way. However, Nelly remembers something, changes her body gesture, like she is trying hard to express her happiness in another way rather than hugging Sammy. She has changed her mind seconds before Sammy opens his arms to hug Nelly too.

"I was... You know what happened?" Says Nelly while tears of happiness are rolling down her excited face. "Actually, I actually wanted to get some water and there was no one and I did not even imagine those bastards are coming. I run towards the two hills. I called your name a million times. You were asleep, aren't you? So, I decided to reach my rifle or at least the suicide pills when I figured it would be too late for you to wake up to get prepared to fight them back and what not. I have to end it, just like you taught me. No? So, but you killed them all. Like flies. Are you awake? Can you hear me? Oh my God. I was terrified." Nelly keeps talking and talking, facing Sammy and walks backwards, while Sammy listens to her, smiles and still walks forward towards the well. Villagers are still outside their cottages shocked by what they have just witnessed. Still excited and extremely happy for the fact she is alive and protected by Sammy, instead of hugging him, she begins running towards their camouflage blanket.

"I'll be right back Sammy." Says Nelly without realizing she has addressed Sammy that way unlike every other time she addressed him as Mr. Sammy.

Sammy nods smiling while he still walks towards the well. An elderly woman walks towards the well too and reaches the well earlier than Sammy. She pulls a full bucket of water; pours the water in the copper bowl she has in her hand and gives it to Sammy as soon as he arrives at the well. Sammy quaffs the whole bowl of water and sees Nelly running towards him, holding something.

"I was scared to death, thinking that I am going to die like I always think. I would end up after what happened to my parents and siblings." Says now the talkative Nelly who cannot stop talking now. But I suddenly saw them die like wild animals. I saw bullets ripping their dirty flesh apart and I knew it was you."

Sammy is about to drink the second bowl of water when he notices Nelly is holding his knee-strap. Nelly kneels before Sammy, takes a deep breath.

"Here." Says Nelly, pointing at her knee. "Put your foot on my knee. I'll fix your knee-strap."

"No. No. Miss Nelly." Says Sammy in a humble way.

He looks around and sees a piece of slate by the well's opening. He takes two steps, sits on the slate and stretches his bad leg.

"Let's do it here." Asks Sammy. "Let's do it here. Please stand up."

Nelly gets up and joins Sammy by the slate. She fixes Sammy's knee strap. She is fixing the last two remaining leathers when they all hear someone is trying to ignite a vehicle. Sammy jumps up standing on high alert while others still look and act confused. Sammy raises his rifle and looks into its scope. He sees the armed pick-up driver is still alive despite being severely injured, shot and has on deadly car crash. He remembers he is checking every Isis member to make sure they are all dead when he is distracted by Nelly screaming his name. The Isis pick-up driver is still alive. He is trying to switch on running surprisingly, despite rolling over. The driver takes off creating a big cloud of dust behind him. Knowing he has not much time to stop the surviving Isis animal, Sammy runs towards a three meters high tree and places his rifle on its lowest branch and looks into his scope. The problem Sammy faces is that he cannot target the driver, has him in his scope before taking his shot. There is way too much dust raised behind the vehicle as he presses the gas to get away without getting shot again. Sammy has no choice, but to take a shot, that is more like throwing a stone into darkness. So, he uses whatever he knows about math and geometry to at least take a calculated shot. The driver is getting away quickly and it is time for Sammy to take his shot. Sammy pulls the trigger and his bullet wheezes through air, makes a hole on the driver's back windshield and hits him on his right shoulder again. The same shoulder he has been shot at by Sammy minutes back. The Isis driver loses control and actually stops the vehicle for a moment. But presses the gas, full power this time and gets away. Sammy takes another shot at him. But he has already run out of bullets and needs to reload the rifle's magazine. The Isis

driver takes off, runs away before Sammy can reload. Sammy takes his rifle off the tree branch, takes a deep breath, lowers his head and looks at Nelly who seems absolutely clueless.

"You got him." Says Nelly. "Now, get back here and let me finish fastening your knee-strap."

That's when Sammy realizes she is whether completely clueless or is still acting under the influence of revenge joy and excitement of still being alive. Sammy wants to back and take a seat on the same slate. He waits until Nelly fixes his knee-strap tight. He stands up, thanks Nelly and begins thinking while Nelly continues on her chattiness, telling Sammy again what she has thought and how surprised she is when he has bulleted them down one after the other."

"Listen to me carefully please." Says Sammy after he holds Nelly's both shoulders and jolts her hard so she would snap out of shock and excitement.

Nelly gets quiet for a second, listening to Sammy, pulling herself back of Sammy so to release her shoulders from Sammy's grab.

"That Isis asshole is on his way to his unit where the hell ever it is and would tell them, explain them in details where he has seen us and what has exactly happened to him. Do you understand?"

"I guess." Replies Nelly still looking in shock and confused.

"Ok. Good. Now I want you to go back to where we both slept last night."

Nelly nods confused and getting panicked again.

"Don't panic. Just do as I say and we'll be fine. Get the back-packs ready. Pack them both like they were before we opened them for camping. Wait for me to come back and join you. You think you can help me with that?"

"I guess so." Replies Nelly. "Yeah. I'll do that."

"Great."

But Sammy sees Nelly still standing and staring at him.

"I meant right now. Quickly. Please. We are running out of time."

Nelly begins running towards their camping spot while Sammy walks very quickly towards Isis motor cross. A nomad woman in her early 40s has witnessed everything happened between Sammy, Isis criminals and Nelly. She is carrying her baby.

Sammy arrives at the place the Isis motor cross has been laid in the desert. He raises the bike upwards and tries starting it. But it looks like it does not want to start. He leaves the bike standing on its legs and checks the engine and other parts being a mechanical engineer student and notices the fuel hose has been disconnected from its engine. So, he fixes the hose back and tries again. The bike starts this time. Sammy notices two external fuel tanks installed at both side of the bike's rear side. They are both full. Sammy thinks as these kinds of bikes are constantly used in desert by Isis where there is no petrol pump to refill. So, he figures Isis motor cross riders have back-up in terms of fuel. Sammy leaves the motorcycle on and walks towards corps of one of the Isis members he has killed. He picks his machine gun and a back-pack laid next to his body. He checks the military back-pack and sees there are a few grenades inside. He takes all the bullets the Isis man has with him as ammunition. He checks the fuel tanks to make sure how much fuel he can count for and notices one of the fuel tanks is completely empty, whereas the other one is half full. Sammy sits on the motorcycle carrying all booties he has taken. Sammy notices a big amount of the bike's fuel has been splashed out of the bike when it has collapsed down. But he drives the bike anyways considering the very small amount of time he and Nelly have before another group of Isis come for them. So, he drives the bike to Nelly. The first thing he does is he transfers all booties and grenades to his own back-pack, along with ammunition and the Isis's machine gun. He ties the booty machine gun to the bike using a rope. Nelly has prepared everything, exactly like Sammy has instructed her.

Nelly sits behind Sammy on the pillion. Sammy asks her to hold his chest tight. Nelly secures the back-pack and their rifles on the top of the spare fuel tanks. She holds Sammy tight and Sammy drives away. In order to head north, Sammy has to drive on the narrow road crossed at the side of the village. An old man who has witnessed the whole event runs inside a cottage when he sees Sammy drives the bike and comes back seconds before Sammy and Nelly arrive, holding a bundle to cross the narrow road by the side of the village. He waves at Sammy and stops him for a moment. He hands Sammy the cloth-made bundle.

"Thank you, young man." Says the old man who speaks with a shaky voice, about to burst into tears. "God knows what would have happened to our village, cattle's and women if they made it further. You have my prayers son. Both for you and your beautiful wife. I wish all Syrian men had your courage my son."

Sammy takes the bundle from the old man, thanks him and hands it to Nelly. He wishes the old man luck and drives away after Nelly secures the bundle in her shirt. Sammy begins driving through desert's warm sands, crossing difficult paths with the aim of getting as far from that village as possible. He has no doubt whatsoever Isis is going to reappear at that village bringing a bigger number of soldiers, guns and ammunition this time.

Sammy knows Isis is now aware of whom they should look for. A man and a beautiful girl who is companied and protected by a disabled young man.

"Thanks Miss Nelly." Says Sammy, turning his head back towards Nelly slightly. "I almost forgot to thank you."

"What for?" Replies Nelly, yelling at the back of the bike.

"What are you talking about?"

"For fixing my knee-strap tight a few minutes back."

"Oh. I remember." Replies Nelly sarcastically. "You are most welcome Mr. Sammy?"

"Samaha. That's my family name by the way."

"Yes. You are most welcome Mr. Sammy Samaha. I like your family name by the way."

Nelly's sarcasm has brought a smile on Sammy's face. They both get quiet as Sammy is driving quite fast and Nelly thinks he needs to focus on his driving. Sammy, on the other hand, remembers what Rana, his cousin, had told him about Nelly hating men, specially Muslims. Even Sammy notices it the very first minutes of meeting Nelly after the cemetery, that she is fearful of men. But Nelly has begun acting less afraid, Sammy thinks. Is it because she is beginning to trust him or she has other reasons? She might have changed the way she used to think after Isis attacked and did that horrible thing to her family members. Thinking of all what have happened during the last twenty-four to thirty-six hours. Sammy still does not consider himself a hero hell. He does not even think of what he has done as self-sacrifice. Sammy's mind is busy thinking of all these things while also focusing on his driving.

In the meanwhile, Farhan, Ayad's armed pick-up truck's driver who has astonishingly survived and pulled himself out of Sammy's bullet range and got away despite being shot twice and being in a severe car crash, uses all he has in him to drive his vehicle near the cellar storage facilities where Hadji Mazen and others are based at. The pick-up truck suddenly stops. Its engine suddenly shuts down and Farhan cannot get it working, no matter how hard he tries. Half of his body is soaked in his own blood coming out of his two bullet-wounds he has, plus Ayad's blood which has splashed and sprayed on him after he is targeted by Sammy's deadly bullets. His heart beat rate is decreasing by every minute going by and he is beginning to feel dizzy and having problem standing. So, he abandons his vehicle and decides to walk the rest of the way. But first, he kicks the vehicle twice and empties his anger by doing so, cursing at it for letting him down. The thirst is another factor affecting his control over his body and staying alive. His mouth is dry and he is still bleeding. Farhan makes it to ammunition and arms cellar facility gate and sees three stupid Isis members, his comrades, are playing with a football, just like kids at an elementary school. One of the three Isis guards kicks the ball and the ball goes towards Farhan. Only they notice their comrade, Farhan, after following the ball with their eyes. They see Farhan almost completely soaked in his blood. One of them takes his walkie-talkie over his mouth and reports to all that Farhan is back, wounded or shot and is in a bad condition. The other two who run to help him carry Farhan on their back and take him below the office building in which Hadji Mazen is in.

Hearing the news on his wireless communication device and all the buzzy, Hadji Mazen comes down the office building and sees an Isis soldier has a full bottle of water, holds it in front of Farhan's lips so he would drink. A medic arrives simultaneously and injects him with a shot. Another Isis criminal has a dark brown resin looking substance in between his fingers. He asks comrade to take the bottle off Farhan's face, so he can give him a strong medicine. So, he does and the man presses the substance and holds back the water on his lips. Farhan quaffs whatever water is left. Hadji Mazen lights a cigarette, sits next to Farhan on a chair his handyman gets him. The medic looks into Farhan's pupils and nods.

"He's going to make it of course." Says the medic to Hadji Mazen. "Two bullets wounds, both on his right shoulder.

Strange. But he'll be fine despite bleeding for quite a long time.

The guy who pressed the dark brown substance into Farhan's mouth and who is now holding his head glances at Hadji Mazen and blinks.

"He'll be able to talk in about four to five minutes. I gave him some pure strong opium. It will both ease his pain and make him talk in a bit."

The guy is right. The dark brown substance he has forced Farhan to swallow was actually opium. A strong morphine-based drug which refreshes Farhan a few minutes later while almost everyone has gathered around him, so he would reveal the tale and explain how he has become wounded.

"Where are the others?" Asks Hadji Mazen, sounding quite concerned. "Did you guys come across armed factions, military or something? Talk god damn it."

Farhan tries to sit strength now. A comrade lifts his head to help him sit up. Farhan coughs some blood out and tries to clean palm of his hand by robbing it to the ground.

"To follow your orders," says Farhan. "our team leader, Ayad, ordered us to be ready to move early this morning. I drove Mr. Ayad, there were our machine gun operators Hakim and Mostafa at the back and Kabir and Jassem followed on their motor crosses. We saw a nomad shepherding his goat cattle. Mr. Ayad ordered us to stop. He asked the nomad if he has come across any armed people, anyone holding a gun or rifle or something. I don't know commander. He sounded a bit abnormal. He said he has seen two people walking towards a village nearby. They were armed too. I told Ayad we could not trust his word as he sounded crazy. But he said he didn't want to take any risks. So, he ordered me to change my direction, go towards the village.

Farhan coughs again and asks for more water.

"So?" Says Hadji Mazen, agitated.

"Mr. Ayad was right sir." Continues Farhan. "A few snipers were waiting for us."

Farhan bursts into tears now. He cannot continue talking as he has gotten very emotional.

"Where?" Asks Hadji Mazen, yelling. "In the fuckin desert?"



"No sir. Near the same damn village, the shepherd said. We all saw nomads led their cattle to graze while on our way to the village. We saw a female begun running. I was sure she saw us and decided to run. Ayad gave me his binocular. That's how I saw her. We got a bit closer when I suddenly saw a hole formed on Ayad's side windshield. Not one. Not two, but three times. I felt my right side of my face became wet. They have shot Ayad three times sir. The last bullet hit his neck, left neck and his blood splashed on me and my face. He began pulling my hand and sleeve, probably wanting me not to let him die. And remember, I was driving fast, like Ayad had ordered me. I was about to lose control when I felt something or someone kicked me at my right shoulder. The whole right side of my body went numb. Exactly at the same time the vehicle hit a bad bump and it rolled over, I don't know how many times. I fainted and didn't remember the rest until... Yeah, I lost control. Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot to mention the snipers got Mostafa first. They then shot Ayad and me. I saw Hakim crushed like a tank had run him over when I gained my consciousness back and realized he has been thrown out of my truck, landing further ahead. I think the pick-up truck landed on him when rolling over. I saw Kabir dead, laid on the ground. But two very strange thing I saw sir. I saw Hakim naked, shot dead naked sir. They shot him once in his arm and another bullet in his..."

"Ok. Ok." Yells Hadji Mazen. "What's the second strange thing? Talk before you die you coward."

Farhan pauses for a moment. Everyone around him has gotten quiet to hear what he wants to say.

"Sir. I remember beauties, girls I mean, we had come across throughout our Journey sir. We all have seen extremely beautiful and attractive girls and young women whom some of us had our ways with them and still bragged about it. Ayad spotted a female from far away before we reached the village. The way he described the girl whom he had seen as if heaven's gates have opened and an Angel has fallen down on the earth. He handed me his binocular to see what he had seen. Sir, I don't think I have, sorry, I don't think anyone has ever seen such a beautiful girl in his or her life. Ayad and I were both speechless after we saw her. Ayad ordered to open fire so she would stop running. She did stop. But we were ambushed before we had a chance to get close to her sir. I will give half of what's left of my life to spend an hour with her. Ya Allah sir. So beautiful. Yellow gold hair. I think she had

blue eyes..." "How old?" Asks Hadji Mazen, interested a lot. His eyes have bulged out hearing Farhan described her. Like how old was she?"

