

Hunchback of Baghdad

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Dedication:

To every intrepid, brave Arab and Iraqi armed by science before arms. Our enemy has only defeated us by spreading poverty and ignorance in our lands, usurping the bliss of our civilization. We are the cradle of literature, poetry and the arts. . . . Remember that justice is the foundation of sovereignty —commandment by justice. Your Excellencies and Majesties, furnish my table with bread, shelter my children, provide me with security, and then read me my rights.

The author, 2015

Hunchback of Baghdad

1

Jabar Ouda —Hunchback of Baghdad or Hump of Baghdad — is a man in his sixties, obese, monkey-faced, ugly, strong, and short. He has a defective right eye marked with a white spot in its pupil, is dark-complected and limps, and has a hump atop his back. Usually, he speaks angrily to himself, swearing and cursing as he walks. An edgy, ill-tempered person, who works as an undertaker, he has worked in most cemeteries of Baghdad and its environs. He is known by his ingenious name Hump of Baghdad. He owns several mortuaries. His ill fame as an undertaker is widespread in Baghdad, as he has buried several celebrities, and due to the fact that he has been in this profession since he was fifteen.

His voice is throaty and coarse, a voice that fills children's souls with terror. Alternatively, maybe his smoke-blackened teeth disgust the soul of whoever speaks to him. Especially, he is not particularly liked in Iraqi society. When he makes a decision, neither his family nor subordinates dare to comment on or discuss it. All that arouses his anger is avoided by them.

He has two sons, Salman, 30 years old with a tiny body and somehow accursed with his father's ape-like features, sloping forehead, sunken eyes, jutting chin, black, spliced, carefully combed hair, and the mustache.

The youngest, Aboud, is somehow well built, with a hawk-like nose, wide mouth, large head, and two scars on his forehead.

However, the mother, Hosnia, performs the last rites for females; she also does not hesitate for a second to steal anything. She has ugly features, a blackened face, and a large, round nose, a mean smile, and a big hairy mole. She wears a black veil, over her roughly shaped hair, has toughened senses.

“Months have passed since the downfall of Baghdad, and Saddam’s phantom still haunts the souls of the public; although, no one knows his whereabouts,” Jabar says while reclining on the couch in the middle of a small reception room. In a house whose walls are torn by dampness, corners cracked wide open, and without even lights to scare away the ghosts of darkness. War has left nothing useful, no water or electricity, only killing ghosts knocking on houses, leading their inhabitants to an unknown destiny.

They were sitting having tea as if in a secretive meeting, to make their plans after Baghdad’s downfall under a lantern’s dim light.

- “Stupid war. We have not removed him, so where is the certainty to celebrate?” said Aboud seriously.

His elder brother throw a warning glance towards him, saying, “I do not want to hear you saying such gibberish again.” Then with a resentful look he asked, “Understood?”

“Understood”, replied his younger brother, with his head down obediently.

The elder brother continued to look at him cruelly, drinking his tea. Rudely, he said, “Saddam Hussein has killed a lot of us as if we were sheep. He has had what he deserved.”

“Only God knows how much I hate him”, said their father, gazing meditatively at the ceiling and wiping his chin. He has destroyed us.” He

altered his pose, as if about to say something different. “The most important thing is that our business will grow. People will kill each other and Baghdad’s downfall will not pass quietly. The game is just starting. We have not entered the democratic era yet — we will need centuries to get used to democracy. Our people have no use for justice. We have to prepare our mortuaries for this purpose.” He laughed maliciously and turned to his wife. “Is not that your chance, Hosnia?”

With a sly smile, Hosnia replied, “The most important thing is that we do not want law. Law has impeded our richness; our network must spread immediately. We were about to be hanged during Saddam’s era, if it was not for that blessed American interference.”

Yes, all were imprisoned in [Abu Ghraib prison](#) awaiting their execution. Jabar and his sons were accused of stealing human organs and forgery of death certificates. Moreover, some witnesses had asserted that Jabar had committed necrophilia with a 15-year-old girl’s corpse.

His wife was involved in forgery and replacing infants with corpses of infants, in coordination with hospital staff, to convince new mothers that they had delivered dead babies.

“Tomorrow I’ll meet Doctor Salem”, said Jabar. “The organization operations will start again.” Then he whispered, as if emphasizing something important. “The operations will grow this time. Do you know with whom shall we operate?”