"I think around eighteen, nineteen or twenty maximum sirs. You'll not grow old with a girl that beautiful. Allah o Akbar." "We'll talk about the Angel you saw more later. How were you able to escape?"

"When I gained consciousness, I was in pain. I realized the vehicle had surprisingly landed on its four wheels. I pretended I was dead for a while until I saw the girl doing something on a guy's leg. I guess she was dressing his wound or something. I prayed to Allah to help me. I decided to start the vehicle. But I recited my deathbed prayers first. I started the vehicle. It did not start my first and second attempt. But with Allah's help, it did the third time. I used all what was left in me and drove away, thinking I got away. But again, I felt the same kick on my same right shoulder again. The guy got me on my damn shoulder again. Sir, it was impossible. I was way farther from his range when I glanced at the mirror. I went numb again for a moment, but with Allah watching over me, I escaped."

"Where's your truck now?"

"The truck has been badly damaged. It stopped around a kilometer or two away from here sir. I had to walk all the way back to you to report a group of guerrillas, military or armed factions. It was a miracle that the vehicle brought me that far. Nothing left of it sir."

Hadji Mazen has begun panting out of anger and rage. He is furious steaming, sweating and murmuring something. He is deciding what he has to do.

"Listen you all." Yells Hadji Mazen. "That's why the fuck I sent you guys for search and identification missions. Look what happened? We would have all ended like Farhan if we all had gone that direction without search and identification first."

Isis animals hum and nod meaning their commander is right. Hadji Mazen pauses for a few seconds, walking back and forth. "Omar, Damdam and some courageous Islam soldiers, get ready. Emad will stay back. Omar, Damdam and their team members take an armed pick-up truck each, arm yourself to teeth. We will head that way with three trucks. I'll teach you how to capture and behave each and every one of them. Throw Farhan at the back of a truck, so he would tell you the direction, address." Damdam gives a pity look at Farhan. He shakes his head and raises his right hand to attract Hadji Mazen's attention.

"Sir. Commander." Says Damdam. "Farhan does not look like he is going to make it. I guess he is dying."

"Where do you think his destination would be after death Damdam?" Asks Hadji Mazen. "He is going to join our beloved profit and Imams. He will be given a huge mansion with so many handmaidens and even more Heaven's angels, houries. Sexy and beautiful ones."

"But commander." Replies Damdam, laughing, trying to calm down Hadji Mazen, the ugly monster. He sounds like he has already seen his houri. The doll looking girl he has seen at the village.

"No... No... No." Replies Hadji Mazen, also laughing. "A houri that beautiful he described will be mine. So, watch no one touch her when we capture her, huh? I'm serious. I want, I must be her first in case she happens to be a virgin."

Damdam nods and all Isis hirelings around burst into laughter while Damdam and his subordinates throw Farhan at the back of the armed pick-up truck.

Sammy keeps on curiously glancing at the motor cross's fuel gauge while driving very fast to make sure the bike can still be useful and gets them somewhere, at least as safe as possible. It is a few minutes later when he notices the fuel gauge indicating the bike's fuel is about to end. So, he slows the bike down gradually.

"Are we stopping Mr. Sammy?" Asks Nelly. "Why do you want to stop? Didn't you say they'll come after us soon?"

"Yeah, I did miss Nelly." Replies Sammy, knowing how anxious and terrified she is from the tone of her voice. "We are far enough now first of all and the motorcycle is running out of fuel secondly. I need to refill the tank with whatever fuel has left in the spare fuel tank."

Nelly and Sammy get off the motorcycle. Sammy takes out the spare fuel tank from the rear side of the bike. He unscrews bike's original tank open. He opens spare fuel tank's cover and pours whatever fuel has left in it. He sits on the bike to start it again. But he changes his mind. He has a better idea. Sammy takes out the bike's second spare fuel tank too and throw it away along with the first one which has just become empty. Instead, he places and ties their two back-packs on at the rear of the bike where the spare fuel tanks

were installed initially. Their back-packs have become quite heavy because of the grenades, machine gun and its ammunition added to their contents. Sammy also does that because he has noticed Nelly has to have her hands on their back-packs opted preventing them to fall down. Especially when Sammy has to drive on paths with so many bumps and ups and downs.

Sammy sits on the bike again and starts it. Nelly does as Sammy told her before Sammy drives away. She places the loaded fully hunting rifle on the bike's seat between herself and Sammy. Sammy and Nelly go towards the north and can see Euphrates river from far and wild plants, bushes and canebrake that are at both sides of the river as long as one's eye can see.

Sammy begins slowing the motor cross down once again. "What again?" Asks Nelly, sounding annoyed already. "Fuel again?" "No miss Nelly." Replies Sammy, also getting annoyed with her, but controlling his temper tone. "Can I ask you to have more patience please. I need to focus. I'm slowing down because I have a plan and I need to share it with you. Why? Because I count on your help. Like we discussed even before we began our Journey."

Nelly keeps quiet and waits for Sammy to continue. Sammy stops the bike and asks Nelly to hand him over the blue and colorful bundle which the old man had given them back at the village before they drove off towards the north. Nelly opens her hunting khaki shirt's bottoms and gets the bundle out while Sammy looks away not to accidentally see her underwear, bra or something. Sammy places the bundle on the bike's seat, opens it and is pleased to see the food was wrapped inside a multi-layered orange cloth with flowers on a nice ultramarine blue background. So, he tears down half of the cloth bundle and wraps the food the old man has given them in the other half of the cloth. But he changes his mind again. He opens his back pack, takes the grenades as well as a plastic case out and puts the food in the case and pushes it back into his back pack. Nelly observes all what Sammy is doing. She has decided to keep her mouth shut and have patience, like Sammy has asked her earlier. Nelly sees Sammy places grenades on the colorful cloth, measures it in his mind and tears a piece of the cloth apart. He wraps the grenades into colorful and ties it. Sammy nods while looking satisfied, as if he has achieved what he had in mind.

"Well. Ok miss Nelly." Says Sammy, holding the grenade wrapped in a nice piece of colorful cloth. You should help me wrap all the grenades in the pieces of cloths I'm about to tear down for you based on what I've measured. But we need to be quick doing so and I don't think I need to explain why. Are you ready?"

Nelly nods and Sammy begins tearing the colorful bundle's cloth into specific sizes. Nelly, on the other hand, wraps each grenade inside the piece of the colorful cloth and lays them next to each other on the bike's seat. It does not take Sammy and Nelly more than three or four minutes to finish wrapping all their grenades inside the pieces of cloths.

"Ok. Now please pay close attention. It's very important thing I want you to understand first and do for me next." Says Sammy with a quite serious and concerned tone. "Open your shirt's bottoms again and store all wrapped grenades inside your shirt. Sit behind me like usual and I drive. Drop a wrapped grenade on the ground whenever I say "Now". Did you understand?" "Yes. Off course." Replies Nelly. "No worries. I got it." "Great. Thanks." Replies Sammy. He gets his final confirmation after she nods.

Sammy begins driving until he and Nelly reach Euphrates river bank. Sammy drives in parallel to the river, on the sandy area of it. He yells "Now" and Nelly drops one of the grenades on the sandy ground. Sammy yell "Now" every ten to fifteen yards and Nelly drops a wrapped grenade on the ground. This process continues until grenades finish. Nelly, who is extremely curious and hates not to know what their next plan is, is getting a bit uneasy. The sound of the bike's engine, the wind as well as river, are so loud Nelly has to yell.

"Where are we going now Mr. Sammy?" Asks Nelly, shouting. "What is the plan in case they come after us? Why don't you share what's happening in your mind? Why the hell did I have to wrap those grenades in the cloths and why did you ask me to drop them every now and then?"

"It's not if they come after us Miss Nelly. It's when they will. Please let me focus now and I promise I'll tell you everything and you'll get answers to all your questions in a few minutes. They'll appear any moment now and I need to think ahead. Please trust me. I know what I'm doing."

Moments later, Sammy and Nelly reach the point they can only see rocks and like broken pieces of stone on the path they are on instead of the sand they have travelled on. There is no road, and the path by the river bank has many bumps and humps that Sammy is really forced to slow down and drive quite carefully so he would not lose control of the bike, crushes down and probably hurts Nelly or both of them. With the bike slowing down, Sammy can talk without shouting as the engine sound has been reduced and made communication easier for him and Nelly.

"I intentionally drove on the sand back there, so those bastards can track us and the direction we are heading Miss Nelly. My intention is to drive the bike as long as there is fuel in it. Oh... I almost forgot to ask you. Can you swim? I mean do you know how to swim?"

"Of course, I can." Replies Nelly, tired and hungry, annoyed and agitated. "I know how to swim. Who does not? It's twenty first century."

"We are going, I mean we must leave the bike at the river bank and swim to the other side. Of course, we will keep on going until the bike is out of fuel. We should get to the other side of this river. Because Isis animals cannot get to the other side like us."

"What do you mean? Why can't they?"

"Because you and I are two individuals carrying only two back packs and two rifles. But they'll come after us, armed to their teeth now. We can get to the other side, because we move light. They can't, because they should get their motor crosses, armed pick-up trucks, probably tanks and all that. It's impossible for them to cross the river. This is a river with a deep end. Do not, please do not underestimate Euphrates's current power. The current would take you away if you are not careful or do not know how to swim. So, anyways, we'll leave the bike on the river bank where they can spot it easily. And that's what we want. We want them being able to track us and heir bike. These are all traps. Consider the bike is as a bate.

Nelly pauses staring at Sammy, confused. She has begun to doubt if Sammy is really out of his mind? What is this? She asks herself, questioning Sammy's sanity. He is going to let Isis killers get to find out the direction they are headed instead of staying hidden as much as they can... Does Sammy really want Isis to follow them? On a right direction? What does that mean? Nelly has begun worrying seriously, worrying

about Sammy's stupid strategy which is going to get her, both of them killed.

"Don't you think it is best to stay hidden, taking paths they would not even think of? You intentionally give them a damn clue where they can find us? Don't you think there's something wrong with your planning? Or strategy? This is stupid."

Nelly shakes her head with a sarcastic smile on her face and that pisses Sammy off.

"Other Isis groups and units will find us even if we keep ourselves hidden from the unit that is after us now. Other units will, Miss Nelly. We will leave the bike at the wrong side of the river bank. So, they'll look for us at the other side, the side the bike is, without putting an APB on us, attracting and leading every single unit towards us. While we have already crossed the river, heading north, they still look for us at the other side. I do not want them to feel the matter is so out of hands that they feel they need to get their other units involved. Besides, why are you questioning my strategy? Our deal is for me to get you to safety and you do as I said and when I said it. I promised to get you to safety and I will. Unharmed. And you have options. I gave you options what to do if it is proven wrong. So, please let me do my job and complete my mission. You cannot call a strategy stupid, unless you know a better one. And by the way, I can swim. I had to wade before you were sent to an instructor. My leg did not prevent me achieving anything Miss Nelly."

Nelly has now stopped her sarcastic smile. She and Sammy get quiet for a moment. Nelly is a bit angry at Sammy for thinking he is right all the time.

"And for your information Miss Nelly." Continues Sammy in a more serious tone. "I apologize for reminding you, those bastards shot my father dead years before they killed your parents and siblings, making me a fatherless orphan. I lost my idol, my best friend, my father and those Isis bastards are responsible for it. So, not everything is about you when it comes to fight them. Yes, I made a promise to you and I'm going to keep my vows one way or another. But I also think of revenge. Taking revenge for them killing both our mothers, fathers, and whomever we loved too. So, stop thinking I'm a limping idiot who does not know what he's doing and what he wants, made a vow to take you to safety, unharmed, and I think I've done well so far. So, I expect you to keep yours,

listening and doing all what I want from you. Not criticizing and underestimating my, my physical situation and decisions." Sammy clears his voice. He suddenly realizes he has been looking right into Nelly's eyes telling all those things to her while influenced by anger because of her sarcasm, vengeance, remembering his dad, mom, Nelly's parents, siblings, Amer, Sara, Hanieh, Robert, etc. He notices tears have formed and about to descend off her pretty eyes and on her silky white skin.

"You'll get everything, you'll see it with your own eyes in a few more minutes and you'll get the answers to your questions. Your doubts will go away. Let's get on the bike and go forward until we run out of petrol. Like I said, we will leave the bike and swim to the other side of the river. The current will take us a distance backwards, towards where we came, but at the other side of the river where you dropped the grenades. That's when the show begins. My show."

Sammy sits on the bike again, looks ahead and waits for Nelly to join him and sits behind him on the bike. Nelly has lowered, probably acting she is sorry. She takes a few slow steps, sits behind Sammy, keeps her rifle between her and Sammy and grabs him from behind like Sammy has instructed her in order to stay fixed to him and prevent falling down on the bumpy rocky path. Sammy drives slowly and steadily by the side of Euphrates. None of them speaks a word anymore. They ponder about different matters while heading north slowly.

The three-armed pick-up trucks are headed towards the village Farhan has told Hadji Mazen and others about. He has given the direction and has laid at the back of the truck motionless, but still alive. He has been bleeding so much his body cannot bear lack of that much blood.

Hadji Mazen's truck is moving ahead, while Damdam and Omar's move a few yards behind, each at one side of their commander's truck. Hadji Mazen can already see the village from far away. He uses his binocular to see things closer and if he can sense any threats.

An old man and two middle-aged women are pulling water up from village's only water well. He sees a younger nomad digging a grave or a hole. Hadji Mazen notices his trusted ringleader, Ayad, and the other Isis subordinates who were shot dead, are laid in order next to one another, and figures the digging nomad is actually digging them graves.



"How many did Farhan say those armed people were? Attacking Ayad and his team? Five? Six? Idiot. You are useless like always."

A shepherd leads his cattle of goats towards the village from the right side and he seems only five to six hundred yards away from the village. Another woman hangs her laundry on a rope outside a cottage while her two kids are playing around.

"They look like nomads from here." Says Hadji Mazen, talking over his walkie-talkie. "Open fire, but don't hit them yet. I want the fear inside them, so they'll talk. But we're still far from them. Open fire anyways."

The heavy machine guns installed at the back of each pick-up truck open fire a moment later, targeting those defenseless nomad's cottages and well. A bullet hits the well's stand, breaks it and the whole basic wooden structure collapses into the well. The woman grabs her children and pushes them inside her cottage. She leaves her laundry and runs inside, pushing her kids while covering them, standing between her kids and Isis brutal bullets like an iron shield. Goats run towards different directions in front of the shepherd's exhausted and confused eyes. The old man and the two middle aged women take shelter behind well's short wall. But the digging nomad is the only one who is actually not even bother machine-guns go off. He continues doing what he seems to have been doing for hours. A pregnant woman crawls out of another cottage, holding a hole on her stomach to stop it from bleeding. She thinks about the baby she carries, even getting shot. She yells and screams for help, not for someone to save her from bleeding to death, but for another more experienced midwife to save her baby. But no one has the courage to exit the cottages, considering the rain of bullets falling upon them. She loses consciousness before Hadji Mazen reaches the village, while he laughs at her for the position, she has fainted in.

Isis bullets have punched holes on the clothes hanging, on cottages' walls, doors and windows, etc. The old man who has given Sammy and Nelly a cloth bundle begins running towards his cottage from the well when the machine-guns stop firing at the village while Hadji Mazen, Damdam and Omar are laughing at the old man's motions, the way he runs.

Armed pick-up trucks reach the village. Everyone of Isis killers get out of the vehicles, except machine gun operators.

The first thing Hadji Mazen does, is he orders Isis soldiers to rummage all cottages and the whole village to find the extremely beautiful looking girl Farhan has told him about. He even orders some to look up the few trees near the village's well and between the tall bushes. Getting a very pretty young girl is the priority to him, despite his ringleaders and their subordinates being killed and having a serious mission to complete ordered by his boss. Hadji Mazen lights a cigarette and hopefully waits for his people to find and bring him his prize. But he has almost finished his cigarette when he is informed, they have found no such a girl in the village and areas around. They push three normal looking girls out of their cottages and tells him those are the best-looking females amongst nomads. All nomads have been pulled out of their cottages. They look terrified shaking. Disappointed and furious, Hadji Mazen asks from a nine-year-old boy who is amongst the nomads gathered out. Hadji Mazen takes his dagger off his belt, lifts the poor boy and hits him on the ground. He kneels next to the boy while the boy's mother pleads for mercy. Hadji Mazen's position next to the kid is exactly like a Muslim who is about to slaughter a sheep, like they do in Islamic rituals. Not being able to bare what is about to happen to her son, mother of the boy runs towards her boy, but she is stopped by two Isis monster looking guys.

"We've come here today, looking for an alibi to behead a few people." Says Hadji Mazen, yelling, shouting and addressing nomad villagers. Who's head though? Traitor's heads. Traitors of the caliphate. I'm going to start with the children today in particular. We move up to older and older until it's time for the elderly. Unless, yeah, unless someone, one of you, tell us where are those soldiers who shot my people?"

Hadji Mazen poses as though he is going to see the boy's head while he screams for his mom. The blade even slashes poor boy's neck skin slightly. The boy's mother screams, swearing there were no soldiers involved. She shouts saying she has personally witnessed the whole event and swears there is no soldiers involved in killing his men. The boy's mother is the only one talking. All others are quiet, like they've made a vow of silence. They all hate Isis and their beliefs. So, no one is going to provide them with any info leading them to the nice boy and the girl who have protected their village and nomads from the previous unit that showed up earlier that morning and Hadji Mazen to have figured that out. Hadji Mazen asks the two Isis soldiers to let the woman get close to him.

The woman walks towards the evil man shaking, so she might be able to save her petrified son. She appears she is ready to do anything, anything at all Hadji Mazen asks to save her son's life.

"There were no soldiers my master." Pleads the mother. "It was a limp man; I mean young man in his early twenties and there was a girl. I swear to Allah."

The woman continues while pointing her finger at the hill, "The limp boy has taken position on the shorter hill down there. They took your men's motorcycle and took off. I swear it is all truth. Please give me back my boy my master. I told you all I saw. I swear to great Allah."

The woman bursts into tears louder and louder again, calling his son, promising him everything is going to be fine in a short bit.

Hadji Mazen releases the kid. He gets up and grabs the mother from her hair.

"Come and show me where did that limp boy shot my men from exactly. Where? Which lower hill? Huh?"

Hadji Mazen pushes the woman, demanding her to show him the spot Sammy and Nelly had camped the night before. The woman walks ahead and Hadji Mazen follows her along with a few of his soldiers, Omar and Damdam, his trusted ringleaders. The terrified woman leads the monster and others to the place between the two hills and shows them where she has seen a girl and a limping boy have camped quietly the night before. Hadji Mazen checks the area and sees two empty canned beans, and a plastic case, foot prints, etc. He walks around for a moment and sees a few bullets' shells. He picks some up and compares them.

"So, they were only two, huh?" Whispers Hadji Mazen, talking to himself quite frantic.

"Yes sir." Replies the frightened woman, thinking Hadji Mazen is asking her the question. "I swear to Allah, this is all what..."

"Ok. Shot up and answer me." Continues Hadji Mazen, interrupting the woman. "Tell me about the girl now. Only the girl. Did you see her from a short distance?"

The woman smiles despite being so scared, pauses for a moment and replies saying:

"The girl? She did not look like a girl from this universe sir. She was so beautiful that even me myself could not take my eyes off her sir, and I am a woman, not a man. After the

guy took your friends' motorcycle, she sat at the back of the guy. I saw her when..."

The woman is about to leak, reveals the fact that the old man has given Nelly and Sammy a food bundle after waving at them to stop. So, the woman pauses for a moment, pretends she has to clear her throat and continues talking:

"Yes sir, I was saying. I saw her for a quick moment, a second or two at the most, while they drove away crossing our village road. Her beauty was not of some beauty from this globe sir. She looked heavenly."

"Ok. Ok I got it." Says Hadji Mazen angrily. "So, there were no soldiers, armed factions, military, etc. The whole mortifying act, killing my ringleader and his subordinates was done all by a young limping man."

The woman nods, hoping the demon would let her be.

"Only two." Whispers the monster again while walking back towards the village with others. "A paralyzed man and a very pretty girl. I have no doubt those two killers were chosen from sniper commandos for this mission in particular."

Hadji Mazen continues yelling, so everyone of his crew would hear him. "Get me that idiot Farhan now."

Four Isis soldiers pull Farhan's motionless body out of the back of the armed pick-up truck and release him on the ground in front of the commander.

"So, Mr. Farhan." Asks Hadji Mazen in a sarcastic tone while he looks Farhan into his eyes. "Some few fully armed army or faction followers attacked poor Ayad's unit and assassinated each and every one except you of course, who was lucky enough to get away, huh? Is that what you said? Ha?"

Hadji Mazen, who has bent looking into Farhan's eyes so far, stands straight, scratches his head.

"Who is a liar?" Yells Hadji Mazen, asking every Isis around him. "I mean to define me a liar. Whose enemy is a lair in our holly religion?"

"Holy profit and Allah himself." Yells every Isis member univocally.

"And what would a Muslim liar's fate should be as per our holly Islam's instructions?" Asks Hadji Mazen again, while he takes out his dagger, lifting it up.

"Extinction." Yells everyone univocally again.

Two Isis soldiers help Farhan up. Hadji Mazen walks behind him and grabs him from his hair.

"Allah o Akbar." Yells everyone. "Allah o Akbar."

"Do you have any last word?" Asks the commander.

"Water." Replies Farhan. "Cold water please."

Hadji Mazen pulls his hair towards himself and inserts his dagger to the thirsty comrade's throat. Farhan's blood does not surprisingly splash out. He has been bleeding off his two very close bullet wounds and there probably is not much blood left in his veins. Farhan dies within seconds, while his comrades express how pleased they are, by cheering and calling for their God, telling him how fair and great he is.

The next act of Hadji Mazen is to push the poor woman forward again, asking her to show him the part where Nelly and Sammy took escaping that scene using the motor cross. The woman walks for ten to twenty yards before she points at the tire marks the bike has left on the ground. Hadji Mazen pauses and follows motor cross's tire marks on the sand for as long as he can see. He looks very angry and agitated. He keeps on whispering something, talking to himself and nodding. He calls Omar and Damdam. They run towards him.

"Take your people with you, take all arms and ammunition you need and follow this tire marks on the ground, find the paralyzed guy and the girl, and bring them both to me, unharmed. Specially the girl. Remember, I said I want the girl untouched and unharmed. We've lost so many of our good comrades, simply because of the incapability's of the people I put in charge. Oh, Ya Allah. Imagine. Only a guy, a limp guy and an Angel looking girl? We will certainly be laughed at by whomever finds out who or how many soldiers were involved in killing our brothers, Ayad and his crew. Go to get the soldiers, and get me the girl without touching her." "Yes commander." Replies Omar and Damdam univocally. They go to prepare, getting to follow the limp guy and capture him and the Angel looking girl.

The shepherd, whose goats have run to different directions after machine guns opened fire, has gathered the goats all, having difficult time doing so. He has brought his cattle towards the barn from a different road and is trying to fit them all inside the barn. Hadji Mazen sees the poor shepherd and waves at him, having a satanic smile.

"Omar. Damdam." Yells Hadji Mazen. "Come back to this village after capturing the guy and the girl. Take six or seven goats, load them at the back of your trucks and bring with you along with the limp guy and the girl. So, we will have a nice goat meat kebab all of us."

Omar and Damdam nod happily while preparing to leave for their mission.

"I'm not coming along with you. There's no need for us all to leave the base. Go and look for two tiny people. I'm sure you can handle it. But we'll be in touch though via our wireless. Go and get those snipers."

Hadji Mazen addresses nomad villagers.

"And about you stupid nomads. Why did no one tell me what you'd seen first when I ask? Huh? Why is every one of you shit people quiet? Now, I'll teach you how to deal with the next Isis unit you come across."

He lifts his hand.

"Machine-gun operators." Yells the monster. "Unleash hell on my command. Show them how hell does look like."

Simple minded nomads look clueless. They have no idea what Hadji Mazen means by what he said. Until they see heavy machine-guns point at them. Machine gun operators load their guns and villagers begin running to different directions when they hear the threatening sound of guns getting ready to fire. Some of them know what loading machine-guns means. They shout asking everyone to take shelter. A gun fire sound makes Isis animals surprised before their commander orders them to fire. Everyone looks confused until they see Asad, Hadji Mazen's driver, yells for help. A hunting shot-gun has made a huge bullet wound on his chest. Everyone hear a gun reloading and they see an old man reloading a shot-gun. He is the same old man who gave Sammy a cloth bundle before they left the village. The old man reloads, but he is shot on the head by Hadji Mazen, who is closer to him, before he has a chance to shoot Hadji Mazen as he is next after his driver, Asad. Hadji Mazen, angry and furious, orders fire and machine-guns goes off, shooting everything and everyone they see.

Hadji Mazen goes to Asad's body, takes the car keys out of his trousers' pocket, takes a seat behind the wheel, ignites the truck and heads back towards cellar storage facilities immediately while killing innocent defenseless nomad villagers. Mean and in honorable, Isis unit does not stop shooting at the village for several minutes until they see no movement or sound coming from the village whatsoever.

The motor cross carrying Sammy and Nelly stops running suddenly. That indicates a fuel issue. They have finally run out of petrol. Sammy asks Nelly to get off the bike. This is the first sentence spoken by any of them since a few minutes back when they had an argument. Sammy gets off the bike himself, takes out back-packs, rifles and whatever belonged to them before he pushes the bike lay on the ground.

"Please walk only on the rocky, stony ground." Asks Sammy. "We don't want to leave any foot print so they would realize we have crossed the river. Also open your back-pack and take out all those plastic cases. All of them."

Sammy does first himself whatever he asks Nelly to do. He wants her to learn also to know she is not the only one who has to do it probably. So, they both take out all useable plastic cases.

"Now I want you to put all food stuff and any other thing that should not get wet inside plastic cases and tie the opening tight. I want us to pack everything in the plastic cases and make them waterproof. We'll place waterproof cases back inside our back-packs."

Nelly looks at how Sammy does it and follows his instructions exactly. Sammy transfers some of the heavy stuff which Nelly is carrying inside his own pack and tells Nelly he does that because he wants Nelly's pack to be lighter while crossing the Euphrates. Sammy shows her how to keep her rifle up while crossing the river to prevent water to penetrate the rifle's different parts.

"There's a depth of between ten to forty-five meters in the river and I have no idea what the depth of the river is on the spot we are going to cross. So, do not put yourself in danger of drowning, particularly because I asked you not to let the water gets into your rifle. What matters most to me is you get to the other side in one piece."

They are prepared to cross the river seconds later. The river's width at that particular spot does not exceed two to three hundred yards. Sammy checks around, turning his head to different directions one last time. They are ahead of the Isis criminals by around thirty to forty minutes. Sammy focuses all his attention towards Nelly after he makes sure there is no one around.

"Ok now. Let's set certain rules before we proceed." Says Sammy in a kind, but serious tone. "Keep your rifle far as long as you can cross easily. But let it go if you feel it's pulling you down the deep with it. Like I said earlier, getting to the other side safe is my objective. Do not panic and do not start paddling in case you happen to experience muscle cramps in the water. The current is going to take us back towards the place we came from and that's exactly what we need. So, don't let this factor bother you. Do not feel shy to ask for help. I'll be right next to you and I'm not going to let anything happen to you, even if it takes me giving up all what I'm carrying. Clear?"

Nelly nods, but she seems anxious. She is staring at Sammy when she notices he turns pale suddenly. Sammy has a smile on his face. He cannot believe what he can see. Confused and worried, Nelly looks behind herself to see what Sammy is staring at. Sammy has seen an inflatable little boat two-three hundred yards away, stopped at the river bank. They both stand up and run towards the boat. Nelly is so excited that she has forgotten to carry her back-pack and rifle. So, Sammy has to carry everything and run, considering problem he has with his left leg. Nelly reaches the boat first obviously. But she suddenly screams as soon as she reaches the boat and takes a few steps back. Sammy throws their back-packs and rifles on the ground. He continues walking to the boat quickly to find out what has scared Nelly that much? Sammy cannot see any foot prints around the boat. The air in the boat is not full. It seems half aired. Sammy sees a leg inside, on the edge of the boat, tied to a blue rope, while the man's rest of body is still inside the water. The body is not floating on the water. It looks as though something is pulling the man's head and the rest of his body deep into the water. Sammy asks Nelly to look away and take a sit. He knows they have no time to figure out what has pulled the man deep in the water. So, he opens the tie on the blue rope and releases the dead guy's leg. The whole of the dead man's body is like sucked into the water as soon as Sammy releases his leg.

Sammy asks Nelly now to help him. They take their back-packs, rifles and everything else they have decided to leave because of weight or other reasons and lay them all inside the boat. There is only a wooden paddle laid on the river bank yards away. Sammy goes and grabs it quickly. He helps Nelly get on the boat. Nelly is quiet, looking up. She sits on the boat carefully. The only thing making her happy about the boat, is the fact that she does not have to swim. The boat's shape



changes a bit after they get in and sit on it. Sammy and Nelly notice it well.

"This boat lacks air Miss Nelly." Says Sammy. "It's our safest chance to get to the other side of the river safely. So, please do not move at all, especially when we are at the middle of the river. Because we, along with all of our things, will be falling into the water in case we move and the boat rolls over. You know what? Stretch your legs and hold boats edges, keep still for a few minutes."

Nelly distributes her weight throughout half of the boat by stretching her legs like Sammy asked her to. Sammy pushes the boat and it finally gets afloat on the river's water. He crawls into the boat himself carefully. He distributes his own weight at the Nelly's opposite side and begins paddling. Nelly is quite scared of water. She tells Sammy she is scared despite she knows well how to swim. She says she has never tried even swimming in a river that big in length and depth.