All these charges were dropped after Baghdad’s downfall. Criminal records were burnt, and The Hump of Baghdad started to dig his depraved path, as he is now on the loose, grateful to the gracious invasion.

“With whom shall it be?” they asked in low voices, jointly.

“Iranian intelligence”, the Hump replied.

Panic displayed on their faces.

“What a catastrophe, are you crazy?” the mother said.

“No, no. Do not be afraid. Do you think there will ever be stability again? No. Chaos and killing will spread and extend. There is a great plan for Iraq.”

Fears started to haunt his family’s imagination, while The Hump elaborated, to prove once again his absolute maliciousness.

He will crush whoever betrayed or defamed him. He will put each in his righteous position. All these concepts were present at this doomed meeting, as if an invisible but sensed giant black cloud shadowed the scene.

2

DoctorSalemwas in a secret meeting with members of Iranian intelligence at his house, his gaze moving between those present. They were five bearded men; one was wearing glasses with black frames and a dark-beige beret. Seriousness was prominent on all five faces, emphasizing the meeting's importance and vitality. They were all speaking Arabic fluently — classical Arabic.They were emanating some kind of weird, unpleasant eeriness.

Then one of them said, “Your agenda must progress in strict privacy and confidentiality, especially during this time. As Saddam Husseinhas not been arrested yet, danger is still imminent, DoctorSalem.”

Another spoke up.

“Our list of names of Iraqi pilotswho participated in the war against Iran has been completed. We will launch our operations according to our agenda that awaits your orders; after people are sunken, numbed by democracy. . . . Remember that we still have a covered card. America looms, passionately on fire to watch Iraq's destruction continue.”

“Shall we start from [al- Hassan Al Askari](#)as per my knowledge?”asked DoctorSalem.

All nodded in agreement. Then the one with beret said, “Everything is scheduled. As Muharramapproaches,[Muharram processions](#) of [Tatbir](#)and weepingare being prepared for your people.Shia'apeople are passionately eager for these rituals, especially after being banned by Saddamfor so long.” He clenched his fists angrily. “The time has come.”

“You will be promoted, Doctor Salem. Do not worry. Tehran appreciates your efforts”, said one of them.

Doctor Salem smiled, and said coaxingly, “I have ordered our best support, Jabar the Hump, to gather his subordinates, and we will start pumping in money to rebuild the network. It was about to be destroyed except for the fall of Baghdad.

“Organizational networks have begun to enter Baghdad and secure everything. Their effectiveness will be tested during future processions. Attacks on Sunni mosques will also be effective. Sunni and Shia’a are very coherent; thus, our job is to sow disparity. This can only be achieved by utilizing shrines. We already have clergy to satisfy the mission.”

They then chatted about trivialities, concluding the meeting after a tactical study to destroy the remains of the country.

Dr. Salem was their right hand. He could turn them against or in favor of anyone as he wished. He has vast life experience, sharp innate intelligence, and a sharp ability to judge correctly character at the first glance. His method in introducing people and facts to his supervisors should be taught in intelligence and diplomatic institutes, if you want to classify it justly.

In another area in Baghdad, particularly in [al- Thawracity, currently called Sadr City](#), Jabar had a dissuading meeting with a person in the latter’s house. They were having an important conversation about rebuilding the organization that had been dispersed during Saddam’s time.

Sarmad Al Taie, Jabar’s conversation partner, is a youth in his twenties, his features reflecting his recklessness. His face is reddish black, with

thick, clenched lips and eyes that are swollen as if with drink. He has spent most of his life between the slums and the streets. He is wearing old trousers and a dirty white old shirt.

They were sitting in an old hall on a dirty, red, old wooden couch. Jabar handed a sum of money to Sarmad.

“This is the first payment. We will provide you with information later.”

Sarmad counted the money resentfully and maliciously said, “From where shall we start?”

“The [Shaab district- Shaab market](#) is a good start. There is always a crowd there. We will hunt the largest number of corpses. My mortuary there will take care of them.”

“Your malignity is unlimited. Your mortuaries are taking great opportunities now.”

“What do you care? As long as you are paid, it is a push of a button for five hundred dollars. The issue will be settled as a suicidal explosive attack. That is what the new government desires.”

“OK, but operational costs will be different next time.”

“Understood. Sure. I will leave you now. We will meet after the operation.”

They stood, “Sarmad” walked “Jabar the hump” to the door. “Jabar” left and “Sarmad” stood there watching until he disappeared in the dark empty street. He thought extensively in “The hump’s” offer. This worm has never been quiet; in an endless motion distracting preys. Making them unable to determine which way he will take, or the speed it will use in its attacks. He will accept the offer. He will gain money and that is what matters, nothing more.

3

Baghdadis now facing a catastrophe unprecedented in any occupied country ever. Corpses, burnt corpses — and no one dares to inter this huge quantity of corpses filling Baghdad's roads and streets.

Harun al-Rashid's capital has become completely abandoned, by cars and by people. A city that life has abandoned, now ghosts inhabit its alleys, and yellow winds whistle terror through the few remaining souls.

Death and cruelty have overwhelmed the city doomed with its desire for destruction; exploiting the fall of Baghdad and its captivity between great powers. Overthrowing its black webs, to shadow the city with sorrows it has never witnessed. People realized when it was too late that Saddam, although brutal and cruel, was a sort of mercy, not a curse. The torment done by Saddam was nothing compared to the terrors Iraq was suffering now.

The streets are dead. Life is asleep and veiled in darkness. No light shines in any single house, as if the city is brutally expelling everything. Sleep never flirts with people's eyelids. The occupiers or the militias, who appeared and announced their control over Iraq under the new laws of the reign of terror, are constantly threatening to invade people's houses.

There was only one known criminal before 2003. Now murderers are legion, uncountable like gravel. They commit their crimes in police uniform — breaking into banks, kidnapping ministers from their ministries as hostages. That has become the new method of interaction between political parties now. Even in other countries, chaos does not prosper as it does in Iraq.

Evil brokers are sparing no efforts to sow explosive disparity. The country is in a transition phase. . . but to the worse.

Noor

This girl has been longing to make love with her knight. She passionately dreams of a world where her knight leads her between flowers and roses to an imaginary world. To a world where they meet in cafes, and he gives her a violet rose each time. . . . Yes, she loves violet. She wishes her wedding dress will be violet, and that the whole world will become violet. She fell in love before the fall of Baghdad. She loved Khaled the young journalist before he was killed in the American invasion.

She loved him, and the roots of their love have grown deep into the silt of the Tigris and Euphrates. On [Abu Nuwas](#) bank their passion has revealed love's different colours. . . under the shade of palm, ivy, and jazarin trees.

Noor has full, complete, glamorous femininity, to the extent that all the students in the faculty of media and mass communication whispered about her overwhelming softness, beauty, and femininity. Save Khaled, who was insanely infatuated with her. He started to find her face in the sunrise, the sunset, the moon's glamour, the stars' brightness, the clouds' richness, the scent of roses, and water's smoothness. Noor contained the universe about him, before he was killed while covering a story for his news channel, by a bullet from an American soldier. Noor was watching him live passionately when the bullet penetrated his forehead, and she saw him fall in his own blood.

She jumped off her couch in panic, shaking and crying for her knight. Those around at the house have not mourned her lover less; he was supposed to be her fiancé except death was faster to be wed.

The Almighty's destiny is always mightier.

Hasan al-Askri's Dilemma

“There is a plot to detonate the shrine. It is the winning card for Iran and America. To expand the playground and the game without any impediments”, stated the Iranian general Kasem, sitting in his large, luxurious palace garden, having tea with another Iranian officer, guarded fiercely by security men dispersed throughout the palace and grounds.

“We will make a joke out of America. Israel opened the doors of hell to get rid of Saddam, and they will not be able to close them.”

Kasem took a piece of fruit, wiped it, and paused before biting in, to say, “Matters are starting to flow as we desire. Our empire will return. Iraq is ours.”

Destiny played such an ambiguous role drawing this country's future. Iraq went through devastating death scenes. Death has snatched young, old, women, and children, putting the country under a reign of decay that has spread all through the Euphrates.

“What a shame we have not heard about such horrific traitors before. How do most politicians, who have not even obtained the elementary education certificate, occupy high posts? The ignorant are ruling Iraq. How will they rule future generations? Ignorance has prevailed. Political parties themselves compete in killing the people, and blame their opponents.”

“Tonight we will meet with a radical group whose goal is to enter Iraq and be field active. We will provide them with appropriate grounds,” replied General Kasem, adding contemptuously, “The shrine detonation plan will be executed by these radicals.”

The loud, reckless, and rude laughter of the two men filled the air. Then the second man slapped Kasem's shoulder, saying, "Cunning plan, my friend."