Sammy paddles once at each side of the boat and the current takes them back while Sammy pushes to go forward. It is around ten to fifteen yards left for the boat to reach the river bank at the other side when both Sammy and Nelly hear a strange noise, lose control and both fall inside the river. But Nelly is very careful. She does all she can to keep their things afloat on the boat. Nelly who is holding boat's one edge suddenly let go of the boat by a single mistake and gets separated from the boat. That's when she begins shouting Sammy's name. Sammy hears Nelly calling for him while he is at the other side of the boat and cannot see what happened to her as pack-packs have blocked his view. Sammy reaches for the blue rope, grabs it and throws it towards her as hard as he can. Paddling hard to swim against river's current, Nelly has swallowed a few sips of river's water. But she is able to get a hold of the blue rope. Sammy keeps on pushing the boat while watching over Nelly. They finally makes it to the other side of the river unharmed and Sammy is quite pleased. Despite his bad leg, Sammy returns to the river after he pulls the boat on the river bank and helps Nelly, grabs her out to the shore. Luckily, none of their things has gotten wet or destroyed. Nelly is coughing. She has bent and taken a vomiting position.

"Why are you trying to puke?" Asks Sammy wondering.

"I don't want dead body water in my stomach." Replies Nelly. She gets very angry after she notices Sammy smiles.

"I would not drink dead body water contaminated. You should have thrown me the damn rope faster as soon as I called for you. Now you laugh at me? Making fun of me? Does this shit look funny to you?"

Sammy stares at Nelly's eyes, just listening and thinking Nelly is even beautiful when she is mad, sad, angry, etc.

"Are you done?" Asks Sammy quite calmly and chilled. "Are you done yelling at me I mean?"

"Yes. I guess. Why?" Asks Nelly.

"It's a river genius." Replies Sammy with the same calm tone.

"The water has current. I drink this water right after you pour some poison in it and nothing's going to happen to me. The guy's dead five hundred yards away. Besides, why did you even have to let go of the damn boat?"

Nelly begins screaming at him, using any excuse she can think of, while Sammy still stares into her eyes and enjoys her beauty. Sammy lifts his rifle and uses its scope to scan around and see if he can see anyone? He sees a cloud of dust has arisen somewhere far away and he is sure it is the Isis people coming after them. Sammy has no doubt it is Isis chasing them and are soon going to come across his prints on the sands and are going to do exactly as he wants them to. Nelly notices Sammy after he checked the area using his rifle's scope. She is getting to know Sammy's facial expressions. She also looks at the point Sammy has been looking for a while, but she cannot see what Sammy can with an unarmed eye.

Sammy asks Nelly to take a knife and punch a hole on the boat immediately and push it back to the river, so the river's current would take it away. Nelly runs towards the boat after she takes out a Swiss army knife. But she is not able to punch a hole on the boat. It is too thick for Nelly to be able to punch it the way Sammy wants her to. She gets so mad at herself that she kicks the boat. The boat goes back a bit and current takes it away slowly.

"Whoops. Sorry." Says Nelly, making an innocent child like gesture.

Looking at what Nelly did; Sammy shakes his head and asks Nelly to take all her things and follow him. They take their back-packs, rifles and any other remaining stuff they had with them. Sammy walks ahead while Nelly follows her. He finds a spot between canebrakes and tells Nelly it is the best spot for them to hide at. From what Sammy sees in his rifle's

scope, he can say the Isis units coming for them are still around fifteen to twenty minutes away, considering there is no real road and the fact that they have to drive on desert sands and on rocky-stony paths after that. Sammy has Nelly lay down on the plants and vegetations by the river bank, between canebrakes, and asks her to pay a very close attention to what he is about to tell her. He teaches her how to use the machine-gun he has taken from the Isis whom he had shot near the village briefly and tells her to shoot at Isis when she hears him whistling.

Nelly is quite anxious. Her hands shake and she is afraid she is not going to be able to pull herself together and does as Sammy wanted her to do on time when he wants her to do it. But Sammy takes his own rifle to go and take position elsewhere, so he would perform the tactic he has planned ahead. But Nelly pulls his trousers' leg, begging him not to leave her alone and go. Sammy is next to her. She is still laid on the grass between canebrakes. He tells her that he has a plan and he cannot execute it from the Angel Nelly is at. He explains he has to go to a certain point at which he is able to shoot all the enemy down, destroying them. He also explains the Isis may use rifle grenades if they find where Sammy is shooting them from and they both are going to die if that happens. Sammy's intention is to completely confuse the Isis animals, making them wonder where his bullets are actually coming from. He reminds Nelly she has to pull the machine gun's trigger as soon as she hears his whistle. He comforts Nelly, gives her positive energy telling her his strategy depends on her. Feeling she has something important to do, Nelly agrees to stay alone and does as Sammy asked. Sammy asks her one last time to show him how to operate the machine gun and Nelly does so good showing him.

Sammy changes position after waving at Nelly. He takes position, almost opposite to where he had asked Nelly to drop blue-pink cloths wrapping grenades. He sneaks between some river bank vegetations too. He pulls his rifle in front of him and adjusts its position. He closes his eyes and asks his father and mother's soul to help him execute his tactic exactly the way he has planned for.

Nelly can also see Omar and Damdam's armed pick-up trucks approaching a few minutes later. She can see the vehicles and dust that they have raised behind them driving in the desert with unarmed eyes.

Damdam raises his binocular and holds in front of his eyes. He looks around quite carefully to check if he can see any commando snipers like they have imagined. Damdam and Omar's truck moves with a distance of around fifty yards. Damdam suddenly notices something immobile laid on the river bank. He can figure it is one of their motor crosses the villager nomad woman has told them the limp guy stole, used to get away along with a pretty girl.

Hiding between canebrake on the river bank alone, while Sammy has taken position yards away from her thinking of the next move, Nelly is quite worried and confounded waiting for Sammy to whistle. She is anguished that she might mess things up and ruins Sammy's plan which by the way she has no idea what it is exactly. She can guess only something, but she is not sure. All what she knows is that she has to do exactly as Sammy said if she wants to get to safety.

Sammy has no time to explain to Nelly what his plan or strategy is to get rid of the Isis unit coming after them. Sammy is practicing his breathing, calming the blood cycle down in his body and veins, getting ready for the Isis armed pick-up trucks to arrive and reach the point he is hoping they would. He holds his breath after inhaling and exhaling slowly, while he has one eye looking into his rifle's scope all the time, witnessing the Isis armed pick-up trucks getting closer and closer until Damdam's armed pick-up truck, which is moving ahead of Omar's, drives over the first grenade he had asked Nelly to drop after wrapping it in the colorful blue-pink cloth earlier. Sammy pauses thinking the second Isis pick-up truck is going to make a U-turn and gets away if he hits the first grenade. His intention is to wait until Isis trucks to pass over at least three grenades before he begins doing what he intends, executes his plan. He does not want any Isis member, being cavalry or infantry, to be able to get away from his attack. He wants all Isis are trapped at a point in which they have no other way but to remain where he wants.

Damdam's armed truck passes over the second and the third grenade too. Omar's truck has gotten closer to Damdam's. The trucks have something like fifteen to twenty yards away from each other now. A few yards farther, Nelly has begun shaking, thinking something has gone terribly wrong and that is in fact the reason why Sammy is not taking a shot.

"Please Sammy." Whispers Nelly with a shaky voice. "Take your shot Sammy. Please. Oh, Jesus help us."

Sammy who has been holding his breath, targets the fourth grenade and takes his shot, exactly as Damdam's pick-up truck reaches the fourth grenade and is passing over it. The bullet hits the grenade's body in a blink of an eye after Sammy pulls the trigger. The grenade explodes after Sammy's bullet hits it and explodes Damdam's truck as well, tearing, fragmenting it into flying pieces flying to different directions after they pass all the fire and smoke. Damdam's machine gun operator and his assistant who were at the back of Damdam's truck get tossed out yards away from the truck after the explosion. One of the main machine-gun's operator's body has been cut into half. His body's lower half is still burning in the flames because of the amount of petrol poured on it after the explosion. Sammy looks around with his rifle's scope, but he finds no sign of the machine-gun operator's assistant. Damdam's driver is killed on spot. His body is burning along with his remaining of the truck which he was driving a minute ago. Sammy sees a movement in Damdam's truck. He lifts his rifle and gets the scope in front of his eyes to see clearer. He is astonished to see Damdam is whispering something while soaked in his blood and despite severe burns he has on his face and upper body. Sammy focuses his attention back at Omar's truck.

Sammy points his rifle's barrel towards the second grenade immediately and sees his calculations are correct. Omar's pick-up truck has now stopped right over the second grenade. He wants to take a shot when he sees the Isis man, who has seated next to the driver, opens his door and jumps out, confused and scared, and looks around. Omar jumping of the truck, confuses Sammy for a moment, thinking whether to target the grenade or the Isis man, who appears to have a higher rank compared to the other normal Isis animals he has shot dead before that.

Omar is under the impression for a second that Damdam's truck has exploded crossing over a land mine. He wants to run towards Damdam's burning truck and help his comrades, but he changes his mind, thinking there is no guarantee that is the only land mine at around that area.

Omar begins walking towards Damdam's truck slowly, cautiously and reluctantly while holding a fire extinguisher and while Sammy watches every step he takes and every move he makes.

Omar pauses for a second. He turns his head back towards his truck, driver and machine gun operators.

"Don't move the car." Yells Omar. "I think the mother fuckers planted more land mines. Stay in the car. I'll check our brothers and come back to you. Only Sammy realizes what Omar thinks about what caused his comrades truck to explode. Omar's driver is laid on the seat, hiding. His two machine gun operators lay at the back of the truck too and think they have taken shelter. Omar turns his head back and continues walking towards Damdam's truck, so he may be able to distinguish the fire and save his comrades. Sammy allows him to get closer to Damdam's truck, knowing Omar is not going anywhere. He has ordered his driver and machine-gun operator not to move as he thinks Damdam and his soldiers are in that miserable situation as a result of driving over a land mine.

Omar does not get so close to Damdam's burning truck. He probably thinks there is a possibility for the truck to explode again. He lays down on the rocky ground and figures the fire's origin is produced from beneath the truck. So, he distinguishes the fire. Even Sammy and Nelly can now hear Damdam moaning and crying. Nelly has calmed down after she saw what Sammy did and what his strategy was to begin with. Omar hears Damdam crying and moaning.

"I know brother." Yells Omar before cautiously heading back to his own truck. "I'll ask for help now. Just hang in there. Allah will be with you brother. Recite your deathbed prayers."

Omar turns back and walks slowly towards his own truck and people. That's when Sammy sees three grenades are attached to Omar's military belt along with spare magazines, dagger and some other stuff with which Sammy is not familiar. Sammy has Omar's every move in his scope. He targets Omar's grenades attached to his belt. His rifle's barrel moves up and down slightly, moving with Omar's body movement while walking. Sammy remembers his father suddenly for a strange reason. He begins remembering the last time he has seen his dad.

"Give my regards to my dad." Whispers Sammy while releasing his breath.

He pulls the trigger. His bullet wheezes towards Omar, hits the grenades attached to his army belt and he turns into powder made of blood. Omar's belt grenades detonates and turn him into fragments of flesh. Omar's remaining fleshes are

scattered around. A piece of his flesh hits his armed pick-up truck's windshield. His machine-gun operators and the driver have no gut to raise their heads and look at what has happened to their team leader's body. Damdam is the only one who witnesses how Emad met his maker\_as his front shade is down and he can see in the mirror what happened. Sammy notices Damdam's machine-gun operator's assistant whom he was not able to spot earlier after Damdam's truck turned into pieces, jumps out of a big river bank bush and runs towards his team leader, probably to save him. That's when Sammy whistles, signaling to Nelly to shoot the guy down. He knows the guy would have realized his position and location and would have informed the other truck's machine-gun operators and they would have shot him without hesitation. But Nelly has begun shaking after she gets Sammy's signal. Her hands have begun shaking. She forgets all about what Sammy taught her earlier about how to operate the machine-gun.

Nelly begins crying, cursing at herself for being such a miserable coward. Sammy, unaware of Nelly's mental estate, whistles again while the Isis guy looks at the other side of the river to check if he can see where the whistling sound comes from while Nelly cries quietly trembling. Damdam uses all he has in him in the meanwhile to contact his commander, Hadji Mazen to say goodbye to him after giving him a quick report.

"Hadji come in." Says Damdam, coughing and moaning.  
 "Yes Damdam. Commander here. Over." Replies Hadji Mazen.  
 "I... I mean Ya Hadji Mazen. Omar flew to heaven. I'm almost getting there."

Sammy has focused his attention at shooting the machine-gun operator's assistant who has almost made it to Damdam for saving him. The Isis bastard is only yards away from reaching Damdam's destroyed truck when Sammy targets and shoots him on his testicles. The animal falls on the ground. Sammy tries focusing back on Damdam, he does and takes a shot. But his rifle jammed. Hadji Mazen is pissed off of what Damdam is telling him.

"Stop talking like gays and tell me where the fuck are you?" Yells Hadji Mazen.  
 "It doesn't matter anymore sir." Replies Damdam losing his voice. "We are by Euphrates. Sir, all of us are dying exactly the way we killed back in Sinjar and how we killed Yazidis."  
 "Shot up and tell me what was the gun shot I heard before you die."

"It was Sameer getting shot sir. I'm going to see prophet, Imams, hurries."

"Who shot Sameer?"

"They're invisible."

That's when Sameer begins yelling after Sammy shot him.

"Sir. Damdam, sir. "I see him. It's that one guy only."

Hadji Mazen hears Sameer and begins yelling that a paralyzed guy killed all my trusted men?

"Asks for forgiveness sir."

Damdams presses his walkie-talkie button harder for Hadji Mazen to hear him. He gets the walkie-talkie closer to his ear to hear what his commander replies as there was an interruption in their communication. But Sammy is able to fix his rifle already. Damdam hears a faint pop sound.

Sammy's bullet hits Damdam's walkie-talkie right at the middle, punches a hole in it, crosses the device, hits Damdam on the ear and exits his other side of head.

Hadji Mazen keeps on yelling hello, aloo, but he throws his wireless communication device after realizing Damdam is shot while talking to him.

"Bastards." Yells Hadji Mazen furiously. "I'll kill you one legged shit and fuck your girl, whoever she is, ten times every day from all holes in her body."

He yells calling Samad his last trusted ringleader alive and orders him to get everyone and every equipment they have ready as they are going to head north via Euphrates.

Sameer has gone mad. He loses his mind after he sees what happened to Damdam, his cousin who happened to be his boss too. Sameer begins screaming at his now ripped of penis. He grabs fists of sand and rock, throws them up and yells:

"Yeah. I can't have wedding. No more houri. No more bride."

He gets quiet for a moment crying. Sammy can easily shoot and release him of his misery. But no. He wants Nelly and himself to see every single Isis member suffer as much as possible.

Nelly has stopped crying already. She is speechless, witnessing how precise and accurate Sammy is in targeting Isis down. Even she enjoys seeing that Sameer guy is suffering in pain. She has also remembered her rape attempt and begins to smile seeing Sameer shot in penis crying and acting crazy.



She has also remembered her parents and the brutal way they have gotten killed. She is deep into her thoughts when she is startled by Samir's voice yelling at Omar's subordinates.

"Stop hiding you cowards. Shoot them. There. Exactly opposite your truck at the other side of the fucking river. Heaven awaits you. Prophet, hurries, all await you. Kill them. Stop being such pussies. You chicken shits."