General Kasem is the real prime minister of Iraq if you want to be just. The ignorant politicians are literally only servants. If General Kasem visited Iraq, then he must inspect the intelligence agency, the public security authority, the Bader legions, and the cabinet.

Iraqi politicians' service to Iran is a type of submission, astonishment, and a total surrender to a dominant supremacy.

A minister — or let us use the correct word, servant — prides himself on his submission. His virtue is obedience; discussing the Iranian master is the crime. There are no opinions between them and the general, no right or wrong. There is only what the master desires.

When they speak to their masters away from the media or behind the cameras, they speak politely, quietly, entreatingly, with a pleading smile. The way they bow and give way. A servant — a politician — never walks beside his master. Walking side by side is equality. They walk behind the general, following behind by two steps only, no more or less. Unless the master requests the servant to show the way; in this case only, the politician leads the way, one step ahead. Once the master — General Kasem — identifies the way, the servant returns to his usual position, two steps behind.

These are the details behind the scene of Iraqi political statesmanship.

There are not politicians but servants. Fearing to lose their posts, when the master scorns, they grumble and whine, in a humbly complaining tone, full of pain and lust simultaneously. As if, they are wives having their full orgasms, though receiving harsh treatment; such cases where,

one cannot tell if they are in pain or lust. To keep their ministerial posts they accept all sorts of insults from General Kasem.

4

Midnight at the Iran–Iraq border, six persons sneak into a boat, crossing the border, guided by a dim light. They are six bastards who moved the boat, after plotting on a malicious plan. Nobody knows who will be the bastards' targeted victims. A new crime eventually, and undoubtedly, will be committed. The boat slid over the heavy, dense river waters, giving itself fully to the terrifying, dense darkness that nothing breaks, save dim star rays like whispers.

They circulated among themselves under a handheld spotlight a picture of a high-ranking officer. One of them said in Persian, “This officer was a high commander in the Presidential Guard during Saddam's era; he played an important role in liberating [al-Faw](#). He lives Basra now. We will take him out once we enter the city, along with all the other pilots. This is the list of names.” He distributed five lists.

The boat slid over the waters until it disappeared into the darkness, forewarning a doomed black morrow, heading fearlessly to execute a colourless, dateless plot.

Iraq is going through a black year. How will it pass? Invasions have not witnessed such precedents, as beheaded heads are tossed onto crossroads. There are neither people nor cars in the streets. Where are we?

God, what is happening to Iraq? Is that George.W.Bush's promise of democracy and a new Iraq? Every Iraqi was contemplating this question.

Americans themselves are raiding houses, stealing, raping, and burning. [Abu Ghraib](#) stands there in witness. The eventual actual start was in the doomed 2006. That was not less cursed than the preceding dry,

black, cursed years that burnt Iraqi lives. However, it was a sort of a date with a shameful, sectarian death race for Iraqis.

The Hump sat having tea in the house of A'aloush, one of his subordinates. The latter is addicted to bullying. He has a huge body, curly, disheveled hair, a knife or stab mark on his right cheek, a large, round nose, brown skin, a coarse voice. Although they exchanged many compliments, their meeting was dry. The ugliness and rarity of A'aloush's features were displayed after the smiles had left their faces.

Then he said to The Hump, "I have accepted to drink with you although you are a pimp."

"Take it easy on me. A snitch caused our arrest by Saddam's police. The snitch's name is Tahseen Al Saker. He lives in [al-Shu'ala](#) district. I sent someone to verify the information, and he did."

"I hope so. You are sure of this information?"

The Hump replied impatiently, "Dead sure, as we beheaded all the previous traitors — Ba'athists, security forces, intelligence personnel, and Saddam's commandos — and threw them in the dumpsters of Baghdad's streets. This dog will follow. We will execute him to join the Ba'athists' cadavers. He and whoever snitched on us."

"You know what will happen to you if you lie?"

The Hump raised his head and glanced in contempt at A'aloush. "Listen, you know that I have my men, who can easily slice you to pieces. If you do not believe me, suck that. My family and I were imprisoned and sentenced to death row before the fall of Baghdad.

"This person was the one who destroyed us. Because I am your utmost admirer, before I get this dog — Tahseen — I will bring him over to you

to do whatever you like. I will waive my right to kill him for you. Take him. Are you happy?”

“Are you serious? Will you give him to me, to remove his head with my own hands?”

“Yes. We are using Al-Qaeda’s existence on our fertile landsto impute all killing operations to Al-Qaeda as other militias do. We will bring the axe” — he raised his hand as if holding a sword — “and then cut he sheep’s head, saying, ‘Allah Akbar. God is great.’”

They both laughed loudly, and thenA’aloushasked, “Will you film the operation?”

“Sure, otherwise, what is the use of spending all this money. You will be among the masked gunmen. Satisfy your darkest desires — from now on, there is no law, accountability, nor records.”

“Will you pay generously?”

“Yes, definitely. We will ask for a ransom from the country or family of each hostage. No matter if the hostage is Iraqi or a foreigner, if the money is not paid, death will be his destiny. Everything will be done in the name of Islam, covered with the hails of ‘Allah Akabar’.”

Both men raised their glasses and cheered lavishly, and then drank a toast to the deal. Their sly laughter grew louder, covering all other sounds of the night. The Hunchback returned his glass to the table, saying with the ingenuity of an alcoholic, “Then we will join the marvelous band. Your participation with your men is important for me.”

“If I like what you pay, and you satisfy my desires, do not worry about a thing, I will be with you.”

“Thousands and thousands, no, but millions, that is what you will collect, idiot.”

The sound of a great explosion reached their ears; it was enough to shake the house. Then silence prevailed for few seconds. They both collected their senses, and then the Hunchback got up to leave, saying, “If the explosion did not kill me, the ceiling of your house will take care of that duty.”

Tahseen walked him to the door. The hump whispered in a sharp, serious tone, “We are about to launch a civil war. You will have a lot of money. You will not be able to believe how much will you gain from your work.” He then shook hands firmly with Tahseen. “Tomorrow, you will receive your first payment. All you have to do is to gather your men and let me meet them.”

Then he went away quickly leaving Tahseen’s mind preoccupied with such a heavy load of thoughts . . . wondering who had set these genies free. Indeed, the fall of Baghdad would inevitably lead to dilemmas humanity had never seen before!

5

The Arrest of the Leader

No one believed the scene of the arrest of the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, who used to be a threat for all his country's neighbours. Such a disgraceful scenario had been pre-set, which eventually led to his final dishonouring surrender. He has been examined just like a sheep. . . .An unbelievable scene was enough to temporarily reassure his Iraqi opponents and rulers of neighbouring states. The new government came to be of no use as it was nothing but a nasty, swelling big bug creating disgusting fluids . . . Did America really bring democracy to "New Iraq"? You are such a big liar, Mr George W. Bush! What will we see after years of liberation?

A few years later, specifically on Wednesday the 22nd of February 2006, an armed gang, disguised in the uniform of policemen, broke into the Shrine of al-Hassan al-Askari— peace be upon him — and tied up the five members of its garrison, put explosives beneath the tomb, and detonated them. This led to the destruction of the Shrine's dome, which in turn resulted in sectarian violence, which reaped so many souls all over the country.

The Hunchback was sitting with Dr. Salem in a room filled with hospital equipment; they were happily watching the news.

"This is good news, and good progress as a start", said The Hump.

"Yes, but the South of Iraq will not stay restrained. Fighters have been gathering in preparation of a fierce attack. One hundred kilos of explosives will be used!"

“You know, what really matters are that America has recently been satisfied with Iranian activities. As long as both parties are happy, then we are more than happy”, replied the Hump.

“Anyway,” said the doctor, “how’ve your men been doing lately?”

“Fine. They are ready, as long as support is coming steadily.” The Hump rubbed his fingers together in a gesture signifying money.

“You remain a filthy pig, you Hump. You would sell your country for money!”

“Who has remained clean, Doctor? I owe America my life. If it was not for them, I would have been dead long ago. Even you . . . you have sold your country for money. You have been dealing with foreigners for the sake of few dollars.”

“You really deserve to be executed, Hump.” Disgustedly, the doctor turned his face away.

“Birds of feather flock together, Doctor Salem . . . we have found one another.”

Dr. Salem leant towards a drawer, picked up an envelope full of money, and gave it to the Hump.

“Here is ten thousand dollars, and I will give you the names of the Iraqi pilots who participated in bombing Iran during the war, and the names of some high-ranking military officers. Their addresses will be sent to you. The operation will take place soon.”

The Hump gladly took the envelope, thanking the doctor.

“Immediately. I am at your service, Doctor.”