Sammy is quite angry at Nelly for not shooting Sameer when she was signaled. He is about to lose his mind thinking she cannot even complete a simple task. He suddenly remembers there are still three Isis murderers alive, hiding at Omar's truck. He looks for the grenade under Omar's truck, using his rifle's scope. But he can't amazingly spot the grenade, unaware of the fact that Omar's explosion impact has moved the grenade a bit backwards out of Sammy's sight. Sammy is going mad thinking Omar's people have somehow picked the grenade and threw it away. Sammy keeps on searching for the grenade even around Omar's truck when he suddenly notices the tip of the ultramarine blue cloth in which the grenade is wrapped. He realizes there is no way for him to target the grenade from the Angel he has been laying. He has to change his position if he wants to target the grenade.

What concerns Sammy also is that he is afraid Nelly makes a wrong unpredictable move out of lack of self-confidence, fear or any other reasons he is not aware of. Like the same morning when she went to the well to take water without informing him...

Sammy has no choice, but to change his position. He notices river bank's vegetations and canebrakes are not too tall for him to stand-up and change his position without getting easily noticed. So, he figures crawling is his best way to change position. He faces another challenge when he looks more carefully at the path, he has decided to take in order to change his position. There is a revealed area on his way which clearly exposes him to Isis members alive. Sammy has decided to crawl towards Nelly, makes sure she is alright, targets the grenade under Omar's truck, shoots it and sends them all to hell at once. He has no choice but to take that risk and he knows it. Sammy decides to end Sameer's life before moving with the aim of changing his position. He can be yelling and giving others heads up. But the element of surprise matters a lot. So, he targets Sameer and cuts his skull into half by a single bullet. He hears other Isis cowards hiding in Omar's

truck calling his name and asking what happened and if he is okay. Sameer's body does not fall on the ground after Sammy shot him on his head. He is still sitting on his knees even after his skull is divided into two bloody nasty pieces.

Sammy begins crawling towards Nelly after he hangs his rifle on his shoulder, and loads his rifle quickly and quietly. He looks towards Omar's truck every three yards he advances. Omar's driver, on the other hand, takes his smart-phone, spans it to different directions slowly so he would watch it quietly and find out what is happening out there. Sammy crawls slowly, but his body hits and moves river bank's vegetations and canebrakes anyways, and that is what Omar's driver notices while watching the clip he has recorded using his smart-phone. Movements. There is a little glass at the back of the driver on each pick-up truck which opens to the back loading side. The same applies to Omar's pick-up truck. So, while laying down on the truck's front seats, the driver pulls the back glass open slowly and quietly and tells his machine-gun operator comrade and his assistant about the movement he has discovered at the other side of the river and tells them to be ready to stand up and shoot the guy as soon as he films, watches the clip and makes sure he is not in an attack position. The machine-gun operator obeys and Talib has to agree as they know they are going to end up like any of their other comrades. One of the machine-gun operators who has become terrified of what may happen to him is so thirsty that he chooses not to talk in order to keep his thirst level under control. He responds only by nodding and hand gestures.

Sammy has almost reached the revealed point of canebrakes when Omar's driver, Bilal, films him and yells now after he watches the clip and sees Sammy in a valuable position.

Bilal is right. Sammy has reached a few yards on which there are no vegetations or canebrakes on the river bank.

"Where's he exactly?" Asks Obaid, whispering excitedly as if hope has come back to penetrate their souls.

"At the other side of the river." Replies Bilal also whispering hurriedly. "Faster before he gets away. Look at where there are no plants. You can see him like he's waving at you. Faster."

Obaid, the main machine gun operator and Talib, his assistant, look at one another.

"One, two, three." yells Obaid and Talib. "Allah o Akbar."

They jump up. Obaid takes position behind the heavy machine-gun while Talib, his assistant, holds a bandoleer, ready to reload. Obaid points his 95 caliber anti-truck machine-gun's barrel at Sammy and pulls the trigger yelling. That's when Sammy hears Nelly screams his name. He hears the loud defining machine-gun going off and sees the bullets hit the ground and rocky land around him. Sammy is scared after witnessing how stone and dirt fragments hit him in his hands, legs, face, etc. He tries to crawl faster. But he has a bad leg and that causes him to speed up only to a certain pace.

Nelly has dropped the booty machine-gun Sammy has given her. She can see Sammy from between the long straws, turns towards him as slowly as possible while she is crying quietly.

"Faster Sammy." Whispers Nelly crying. "Come on. For God sake. Move. Oh shit. I ask you Jesus Christ, please help him. Oh, dear lord. Faster, come on please. She draws a cross on her chest, wipes her face, closes her eyes and says:  
"Lord. Our father, please help him get back to me safely."

Sammy is very close to entering the canebrake covered area of the river bank and gets himself hidden, when he feels a kick on his right leg. He has no doubt he has been shot, but that cannot stop him from taking shelter and staying hidden before he loses his life. He tries to crawl faster. Nelly also moves towards Sammy a bit, so she would help, pull him inside the covered, unrevealed area. Sammy sees Nelly suddenly. Nelly starts her hand for Sammy to hold and pull him. But a bullet hits a piece of rock near Sammy's face and a crack or rock fragment hits Sammy on his right eyebrow. Nelly is panicked and moves back a bit, thinking he has been shot. Nelly goes into shock, stops crying. She stares at Sammy's face, on which blood drops and are rolling down from.

Sammy makes it to the bushed unrevealed area exactly when the machine-gun runs out of bullets and needs reloading. Sammy shakes Nelly and tells her to change her position slowly, as Isis machine gun operators can reload and start shooting again, guessing their approximate position, while wiping his blood from his face with his sleeve.

Sammy and Nelly can hear Obaid and Talib trying to reload. He changes his mind. So, he asks Nelly to change position while

he only thinks of targeting the grenade under the armed pick-up truck. So, he takes his rifle off his shoulder and takes targeting position. But he is laid as Obaid and Talib have reloaded and begun shooting into river bank's bushes and canebrakes where they guess Sammy might be hiding. That is what Sammy is exactly worried about. He wants to send them to hell by shooting at the grenade, even before they do reload. Sammy has no choice but to ignore bullets hitting close and far. He sees the grenade finally from his scope, targets it after holding his breath and takes his shot right after exhaling. The bullet hits the grenade right at the middle, explodes and causes the truck explodes too, exactly like what happened to Damdam's truck. Obaid and Talib are tossed out of the truck and each land yards away from the burning truck. Omar's driver, Bilal, seems to have been looked in the truck as Sammy can see from his rifle's scope that he is trying hard to open the truck's doors but can't. Sammy leaves his rifle and rolls on the ground and picks the machine gun he has given Nelly to shoot where she has taken position. He takes the machine gun, kneels and barrages on them, opens fire at Obaid and Talib who are crawling and limping, trying to take shelter. He punches a few holes on each of them and drops the machine gun when he makes sure they are both dead. Sammy goes back a few yards and picks his own rifle again to look into the scope and see what Bilal does next. He wants to make absolutely sure no one survived. He sees Bilal still sticks inside the burning truck, struggling to exit and save himself. So, Sammy stands up freely, knowing there are no more threats. He walks between canebrakes and reaches Nelly.

"You okay?" Asks Sammy, standing over shaken Nelly.

"Yeah. I'm fine." Replies Nelly still ashamed of not being able to do a single task Sammy has given her.

Nelly takes out a piece of cloth left from when she wrapped around those grenades and hands it over to Sammy.

"What's that?"

"It's for your eyebrow. I think you got shot?"

"Thanks." Replies Sammy. He cleans the blood off his face and puts the piece of cloth over his eyebrow wound. Sammy pauses, looking towards Omar's truck, puts the cloth in his pocket and lifts his rifle and checks Bilal on his scope. He sees Bilal has kicked the windshield and is trying to crawl out of the vehicle. Sammy targets him quietly and calmly and pulls the trigger. Sammy's first bullet cuts Bilal's wrist, ripped it off his forearm. And takes his second shot after Bilal begins screaming and cursing at someone, whom Sammy thinks

meant him. Sammy's second bullet hits Bilal's armpit and exits the other side. Bilal falls on the vehicle's hood, hitting his face on the frying\_hot hood. The way Sammy can easily see from his scope that Bilal's face getting fried.

Sammy feels a soft warm hand on his left hand. He sees another hand is trying to lower his rifle. He cannot believe that Nelly has touched him. He lowers his rifle and sits down next to Nelly, who is now petting Sammy at his back, trying to calm him down.

Sammy is beginning to feel Nelly's hand on his back when she suddenly realizes what she is doing and she pulls her hands back. But Sammy places his head on his rifle which he is now holding it in a vertical position, relieved of the fact that all the machine-gun bullets have not hit him and Nelly, and only resulted in a three-centimeter wound on his eyebrow. That's when he remembers a kicking feeling he had felt on his right leg before he made it back to bush and canebrake area. Sammy knows he is not shot on his leg, as he cannot see any bullet wound or blood. But he suddenly notices a hole in his shoe hill. Only he realizes how lucky he has been that a bullet made a hole on his shoe hill. Sammy starts laughing for a moment. He sits on a relaxed position for a few seconds.

Still cautious and worried for the fact that there may be some other Isis, Sammy scans the area immediately. He gets up and scans the area standing now. There is no one and that reassured him they are safe for now.

"It looks safe." Says Sammy. "Get your things and let's go."  
"Can we rest for a while?" Asks Nelly. "I'm exhausted."  
"Not here. Not now." Replies Sammy, looking at the black smoke on the sky. "It's an Isis magnet. They are going to show up any minute now. Let's go. We will find a safer place to rest."  
"Ok sir." Replies Nelly impatiently. "Yes sir. Let's get going."

Sammy and Nelly take their back-packs and rifles and begin walking towards north, holding behind river bank's canebrake and vegetations. They leave the booty machine gun right at where Sammy has used it last between bushes, so it would not be spotted by any chance.

Sammy and Nelly begin walking towards the north, hiding behind canebrakes in parallel to the Euphrates river.

Farmers used to farm grains, vegetables and some summer fruits on certain areas on the outskirts of Euphrates river before the war began. They used river's water to irrigate their farms and used subterranean water as their drinking water. Most of the farmers have built sheds on their farming lands as they are quite far from villages, towns and cities and it is a time-consuming process going back and forth on a daily basis. So, they have built sheds despite the fact that those areas are not included in the areas supplied by water and electricity. They did their farming work during the day, from morning until sunset, and stayed at the sheds they had built, so they would get to work the following dawn.

Sammy stops Nelly every few yards and scans the area using his scope. He would advance while Nelly follows him from behind. Sammy notices a deserted shed far away which looks abandoned after farmers escaped the area because of war threats. He and Nelly notice the shed was built on a watermelon farm land. The owner has evidently escaped after the unrest starts between government forces, different factions and of course Isis terrorists.

A hot and dusty wind has begun breezing and the sun is almost reaching right at the middle of the sky. The wind rolls dried bushes to the right side on Sammy and Nelly's path. They are both tired, alarmed and thinking about what may have come next. On their way towards the shed, Nelly keeps her hand on her stomach and bends. She seems she is in a lot of pain. She kneels down. Knowing Nelly has never experienced such an environment, exposed to so much heat and sunlight, Sammy has no doubt she has become heated up and dehydrated. So, he takes her back-pack and his dad's hunting rifle from her and hangs them both on his own shoulders despite his leg limp, exhaustion and thirst, after he makes her drink some water off their thermos and wash her face. Sammy reaches his hand to help her stand up and continue:

"We can't rest here. You know that." Says Sammy, panting.  
"Get up. Let's go. It's not much left."

But Nelly gazes at Sammy's hand for a moment and tries getting up herself, so she would not touch Sammy's hand. Sammy turns back and continues walking towards the shed. Sammy is once again offended for the fact Nelly is still hesitant to touch him despite placing her hand on his hand and patted on his back earlier. But he tries to forget about Nelly's reaction, as getting her to safety and saving her is what he has promised he would do and keeping his promise is all what

mattered to him at that point. Nelly, on the other hand, has begun blaming herself, cursing and swearing at herself for her idiotic unfair reactions towards the only person on her side. But she feels she has no control over what she does in similar situations. Her tears have begun gathering in her eyes. She walks slower for Sammy not to notice her getting emotional. She looks at Sammy going ahead of her carefully, limping and carrying two heavy back packs, two rifles, thermos, etc. all by himself.

"Mr. Sammy." Calls Nelly. "I just wanted..."  
"We're almost there." Replies Sammy, interrupting her. "You going to feel better as soon as you get away from the sunlight."

Nelly is about to cry. She stops talking. She becomes confused again, thinking, while in an emotional estate of mind, whether her being about to burst into tears is the result of all hell she has been through for the past hours or it is because she thinks she has broken Sammy's heart time after time.

Sammy and Nelly make it to the shed finally. There is no door. So, Nelly sneaks into the shed under the shade immediately, while Sammy drops their rifles and back-packs and stays out guarding, instead of joining Nelly.

\* \* \*

A young good-looking man is chained to a wall's water pipe connected in a dark and terribly scary looking chamber. He looks berated and tortured. He has quite a few wounds all over his body, mainly on his lower body. The guy looks like he had been starved and abused for days. He is naked and lays on a dirty old mattress, while his butt is covered by and even dirtier sheet or blanket. A handy cam is facing him while still connected to a tripod. A metal heavy gate with a huge lock separates the young man from the outside world. He can hear another man crying for mercy, begging some people not to kill him. The voices yelling and cursing at the man with an unknown voice leading is familiar to the young man's ear. He knows the Isis member's voice. He knows all their voices. The voice of the man begging gets closer and closer. They may want to bring him in my chamber, the young man thinks. For some reason, the chained young man has begun dreaming of freedom when a loud sound of someone kicking the metal door makes him realize even dreaming of freedom is impossible for him. The heavy metal door opens by the second kick and the good-looking young man tries to hide himself under the dirty

sheet, as if that light sheet can be used as a shield, saving him from Isis animals. The young man can still hear the pleading man's voice even when he hides under his dirty sheet. He speaks from a hole in his sheet that Isis throws a man inside, blindfolded and handcuffed from behind. Isis members have thrown him in the chamber and left. They locked the heavy door and left laughing and joking with each other. The poor man cannot see a thing. He is blindfolded. But the young man knows he is not going to see a thing, even with wide open eyes. The chamber is too dark. Besides, there is nothing to see. Some cracks on the chamber's ceiling are the only source of light. Sunlight penetrates those cracks and hits chamber's walls which are all covered by shiny Arabic tiles. The chamber looks more like a public toilet than a normal chamber, cell or room.

Hearing the young man panting is the only sign the new captive man can figure he is not alone wherever he is.

"Is there anyone else here?" Asks the man reluctantly.

But the young man chooses to keep his mouth shut. He is on the stage of nervous breakdown; considering abuses and tortures he has gone through. The new captive man begins to cry, whispering mom. Mom.

"Hush." Whispers the young man from under the sheet. "The master will come in if you make noises. You don't want him to come in."

"My name is Bassam." Replies the man happily. He is so happy there is someone he can talk to. "What's your name?"

"Me?" Asks the young man. "My name is Robin. Robin Shaffi." Robbin and Bassam speak for a few minutes, whispering and getting to know each other.

"I was a lieutenant in Syrian national army intelligence until I was captured. They used to work at intelligence office and tortured me for several times during the past 28 days so I would reveal army secrets to them."

"Tortured?" Asks Robin sarcastically. "How tortured you mean? They beat you? Punched you? Starved you? Or removed your hands' and toes' nails? Or maybe they raped your... anyhow. How tortured?"