“Take a good look at the money, Hump. I think two men shall be enough to handle this. We will provide you with new cars and official IDs you never dreamt of. I want as much detailed information as possible about the current situation in the country.”

This is how the doctor has been managing his men since he was appointed as Head of Operations. He kept an always-open eye, a firm, solid grip, and an ever-predominant total control. However, a thin, almost unnoticed scratch appeared on the walls of this construction when he received the order, to arrest one of his colleagues in the hospital and get rid of him immediately. He could not dare to ask about the reason behind this arrest. As it goes, do as the orders say first, then think about it later —what an absurd rule! Even questioning an order is prohibited!

In fact, it was an undiscussable order. He knew he was nothing but a fly on the wall of his boss. Yet, at the same time, he knew that General Kasem was unbearable . . . he was such a pain in the neck. However, orders remain orders. He can never make a pre-emptive strike to change the course of actions.

The doctor’s attitude towards his men is typically aggressive. He never attacks unless he is sure he will never be caught. Such a despicable man who knows nothing about forgiveness. When he gets the upper hand over his enemies, he shows no mercy whatsoever! Alternatively, as it goes. . . . These are the ruthless rules of the Mafia work!

6

Minister of Interior Affairs

Such a luxurious office as he had never dreamt of. With a number of well-built bodyguards who get high salaries. Wearing black suits and black glasses . . . with merciless faces!

As for the office of the Minister of Interior Affairs, it is such a stylish one, with a view of the Tigris River, away from the noise of the city. The Minister — surrounded by a strict escort — stepped out of his car and asked his first assistant, who was waiting for him right at the gates of the ministry's huge building, "How is it going with our latest weapons deal with China?"

"The deal has been sealed. We shall receive the weapons next month, Boss."

"Great." The minister motioned for his assistant to come closer. "I want the process of burying the treasure to be official, as if we are burying a real corpse. Until it is out of the country."

"Don't worry, Boss", the assistant replied. "Dr Salem has already prepared the death certificate. The undertaker is someone he trusts."

"What's his name?"

"Jabar Ouda, Boss."

"The Hunchback?" the minister asked uncomfortably.

"Yes, indeed he is, Boss. You will see him once we reach the office, Boss."

As they reached the office, Fakhri, the assistant, motioned to the guards to leave, and then closed the door behind them. He picked a red file out of the group on his desk and respectfully placed it in front of the minister, who scanned it quietly, focusing on the photo of the Hunchback.

“He got a death sentence during the reign of the pimp, Saddam Hussein, right?”

“Yes. He miraculously managed to avoid it. He is one of the most spiteful men who hate not only the Baath Party, but the whole world as well!”

“I do not really care. The only thing that really matters is that he will bury the money discreetly, as if burying a dead body, in order to avoid any doubts. Then, we can easily get rid of him later.”

“For sure, Boss. Billions of dollars . . . worth the sacrifice.”

“I will never forget about you, Fakhri,” said the minister, giving his assistant a look that carried a certain meaning, with a big smile of pride.

“You have already done much more, Boss.”

Suddenly, the cell phone of the assistant rang. Fakhri glanced at the screen.

“It’s Jowana, the Kurdish woman I told you about, Boss. May I take the call?”

The minister nodded.

“Welcome, Jowana.”

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“What? You are here in the Ministry Building now?”

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Fakhri quickly told the minister the purpose of Jowana's visit and waited for permission to bring her into the office. After a moment's reflection, the minister nodded.

Fakhri spoke into his phone. "I will send someone to you to bring you to the minister right away."

A few minutes later, a blond girl wearing a miniskirt that showed off her beautiful legs entered the office. When the minister set eyes on her face, a melody sang in his head. What a beautiful girl she is! With two wonderful, blue pearls for eyes.

It is as if she has been created for his own sake. She might be thirty-five. In her eyes, one can see calmness or maybe even sadness. The tap of the high heels of her red shoes on the tiled floor has a rhythm that is like a Beethoven symphony. When she moves her right leg forward and lifts her left leg to move it, in this precise moment her body moves in three different directions almost on purpose. Her luscious round thighs move forward, so the soft friction between her legs moves the air around her. Her full breasts jiggle, announcing their overwhelming presence. Her nice soft butt shakes like a pendulum, with the same strength and distance in each direction. In fact, Jowana's one-of-a-kind butt really deserves a whole manual to describe its numerous features.

His eyes wide and his mind preoccupied with devilish thoughts, the minister motioned to a chair. "Have a seat."