Bassam has begun to realize Robin's sarcasm is probably because he has been tortured in way worse manners.



Hadji Mazen's boss, Al Alawi, the one Hadji Mazen spoke with and reported to using his walkie-talkie, is smoking a heavy Arabic shisha. He has shisha's hose in one hand and a cup of Arabic coffee at his other hand, the shorter one. One of Al Allawi's hands is shorter than the other. He has a huge wound mark scar on his forehead between his eyebrows and that has caused how horrible he looks. A subordinate Isis walks to him and informs him everything is ready. Al Allawi stands up and walks on a corridor while escorted by two huge Isis men. They reach the metal door Robin and Bassam are at, enter and shut the door behind them. Four Isis members have some kind of mask, like the masks on two of the mask men who grabbed Bassam and pull him in front of the camera, handy cam while the other two pull Robin with his dirty mattress away, so he would not be in the frame. They make Bassam face the handy cam and kneel on the ground. Robin is so scared that he looks away, as if he knows what is going to happen. The scene looks quite familiar to him. The Isis man switches a light, presses the record button and yells Allah o Akbar, indicating the camera is recording. All four masked Isis executioners stand behind Bassam facing the camera and begins citing a note, which is a message for all other army officers who oppose and are fighting against Isis. Bassam urinates in his pants out of fear. Two of the masked men push Bassam on the ground on his chest and push their knees to his back while he screams, shouting for help. One of the mask men takes out a sharpened dagger and begins sawing Bassam's head. They show Al Allawi Bassam's head after they separate it from his body and placed it on his motionless body after Al Allawi nods and smiles. Robin cannot even breathe. Everyone exits the chamber before Al Allawi gets out. He goes to Robin.

"Don't be scared." Says Al Allawi. "I'm going to fuck that tight asshole again of yours, once they take that traitor's body out of here. Wait for me and be ready."

Robin has no guts to look Al Allawi in the eye. He is terrified of his rapist. He has been Al Allawi's captive since around two months back, fighting Isis. Isis has destroyed Robin and other army units, took a few captives and beheaded them in order to send other army soldiers a message, just like what he just did to poor Bassam. Al Allawi and his animal soldiers have beheaded two of Robin's comrades already and posted the clip to the internet. But Al Allawi who is known to love having sex with younger good-looking men happened to like him. He ordered to keep him alive for his own pleasure and raped Robin, sometimes three times a day. Robin has become Al

Alawi's sex toy, whereas he himself preferred to be beheaded, killed like Al Alawi's other victims.

After capturing Robin and two others, Isis members had taken out all their IDs to identify their ranks and roles in the army. They turn higher ranking army personnel to extract critical information out of them. It is crucial for Isis to find out where the army is going to attack them, when and how. But they noticed a strange piece of paper after Isis checked Robin's document wallet. They found out there was another guy's picture with Robert aside from a document indicating he is a Christian that had a little note written at the back of it saying: 'I love and wait for you Robin, my love.'

That is how Isis found out Robin was a gay. Isis members were making offending gesture, showing Robin's boyfriend's picture to one another when Al Allawi arrived and asked them what was funny? After Al Allawi found out Robin was a gay, he decided to keep him as his personal sex slave. Like many other younger men, he has abused and raped since he started even back in Iraq. Al Allawi did not want to lose Robin so easily. He enjoyed Robin's body so much that he has kept him alive so far. But Robin's problem was not that Al Allawi had mental psychological issues while having sex. He enjoyed beating his sex objects, making their blood arouse him more and give him more pleasure in sex. That showed Al Allawi satisfied his psychological needs as well.

Poor Robin is captive in the hands of a psychopath and has no way to escape. He has no coverage to defend himself or no plan to escape. He knows well he is going to be tortured to death if he tries to escape. This is what Al Allawi made sure Robin understood. Robin prays to Jesus to end his misery by killing him somehow. But Al Allawi is not going to kill him. He takes Robin wherever he goes and camps. Al Allawi never allows any of his assistants or ringleaders or soldiers to even talk to Robin. Robin speaks only to people on the death row. Those who are brought into his chamber, to film them getting executed. Al Allawi takes Robert wherever he goes. He throws him at the back of his truck, handcuffed and sometimes even blindfolded.

\* \* \*

Nelly and Sammy are so excited that they cannot even stand up. Sammy has been sitting outside the shed under its shade, holding his thermos. He is staring at the Euphrates which is

running not far away from him. He thinks he would go to the river and wash his face, hands, wet his hair and freshen up. But again, he changes his mind as he has no more energy left in him.

Nelly is inside the shed though. She has laid her back to the shed's corner, something bothers her mind, thinking does she still have to consider Sammy like any other men she hates, distrusts and is afraid of? Considering all he has so far done for her?

The wind is growing stronger and noisier. Nelly calls Sammy inside the shed, but he tells her he has to do something, some thinking and planning before that, in respond. They are at the middle of nowhere, Sammy thinks, without even knowing how far they are from the nearest village, town or city. So, Sammy thinks he better figures out their best next move, before the strong wind turns into a sandstorm. Sammy lifts his rifle and holds the scope in front of his eyes, so he would be able to see even farther distances and become reassured, and Nelly is safe, at least for the time being. But the haziness created by the strong wind is preventing Sammy to scan the area properly.

Before reaching the shed though, Sammy has noticed a small hill behind the shed, and he thinks he might be able to see a bit better if he goes and stands on the top of the hill. So, he goes to the back of the shed and walks towards the hill. He has not taken more than five to ten steps when he suddenly notices an unusual change in the density of the ground he is walking on. The ground under his feet becomes unusually soft and unstable. Sammy jumps on where he is standing so he might be able to figure out the answer for that part of the ground being different. But again, the strong wind and the noises it has created does not help him hear anything and gets to any sort of conclusion. The last solution coming to his mind is to lay on the ground, gets his ear closer to the ground and hits the ground with the bottom of his rifle. He does so and notices the sand and the little stones around his rifle jump upwards anytime his rifle's bottom hits the ground. Sammy lays his rifle on the ground next to him and begins digging the spot. He is quite convinced that what he is standing on is not the natural ground, but something designed to cover the ground or a hole in the ground and he is right. After digging for a few minutes, he uncovers a two meter by one meter metal cover which is creatively designed to look and feel like earth to the eyes. The cover

has a handle. Sammy changes his position now. He kneels on the ground and pulls the cover's knob. Sammy is able to open the cover which has not been maintained or at least opened for quite a while. Sammy sees a ladder that leads to a bunker underground. He takes the nine steps of a ladder and sees a bunker which has shelves attached to the wall. Sammy is surprised to see such a big bunker devised underground. He sees a little carpet on the ground, which is obviously laid there for sitting or resting purpose. There also is a wooden box next to the carpet fixed to the wall. Sammy opens the wooden box. He is curious to see what are the contents of the box, so maybe he would figure what the bunker has been made for?

Sammy sees a box of matchboxes, a box of candles, an old looking thermos and some dried bread with so many molds on it. There are two thin books, a Quran and a notebook on which certain numbers are noted down. Sammy can figure the numbers indicate some weights, prices, etc. He has begun to realize what that bunker's purpose actually is after he finds a case of spoiled potatoes and some dried watermelon pills. Many farmers devise a bunker on their farming land and usually next to their sheds to be used as a cold storage facility to store their products and what they have planted to keep them cool and fresh before they find a buyer for their harvest. Farmers keep their food stuff and cooking raw materials inside the bunker too in order to keep them for a longer time since there is no power, therefor no fridge.

Sammy takes the ladder up and exits the bunker. No one is going to find him or Nelly if they hide inside the bunker in worst case scenario, Sammy thinks. He feels he was right in thinking those strong winds are going to soon end up, becoming a heavy sandstorm.

The sandstorm has become so strong that Sammy finds it difficult to keep his eyes open for long. He hangs his rifle back on his shoulder after he gets out of the bunker and heads back towards the shed.

Nelly is outside the shed. She has covered her nose and mouth with a piece of cloth. She opens her eyes every few seconds and looks around. She is worriedly looking for Sammy. Nelly is beginning to cry, thinking Sammy has abandoned her after she hurt his feelings once again. Nelly begins yelling, calling Sammy.

"Mr. Sammy." Shouts Nelly. "Come back Mr. Sammy. Please."  
"Why are you shouting." Replies Sammy, startling Nelly. "I'm right here."

Nelly has become so happy to see Sammy behind her that she is about to burst into tears of happiness and joy. Her eyes have tears in them, so as Sammy's because of the sand and wind hitting them to their faces. So, Sammy cannot say whether she is actually crying or her tears are the result of dust and sand floating in the air.

Sammy and Nelly go inside the shed and Sammy tells her all about the bunker he has discovered. He asks Nelly to take all her things, follows him to the bunker and takes shelter in there for the time being. The shed has no door or windows. So, it is really not going to be much of help to them at that point, considering the weather condition. Sammy convinces Nelly it is best to move to the bunker, as it has a cooler weather and it is safer for them, especially for them who want to stay hidden for a while. Sammy and Nelly take all they have and head towards the bunker moments later. Sammy takes her back-pack and thermos first and throws them inside the bunker. He throws his own stuff too and goes in first after he leaves his rifle with Nelly up there. Then he asks her to hand him their rifles. Nelly enters the bunker and realizes Sammy is right about benefits the bunker has to them. Sammy aims up the ladder and closes the bunker's door, but immediately realizes how dark the bunker becomes. So, he places a little rock he finds and places it on the edge of where the cover lands for closing to prevent it to close shut completely. That's how the daytime light penetrates the bunker and lights it without them using any candle or other light sources.

There is in fact a bridge connecting the river's both sides around two-three hundred yards farther up. But neither Sammy nor Nelly were able to see it in the haze which wind has created and because of the height of the canebrakes covering their view. Sammy thinks they are safe as Isis is not able to cross the river, like he and Nelly did, along with their heavy arms and ammunitions. Sammy thinks Isis needs special barges or cargo carrier boats if they want to cross the Euphrates.

Hadji Mazen arrives at the place where Omar and Damdam's trucks, soldiers and everyone else were killed by Sammy. Samad and other Isis subordinates follow Hadji Mazen to keep him safe and out of harm's way. The monster commander, Hadji Mazen

exits his vehicle and checks bodies of each and every Isis member he has lost. He gets a bit emotional after he sees Damdam dead in such a wild brutal way. But he cannot find Omar's body. He keeps on looking around, and he asks all Isis soldiers following him to look around and find Omar's corpse. He has no idea that Omar has turned into flesh powder after Sammy targeted and shot one of the three grenades attached to his military belt earlier. Every Isis member who has followed Hadji Mazen is now looking for Omar's body. They search behind big rocks, between canebrakes, vegetation, etc. at the river bank. But no one find a sign of the dead animal. Hadji Mazen is beginning to convince himself that the river's water has taken Omar's body with it. That's when one of the smarter Isis members has become curious after he looks closer at the windshield of Omar's truck and sees a piece of flesh, some hair and an ID pendant which most soldiers wear on their necklaces with their info engraved on it. The windshield has of course landed yards away from the vehicle. The Isis man who discovered Omar's military ID pendant calls Hadji Mazen to the windshield and shows him what he has discovered. But being a dumb person, Hadji Mazen has difficulty to understand what his subordinate tries to tell him. Until the guy has to take a dried straw cane, lifts the pendant, separates it from the piece of the flesh and the hair and gets it much closer to the stupid commander. He explains to Hadji Mazen he no longer has to have everyone looks for Omar's body, as there is not a body that existed at all. So, Hadji Mazen calls the search mission off.

"Don't look for Sayyed Omar's body anymore." Yells Hadji Mazen. "We know he; I mean his body has vaporized, or became powder or something."

All Isis members have a very difficult time controlling themselves from bursting into laughter.

"Vaporized?" Says one of the Isis soldiers to his comrade. "Became powder? Please slap me and wake me up. Who are we really fighting against? Syrian army, their supporting factions or aliens?"

The next thing Hadji Mazen asks for, is a map of Syria. He calls Samad, his only trusted ringleader alive and Asad, his trusted driver and male servant. Emad opens the Syrian map and lays it open on the truck's hood so the commander would decide for everyone what to do next. Every Isis soldier has become fade-up staying out in that wind. They all take shelter

at the back of their trucks, inside vehicles or any other place that keeps them safe from the sandstorm.

A second later, Emad lays the map on the truck's hood. Asad, Samad and Hadji Mazen realize what a stupid idea that is in the first place... The wind is lifting truck's hood, let alone the map. So, they rush into the vehicle while Hadji Mazen is nagging at Asad.

"Sometimes I see you in front of me, but I don't see Asad." Says Hadji Mazen nagging. "All I see is a donkey. I mean you should at least have one fourth of others, huh? The brain I mean. Why did you lay the damn map on the hood in that storm out there you idiot?"

"Yeah. I'm sorry sir." Replies Asad, embarrassed.

The three of them lay the map open, inside the vehicle this time. But Hadji Mazen's walkie-talkie begins making static sounds in the beginning. But they all hear Al Alawi's voice from the wireless device.

"Shit." Says Hadji Mazen, hitting himself on his forehead desperately, thinking of what to tell his boss. "Shit, shit, shit. What to tell him now?"

Hadji Mazen pauses for a moment and takes a deep long breath.

"Assalam o Alaycom sir." Says Hadji Mazen talking to his wireless, knowing he has no choice but to respond.

"Va alaykom o assalam brother." Replies Al Allawi. "So, how far have you gone? Where have you reached so far?"

"We are actually at the same area sir." Replies Hadji Mazen, maundering and fumbling. "We actually have a bit of a problem sir. I have lost three of my strongest ringleaders sir. They are with Allah, profit and Imams now sir. I'm in fact handling the situation at the moment."

"So, they're with Allah, profit and who else you said?"

Replies Al Allawi quite sarcastic. Disappointment can be clearly heard from his tone. "Which unit, battalion or company is the attacker Hadji Mazen? Or there are twenty factions armed to teeth? Or there is a brutal regiment?"

Hadji Mazen pauses again, takes another deep breath.

"Sir." Replies Hadji Mazen, fumbling and maundering again. "Apparently there's a guy whose leg, I mean he limps and he's

with a girl. Apparently, they are snipers sir. So, apparently my trusted..."

That's when Al Allawi cannot hear Hadji Mazen's excuses and interrupts him:

"Apparently that's why I only use to clean-up shit in the towns and villages." Shouts Al Allawi frantically. "You incapable fuck. You enjoyed fucking hundred Sinjar women back in Iraq and that made you lazy. It was a mistake putting you in charge back there. You did not deserve fucking all those women. I could use more capable people rather than you fat fuck. A limp guy killed four of your assistants and the guy is still alive? You are handling what?"

"You are right sir. Forgive me sir, forgive."

"Where the fuck are you, you idiot?"

"We, sir, are by the Euphrates."

"Doing what exactly? Swimming? You brainless piece of fuck?"

"No sir. Of course not. I came to analyze the situation and scene, so I would devise my strategy sir."

"Oh. Devise a strategy. Huh? Describe the scene."

"The guy, the limp one, has somehow blew up two of my armed pick-up trucks. About eight or nine are dead."

"And how he managed to blow-up your fuckin trucks? C4 or RPG or what?"

"I don't know sir yet. I'm working on it to figure it out. I was actually before you call me. I don't know sir. I think he's gotten some grenades. Where has he gotten it at the middle of the desert, I don't know it yet sir."

"He took the grenades or explosives from you and blew up your equipment along with forces in it you shit head. Stay online so I will look at the map. Idiots. Fuck heads."

Hadji Mazen is quite embarrassed by the way Al Allawi treated him in front of Samad and Asad. He has become very ashamed and angry.

"Listen carefully you old fart." Says Al Allawi continuing his previous communication. "There's a bridge you can see if you open your shitty eyes. It's near you now. When you can see it, you head north by the river. You can't miss it. Oh wait. You can. But do not miss it. Camp there with any idiots left until evening. I'll move soon. You don't do shit until I arrive. Clear?"



"Absolutely sir."

The bridge Al Allawi meant is exactly the same bridge near the shed, Sammy and Nelly could not see because of haze, dust and canebrakes by the river bank.

After he is finished with shouting, yelling and insulting Hadji Mazen for his incapability, Al Allawi begins speaking on his wireless again.

"To all brothers and their units." Says Al Allawi in a serious tone. "We're going to advance towards west, you may, I correct. You will come across a limp man in his early thirties and a girl. They are professional demolishers, assassins, killers or whatever you want to name them. Capture them both alive and get them to me. That's all. I will give five virgin girls and five handsome virgin boys as bounty to whomever gets them to me alive. Allah Akbar. Over."

After getting severely insulted by his boss, Al Alawi, Hadji Mazen picks his walkie-talkie too and orders every single Isis soldier, tank, army transportation, armed vehicles, motor crosses and buses, etc. to move towards the same bridge Al Allawi has told him about. He orders his people to carry those boys and girls he has imprisoned to give to his boss, Al Allawi as a souvenir and gets only the youngest and most beautiful captive girls with them, killing the rest before they move.

Hadji Mazen pauses for a second. Emad and Samad glance at each other, knowing how embarrassed their commander can possibly be.

"It's okay sir. Calm down." Says Emad, trying to be helpful. "I can see the day you've captured all Syria sir. You know I have intuitions."

"Yeah commander. You'll capture this country." Says Samad this time.

"I don't care about capturing Syria anymore." Yells Hadji Mazen angrily, punching his vehicle's steering wheel several times. All what matters to me, and you two accordingly, is to find and capture that paralyzed retarded shit and the bitch with him. We will not go and hand them to Al Allawi when we find them, you know. I'm going to deal with them both personally."

Al Allawi calls his personal assistant, Amir, and orders him to go to Robin's chamber, bathes him and get him cleaned-up

as he wants to rape him once again before the whole units move towards the west, crossing the Euphrates bridge.

"Yeah." Says Al Alawi. Get him ready. I need to fuck him and calm down before we move towards that bridge."

"What should I do to him when we are all leaving today sir?" Asks Amir.

"We'll take him with us of course. I'm not done with him yet. He's my pet. Huh? Amir, make sure you handcuff him properly. Not like those two times you fucked-up. He was not here if it would not be because of him being scared to run. Robin can hear Al Allawi and his assistant, Amir's conversation, as they speak quite close to the chamber he is kept at.

Hadji Mazen is very angry at Sammy, what he has done to his crew and his own reputation. He has turned red, frowning and planning what evil thing he is going to do with Nelly when making Sammy watch.

With the order of Hadji Mazen, Samad and Emad get every single Isis ready to go after Sammy and Nelly. Hadji Mazen has a hunch that they are heading towards the north when he follows their tracks, where Sammy has begun his killing Isis members, and figures they are headed to the north. So, he decides to follow going towards north too, in parallel to the Euphrates. He knows the limp guy and the girl are without a doubt going to move very close to the river, considering the heat and their need for water. Hadji Mazen has already ordered the rest of his unit to come and camp by the bridge, like Al Allawi has ordered him too. But he intends to chase Sammy and Nelly to find them and take revenge as it has become personal for him.

Hadji Mazen, Asad, Samad and their subordinates head towards the north and come across the bridge Al Allawi told them about, unaware that Sammy and Nelly are at the other side of the river, now taken shelter in a farming bunker. The bridge has been made years ago, connecting both sides of the river for farmers to transport goods easier between them and other materials for each other's farms.

Hadji Mazen drives over the bridge and crosses the river to the side Sammy and Nelly are. After crossing the bridge, Hadji Mazen has to take right in order to head towards the north, but there are no constructed roads, and the proper road going to the north is something like four hundred yards away. So,

the crazy mad Hadji Mazen, drives onto desert's soft powder looking sand like crazy.

Noticing what Asad, Hadji Mazen's driver, did, driving onto soft sand, Samad picks up his walkie-talkie and contacts Hadji Mazen.

"Sir. Why did you guys cross the bridge sir? And why is Emad driving on dangerous soft sands?" Asks Samad worriedly.

"I have no doubt the mother fucker limp has crossed the bridge Samad." Responds Hadji Mazen. "He knows which side our forces are coming from. So, no way he stays at the east side of the river, knowing his country is under attack from the east side. He will move close to the river. Because they need a constant drinking water source. Remember, never question my decisions again, until I catch those bastards both. Over."

Hadji Mazen follows up with his unit based back at Al Darrah's cellar storages and tells them again to abandon the storages and head to the bridge, camp there and wait for Al Alawi. He is staring at the desert's horizon, playing with his facial long dirty hair while Emad drives him to any direction he orders. It is evident he is planning what he is going to do with the limp guy and the pretty girl, as he addresses them. He is deep into his thoughts when his walkie-talkie makes a sound. He hears Al Allawi trying to establish contact with him, asking for his geographical position. Hadji Mazen responds immediately and informs his boss that his unit is going to arrive at the bridge and camp there waiting for him as instructed. He says he has already tracked the sniper and the girl; he is chasing them and nothing is going to stop him until he puts an end to their killing spirit.

Hadji Mazen says, "Sir. My master, my eyes. This is what I had to do from the beginning sir. But I didn't and you are right. You have all the rights to be angry and mad at me sir. I'll fix what I've messed up sir. I'm now on my way to get them sir. Emad is with me and Samad is following me with another vehicle from behind. Please command my unit until I catch and get those two Satan. Over."

Al Allawi tells Hadji Mazen he is going to head towards Jarabulus (a city on the northern side of the country called Jarabulus) soon after both their units join each other. He says it's been decided he is going to be the one taking control and rule Jarabulus city, provinces, towns, cities and

its villages around it. He says he is heading towards the bridge he told Hadji Mazen earlier in a while.

Al Allawi is getting dressed, closing his military belt and wearing his gun, etc. when Amir, his personal assistant, runs to him.

"Sir, I forgot." Says Amir, panting. "You said we'll take the Christian, eh, Robin guy with us or we'll leave him here sir."

"Don't you know what a tight ass does this Christian guy have? Don't you?" Says Al Allawi in response as if he always jokes with Amir that way. "I think I've told you about it already. He cries sexy when I beat and rape him. How can I let him be? How can I leave him behind? Ha?"

Amir and Al Allawi burst into laughter together. Al Allawi orders Amer to dress Robin up, handcuffs him from behind, brings or escorts him out and throws him at the back of his pick-up truck. He is quite specific in asking Amir to do his task carefully without messing things up like those previous times.

Amir is a short man, with long hair and a thick eye glasses that makes him look like a fish. Isis commander usually gives him simple tasks to do as he knows how incapable and neglected, he is. Most of his comrades think he is a bit idiot.

Amir heads back towards Robin's chamber while Al Allawi gets ready to move. Robin has been just raped once again and has fresh wounds on his body.

Amir opens the lock to Robin's chamber. He takes out his handcuff's keys out of his mouth, where he usually hides it. He opens Robin's hands. Having witnessed so many beheadings, having undergone so much abuse, sexually, physically and mentally, Robin has almost lost his mind. He seems to have accepted his dark damned destiny. Amir cleans Robin's butt, washes his wounds and suddenly hears an Isis team leader is calling him. So, he cuffs Robin immediately and goes to see what the superior is calling his name for. Robin changes his position a bit and suddenly notices Amir has left his handcuffs on his hands without tightening them. Robin can easily get his hands out and release them from his cuffs.

Amir comes back a minute later. He remembers he has cuffed Robin. But in fact, he has forgotten to. He has forgotten to

tighten the cuffs and that is what he doesn't remember. Robin is breathing heavily, keeping his hands hidden at his back, trying hard to sit normal. Robin is extremely worried. That is once in a life time chance opportunity for him. That is his way out and he knows it well.

Amir pushes Robin at the back of Al Allawi's pick-up truck, while some other Isis guys are laying ammunition at the back of his truck too. They lay bullets, grenades, RPG rockets, land mines, etc. They lay ammunition all around Robin, while he acts cuffed at the back and scared. Robin can already smell the freedom. Al Allawi witnesses Robin getting thrown at the back of his pick-up truck and thinks everything has gone well.

Al Allawi and Amir become eye to eye for a single moment. Amir shows his master thumbs-up, confirming he has completed his mission completely and well. Al Allawi nods and believes everything has gone the way he has asked, without any single Isis member suspecting Robin's handcuffs are actually not closed properly. Robin acts normal and holds his hands at the back, facing people, watching them getting prepared to move. Everybody is busy with doing something and no one has the time to check Robin's handcuffs.

Miles away though, Hadji Mazen is moving towards the north, scanning the area thoroughly, hoping to find Sammy and Nelly. Emad, his driver, drives on the soft sand, in parallel to the river, while Samad's pick-up truck follows him. Sammy and Nelly, however, are still at the bunker, taking their time, waiting for the storm to subside or at least become calmer, so they can also move towards the north. Sammy goes up the bunker's ladder minutes later and feels the wind speed is not as strong as it has become a while ago. So, he comes down the ladder and asks Nelly if she is ready to move. But Nelly's answer is negative. She shakes her head and suggests they better rest more in the shade and safe from the storm and being hit by sand and debris floating on the air. Nelly has a point. Sammy is still tired and now they have both become hungry too.

"Ok." Says Sammy. "Let's eat the goat cheese and the traditional bread the nice old man gave us back in the village before it goes bad. I'm hungry. We'll rest an hour more and move after that, no matter what our or weather condition is." Sammy is not looking at Nelly while telling her that.

"We need to continue going, until we reach Jarabulus."  
Continues Sammy.

He takes some of the things out of his back-pack and suddenly remembers he has to refill their thermos. He picks his and Nelly's thermoses and walks up the ladder, saying he is going to get them more drinking water. Nelly is still seated, gazing at a point. She stretches her legs, takes out her hair brush and brushes her hair.

Sammy knows farmers who built the shed and the bunker must have drinking water source and he is determined to find it. He searches all around the shed, the bunker and near the river, but he can't find the subterranean water source. He has to look away farther and farther, but the strong wind and sandstorm is not helping. So, Sammy heads back towards the bunker, but he suddenly notices there is a blue plastic barrel which has laid on the ground, but it did not move despite the strong wind. Sammy has to check it out despite the fact he has to be extra careful and looking around him to check if anyone of Isis member stops him. He goes to the barrel, puts his head inside it and hears water running. He has no doubt he has found the drinking water source.

Sammy sees Nelly has laid a little plastic sheet on the carpet inside the bunker and laid the goat cheese and bread on it nicely, waiting for him when he comes back to the bunker. Happy for being able to refill their thermoses, Sammy thanks her set and begins eating. He notices Nelly is just sitting. She is not eating. So, he asks her the reason.

"What's wrong?" Asks Sammy. "Why are you not eating? I think I heard you saying you are starving a while ago."

"I've lost my appetite." Replies Nelly in a normal tone. "You go ahead."

"You'll not last for long out there if you have no energy. Please grab a bite."

But Nelly looks away, shaking her head. Sammy makes a sandwich for her. He places the piece of the goat cheese at the middle of a piece of bread, spreads the cheese all over the bread using a knife, rolls the piece of the bread and reaches the sandwich towards her. Nelly hesitates initially but takes the sandwich from Sammy's hand after he insists. She takes a bite while Sammy waits for her reaction to see whether she likes it or not.

"My hands are clean by the way." Mentions Sammy. "Just washed them where I took the water."

"It's okay. I know." Replies Nelly.

"I mean I think you should know. In case."

Nelly tries hard not to burst into tears. She is not emotional now because of all what happened to her town, mother, father, brothers or her life, but for the way she has treated Sammy. She knows she has not been acting like a nice person and she blames herself for the way she has spoken, judged and treated Sammy since he begun escorting her to safety, despite having no military training whatsoever. Sammy has not allowed any man, specially Isis animals, to even get close to her, let alone touching her and she knows that the more she thinks and remembers flash-backs. She knows Sammy has surely changed his mind and he is not helping her because he is in love with her anymore. She knows she has made Sammy fall out of favor with her. And she is not sad because of that only. She is sad for the way she has made him fall out of favor with her.

What bothers Nelly most is the fact that she knows how Sammy feels about her and she knows she used Sammy's feelings for herself to get to safety, whether willingly or non-willingly and intentionally, while Sammy loves her and has no idea Sara and Hanieh have told her about it. But Sammy never mentions anything about how he feels about her, never says anything, tries anything or makes any insulting attempts, despite being alone with her all the time. Hell, he has even given her away out in case she feels she is being abused. The rifle and the suicide pills. Those are the thoughts take Nelly's appetite away from her. She has not been fair with Sammy and it is way too late for her to fix it.

While taking bites off the sandwich Sammy has made her and chewing it, Nelly suddenly bursts into tears. That makes Sammy stop eating for a second. There is a moment of silence between Sammy and Nelly.

"Ok, now stop please." Says Sammy, trying to calm Nelly down, unaware of the reason she is crying. "I lost everyone too miss Nelly. I know it's difficult. But like I said, we will have enough time to mourn loss of our loved ones. At least, be happy for the fact that we're alive, safe and going to make it to safety soon. Just like I promised you."

Nelly is staring at Sammy who has now lowered his head and continues eating. The man who has risked his own life to keep her safe, without asking for any rewards or anything at all

return. Another hour passes mainly in silence between Sammy and Nelly. They are getting their things ready to move when they both feel the ground begins shaking. Just like a mild earthquake. Sammy runs up the bunker's ladder. He can already guess what caused the ground to shake. He looks around, at least at the spots he has vision on, the haze still stops him seeing far. But he can hear the sounds that he doesn't like. The sounds that scares him. Nelly has again crumpled on the corner of the bunker, shaking out of fear.

"Ok listen to me miss Nelly." Says Sammy, trying to calm her down again. "I don't want to scare you, but you should know there are tanks, military transportation, armed vehicles, army trailers and even motor crosses out there. And I'm sure they are not friendly forces, government forces, etc. because our army will attack from the west. But these sounds can be heard coming from the east and that means they are Isis forces. I want you to stay put. I'll go out and find out what's what." Sammy leaves Nelly while she shakes like hell. He exits the bunker, crawls while having his rifle hanged on his right shoulder. Sammy stops at a point he feels is safe and notices some Isis units and forces are camping further up, at the other side of the river. He is right. Hadji Mazen's units have arrived the bridge Sammy has no idea is there, like Hadji Mazen discussed with his boss, Al Alawi. Sammy does not know Al Allawi and his battalion are also on their way to join Hadji Mazen's units at the same spot. The haze has become lighter and Sammy can now see clearer. He suddenly sees the bridge.

"Great." Whispers Sammy to himself.

Sammy has faced new unexpected challenges laid ahead of him now. Now he has to take Nelly walking towards the north, passing by the damn bridge without being spotted by Isis forces at the other side. So, he crawls back to the bunker immediately. But he does not enter the bunker anymore. He enters his head and looks at Nelly."

"Like I said, It's Isis forces." Says Sammy, panting. "There's a damn bridge we did not see earlier. Isis forces are camping at the other side. The bridge is around three to four hundred yards far away. I don't think we can carry our back-packs anymore miss Nelly. We can stay hidden, carrying ourselves and our rifles and thermoses if we are lucky. We only need to make it to the other side of the bridge and head north as quickly as possible. Just get me if any grenade is left, leave



back-packs, take your hunting rifle I gave you. Give me my bullets' case too please."

Sammy can say, looking at her eyes, how terrified what he said made Nelly. He notices her face has turned pale and she is out of control shaking.

"Look at me. Look at me." Says Sammy, getting her attention. "Listen to me and we are going to make it. There are bushes, vegetations and canebrakes we can hide behind from here up until we get near the bridge."

Nelly looks away, scared.

"Look at me. Look at me. Our problem is the fifteen-twenty yards we should cross, end of the bridge I mean. So, I have a plan and I want you to listen to it super carefully. Come on up and I'll tell you on the way."

Sammy helps Nelly out of the bunker. He holds her rifle, thermoses and things he has asked her to get him from his back pack. He makes Nelly crawl quickly and unnoticeably like him, whispering. They head towards the north and the bridge first.

"I'll go ahead of you like twenty to thirty yards further. Listen carefully. I'll take position and wait for you after I make sure it's safe for you to follow me. You'll look at my leg while I'm laid on my chest. When you see I raises my feet up, bending my leg from the knee, that means you are safe to come towards me, and you will lay on the ground again when you see me bringing my feet and knee down. Did you get what I am trying to say?"

Nelly nods and Sammy can only pray she has gotten what he means, considering the fear factor, etc. Sammy takes his bullets, two remaining grenades and leaves Nelly crawling towards the bridge and the north. He stops thirty yards farther, looks into his rifle's scope carefully and makes sure no one has stopped him. Sammy cannot see any sign of any infantry. He only sees tanks, rocket launchers, military transportation vehicles and armed units. But so, he signals Nelly by bending his knee, bringing his feet up. Nelly stands up, bending also. She begins running towards Sammy looking at his knee without taking her eye off Sammy's knee and feet. Nelly reaches Sammy luckily without being seen by any Isis.

Sammy crawls towards the bridge again and stops right near the bridge, exceeding the agreed distance him and Nelly agreed and talked about. He bends his knee again after scanning all

around him to make sure again it is safe for Nelly to follow. Seeing Sammy's knee bent, Nelly stands up and runs hiding behind canebrakes. She falls down on the ground as she only looks at Sammy's leg. But she stands up and continues again.

It is time for Sammy and Nelly to cross the side of the bridge end which is quite exposed. But having no other choice except crossing, they decide to do it one by one, so if shot, only one of them would get shot. Sammy suggests watching the other side of the bridge, while Nelly runs to the other side and hides behind the river bank's vegetations again. Sammy follows when he sees Nelly reaching to the other side. Sammy who cannot run because of the problem he has with his leg, crosses the street at the end of the bridge as though he is a ghost, invisible and unnoticeable. He joins Nelly. They are now hidden between canebrakes again and know it is impossible for the Isis members to see and shoot at them. So, they begin running while hidden behind the river bank's vegetations. Nelly who can run faster, notices at some point that Sammy is left behind. So, she stops, looks back and sees him trying to fix his knee-strap. So, she runs back towards Sammy, kneels down to help him fasten his knee-strap. But Sammy pulls his leg back slowly and smiles.

"Thanks, miss Nelly. But no need." Says Sammy, tightening his knee-strap. "I've got to learn doing this shit by myself from now on."

What Sammy says makes Nelly absolutely certain that she has messed up big time. She has broken Sammy's heart, by her insults, reactions and mentality. They begin walking quickly towards the north after Sammy tightens his knee-strap. They walk a few minutes in silence when Sammy notices suddenly tire tracks in parallel to the river too and is quite surprised. He has no doubt those tire tracks belong to an Isis vehicle. Probably some of which have come after him and Nelly, realizing they are headed to the north, Sammy thinks. So, he decides to walk away from the river going to the north in case the vehicle comes back and notices their foot prints on the river bank's sands. He leads Nelly changing her direction to his left where there are so many sand hills created by sandstorms and strong winds, gathering sands at a certain spot, creating a hill. Their new path makes walking certainly more difficult. Exhausted, scared, alarmed and heated, Sammy and Nelly walk going to the north direction for some time that they have no idea how long that is.

Hadji Mazen, Emad and Samad reach the point they can see Jarabulus city skylines already. But they have not come across Sammy, the limp guy and Nelly, the angel looking girl, against their expectations. Samad uses his walkie-talkie to suggest to Hadji Mazen and Emad to stop, take a rest and decide whether to head back to the bridge where their units have already camped and to Al Allawi or not.

They have no idea that Al Allawi has crossed the bridge a few minutes back, has gone to the other side and has followed to reach them along with some of his soldiers. Al Allawi is headed towards the north too with so many ammunitions as well as Robin at the back of his pick-up truck, hoping to see and join Hadji Mazen in capturing Sammy and Nelly. Sammy has no idea he is getting surrounded by Isis. He can already guess there are Isis people ahead of him and the fact that he might come face to face with them at any minute. But he does not know they have no way going back, as Al Allawi is fast approaching from behind.

Hadji Mazen orders Asad stops his vehicle after Samad suggests they stop and rest and decide whether to head back or not. He gets off the vehicle and scans the surrounding carefully. He wants to get back inside his vehicle to head back when Samad shows him his car tire which has been punched flat. Both Samad and Emad are convinced by now that they are looking for ghosts. They know it is pointless looking for the limp guy and the pretty girl on the desert, near the river. So, to chill out, they decide to get naked and jump into the river and swim for a while.

Sammy stops for a moment, lifts his rifle and gets its scope to his eyes. A smile forms on his face when he sees Jarabulus's skylines. He can't, however, see any sign of the black horrible looking Isis flags, no smoke comes out up to the sky because of any explosion etc.... At least, Sammy is convinced that he has made it escorting Nelly to safety. Sammy and Nelly are extremely exhausted. Sammy scans the area around using his rifle's scope, but is unable to spot Hadji Mazen and his companions near the river. A hill blocks his view and he is so tired to change his position already. He and Nelly goes farther and suddenly hear two Isis men joking and laughing near the river bank. It is Samad and Emad swimming and having fun. Both Sammy and Nelly know they have to cross Isis guys to make it finally to their safety heaven, called the Jarabulus city. The wind begins blowing again. The haze is formed on the sky just like a few hours ago. Sammy thinks

he should lead Nelly back all the way to the same bunker they came from before they are caught. But he suddenly hears Samad and Emad stop laughing and being noisy.

Sammy has no energy and courage to climb a little hill up and figures how far Isis members are away from him and Nelly. He cannot think of any possible solution at that point. They will die if he takes tired Nelly back to the bunker, out of dehydration, being heated and exhausted and being exposed to the sunlight. But Sammy has headed towards Jarabulus and there is a reason for that, Tom, Al and Freddy. Sammy remembers the old cell-phone and a sim card he had given Al for them to communicate from basement to his apartment on the fifth floor. So, he asks Nelly to lay on the ground and sand next to him between two sand hills. He inserts his hand into his pocket and takes his cell-phone out and sees there is a signal surprisingly. Apparently, telecommunication had stopped back at Al Darrah only and his phone works since they are near Jarabulus. Sammy calls the number he has given Al and prays someone would answer. Someone answers the phone and Sammy knows who it is.

"Hello." Says Sammy, whispering. "Tom, is that you?"

"Yeah... who is... Sammy. Oh God. Guys, it is Sammy."

"Listen Tom. I have no time left. I'm with a girl near Jarabulus somewhere now. We have some Isis members very close to us and I don't know how far we are from Jarabulus. I guess I remember you told me to come and call."

Sammy hears Tom calling a few people, talking on wireless.

"Now I want you to listen to me carefully." Continues Tom. "I want you to look around and see what you see?"

"I have the Euphrates on our right. There's wind, haze and there is a hill, and I see a huge water tanker, the white one."

"Ok. Never mind. I want you to stay online." Continues Tom.

"We'll track your cell-phone location. Switch to find my iPhone option if you have an iPhone."

"I do. Ok."

"An armored vehicle will come to you in a few minutes. I want you to stay online, stay strong, have patience and stay alive for me. Do you understand?"

"Yeah Tom. I'm thirsty."

"Stay with me. Move towards the water tanker as close as it's safe."

Sammy keeps the phone connected after he activates his iPhone option on his cell-phone. He tells Nelly there is an armored

vehicle coming to get them. He tells Nelly he is going to use the same technique. He is going to stay watching until Nelly makes it to the armored vehicle and he is going to join her at the vehicle after he makes sure she is in. Nelly agrees and they begin crawling towards the water tanker, staying hidden between sand hills.

"Sammy come in. Do you hear me?" Says Tom, concerned.  
"I hear you my friend. The armored vehicle is there between the two hills. It's around thirty to fifty meters away from you. Go to the left a bit and you can see it. It's going to get you to us."

Sammy does as Tom asks and sees the green armored vehicle with American flag stuck on it. He kneels and scans a half cycle around him and gives Nelly to go. Nelly stands up, bends like before and runs to the green American armored vehicle. She reaches the vehicle and looks back to signal Sammy to go and join her already. But she sits on the ground next to the armored vehicle when she looks at Sammy.

Sammy is shocked why Nelly is not entering the vehicle. He stares at Nelly and figures Nelly is in fact looking at something behind him. Sammy is about to turn his head and see, find out what is Nelly looking at, when he hears a gunshot. A bullet hits Sammy at his left side of his back. Sammy keeps on signaling Nelly, asking her to go inside the armored vehicle and leave. But Nelly is screaming, crying loudly, calling Sammy's name. Sammy tries to run towards her and the armored vehicle. The driver keeps on yelling at Nelly, asking her to get in.

"Get in lady." Yells the driver. "He's gone already."  
"No. please don't say that." Screams Nelly. "He's coming, you see. Look."

Another gun shot is heard which rips Sammy through his right back and exits his right chest. Sammy turns back while he has difficulty breathing and he sees for the first time Al Allawi shooting at him with a sniper rifle. Sammy's rifle has fallen off his hand already. Al Allawi shoots Sammy at his left leg next. But his fourth bullet is the one exhausting all Sammy's effort to stay alive. The armored vehicle driver comes out and forces Nelly inside and drives away and disappears in the desert between hills. Sammy's face hits desert's hot sands. He is completely soaked in his blood. He remembers his memories he had with his father. His heavy breathing moves

the sand under his nose. He can hear Nelly screaming his name saying she is sorry.

Hadji Mazen, Samad and Emad have run towards the gun shot sounds after they heard it. They go towards Sammy's lifeless body, holding their rifles. Emad and Samad are in their underwear.

Al Allawi has asked his driver to follow him slowly after shooting Sammy. He walks towards Sammy. Hadji Mazen is shocked seeing the captain, Al Allawi there. Al Allawi reaches Sammy's body and kicks him face up while he still has one of his eyes open. Hadji Mazen's laughter and people around him yelling Allah o Akbar has merged with the sound of the storm. Hadji Mazen's laughter becomes louder and louder until Tom's bullet hits his throat and stops him laughing. Another bullet hits him right at his heart, lifting him off the ground and throwing him three yards away while the others still confused.

Samad and Emad have no chance to show any kind of reaction. Freddy and Al's bullets shot them down from a very far distance. Blood splash and sprays off their necks. They crawl on the sand in agony. Two more gunshot are heard and keep them quiet for good. Al Allawi is completely shocked after he witnesses how his comrades died. He stands there, holding his hands up. Robin finds the opportunity to take his revenge. He releases his hands off his cuffs, gets two grenades from the back of his rapist's truck, pulls their rings while holding them and walks towards Al Allawi. He hugs the monster from behind and begins laughing and pretending as if he's fucking AL Allawi. Both grenades detonate. Robin explodes both himself and captain Al Allawi, turning both of them into fragments of flesh and blood.

\* \* \*

Nelly is screaming, crying at the back of the armored vehicle. She feels so guilty that she decides to end her life. She remembers suicide pills Sammy gave her. She takes the tissue pack out of her pocket and opens the tissue wrap. But she is stopped by the two American soldiers before she throws both pills into her mouth. Nelly tries to snatch the rifle which Sammy had given her from the other soldier. But she can't.

"What the hell are you doing girl?" Asks one of the soldiers, yelling. "what are these pills?"

"I want to die." Yells Nelly replying and crying.

"Are you crazy? You want to die? After we risk everything to get you out of a wolf's jaws? After that guy risked his life to save you?"

Nelly continues crying. The soldier who has his army gloves on opens the tissue wrap, gets it closer to his nose and smells it.

"You going to be kidding me." Says the soldier. "Really? With mint pills?"

The other soldier removes the magazine from the rifle Nelly is holding, smiles and shows it to the other soldier.

"Girl, I don't know what's your story, but you want to kill yourself with mint pills and probably want to shoot yourself with these empty shells."

Nelly cannot believe what those soldiers are telling her. She lowers her head while crying and remembers the time when Sammy was trying to convince her that he could get her to safety, but she insulted him by responding she did not believe he could do so considering his disability. Nelly remembers the number of times, like he has promised her, when Sammy never let any of the Isis animals to even lay a hand on her. Sammy has saved her, just like he vowed. Nelly also recalls her attempt to commit suicide, but Sammy saved her again. Every word exchanged between her and Sammy begin playing in her head like a movie. Only she realizes Sammy needed to convince her to go with him, so he gave her a rifle and two so called suicide pills. Nelly's moaning gets louder and louder when she grasps Sammy has given her mint pills and empty shells, so she would not achieve killing herself in case she attempted again. She knows now the reason Sammy has given her empty shell casing and mint pills so she would feel comfortable, following him without him being worried she would harm herself. She remembers hurting Sammy's feelings by telling him she did not believe he could escort her into safety. Nelly has become extremely remorseful, thinking how nice Sammy was to fool her in order to save her.

Nelly screams and cries, remembering all the moments she had decided to end her life but didn't think she had the chance to do so in the worst-case scenario. She regrets every bit of bitter words she has told Sammy and her insulting comments to him. But it is too late and she has begun hating herself for the stone-hearted cruel girl she has been.

Sammy opens his eyes in a modernly equipped hospital and sees Nelly's blurred image, crying in the eye and smiling on the lips.

"Hello my love." Says Nelly in a remorsefully begging tone.

A rescue helicopter appears on the sky over Sammy while two other combat helicopters with American flags on their sides attack the rest of Isis, launching rockets on them, sending every single of them to hell.

Tom, Freddy and Al jump down the rescue helicopter after it gets closer to the ground. They run towards Sammy's lifeless body, lift him and lay him on a stretcher. They transfer Sammy's dangerously wounded body into the helicopter. A doctor begins CPR on Sammy.

"Move. move. move." Yells the doctor. "We have a pulse"

The End