Fakhri excused himself and politely exited the office.

"Thanks, Mr Minister. Frankly, I didn't know you had such kind heart!" Jowana said cunningly, raising her left eyebrow to stress her last words.

“What’s the matter?” The minister asked. “I see you doubt something. Can you tell me what is it?”

“My husband. Mr Minister, he is the head of a looting gang. A few months ago, our relationship went bad. Now he is threatening to kill me, and he attacked the beauty salon I own, looted everything, and shut it.”

Immediately, the minister picked up a pen and a small piece of paper, his attention never leaving the blond girl. “What’s his name?”

Her manner was seductive as she spoke the name. “Ezz Al-Din Al-Khatib.”

The minister felt he had stumbled on this name before, but he asked, “Where does he reside?”

“al-Mansour”, she said, and then gave the full address.

He pressed a button beside the phone on his desk. Immediately Fakhri entered.

“Yes, Boss?”

“Take this name. I need him to be arrested within one hour.” The minister handed him the note. Fakhri glanced at it, did not comment, and left the office, closing the door quietly.

“I’ll have him arrested. From now on, you are under my protection”, said the minister.

“And I totally agree, Mr Minister.”

Jowana looked relieved, and she changed her position to show her feminine assets, giving her protector a very seductive smile. The minister felt good that he managed to satisfy a citizen.

Such a pretty woman with a wonderful butt, full of life, through many seductive positions she took in front of him. Each part of her body seemed to have a life of its own. Like an arsenal, it showered him with seductive missiles till he could resist no longer and began to pass long nights preoccupied with devilish thoughts and flaming lust. Finally, he made up his mind; he must get her by any means!

7

The Hunchback's Mafia

The Hunchback played a vital role helping hostile agendas in assassinating pilots and burying weapons and bodies that did not have death certificates; as if he is the owner of Baghdad's cemeteries. He dominated Baghdad in an unprecedented way. He bought a villa and decorated the entrance with a metal sign inscribed "Mr. Jabar Ouda's Villa".

The villa is 450 square meters, with a spacious garden. The building is composed of two floors. The first features a reception area furnished with the latest modern furniture, a big plasma home cinema TV, an fancy kitchen in brown ceramic, and six large rooms besides the reception.

The second floor comprises four large, luxurious rooms, also furnished in the latest style, and decorated extravagantly with expensive woodwork and modern windows.

He was sitting with his wife and two sons, chatting. The Hunchback held a list, which he glanced at periodically. He talked to the three of them.

"Salman and Aboud, of course this includes both of you." He directed his next words rudely and indecently to his wife. "We will receive new instructions; we shall execute them strictly and literally. I think I shall travel with Dr Salem. You will run the business as usual for few days."

"We have achieved good progress. I am quite content with our earnings," his wife replied. "Why don't we leave Iraq and start a new life?"

“What!” The Hunchback yelled. “Where shall we go, with our cemeteries of poisoned bodies?” He turned to his sons. “Do you know any other profession but burial?”

Both of them grumbled together.

“No”, replied the eldest. “Burial is the only profession we have learnt.”

“I do not know any other profession”, said the youngest.

Jabar looked at his wife inquiringly and asked: “Have you heard what they said? Do you have what it takes to get a job in a Syrian or Jordanian nightclub to earn our living?”

The woman did not utter a word, showing her regret at having said such a silly thing. She continued listening to her husband’s instructions though her mind was trembling from the events happening around her. Matters had become seriously dangerous. However, she cannot express her fears out of fear of her husband. Who is she to him? She is merely an unpleasant yellow cow. Her death is an asset, not a loss for him. Therefore, silence is gold.

In a very different environment away from Baghdad, in the green area, where no explosives are heard, politicians live an extravagant, lavish life. In particular, the luxurious palace of the Minister of Interior was decorated with waves of colourful and dancing lights.

The wires extended along the garden wall, embracing jasmine and violet, tangled with branches of palm trees, crowning rose trees, spreading like a crescent and stars.

The prettiest place in that palace was the spacious, elegant, luxuriously furnished ballroom. The walls are decorated with precious art and antiquities. The centre is graced with a spacious dance floor, and a

corridor leads to an excessive buffet, just to the right of which the Iraq National Orchestra occupied a beautiful terrace. In the ballroom, on the terrace, at the buffet, in the verdant gardens, guests stood and chatted, wandered and whispered, danced and laughed. The guests included businesspersons, ministers and their wives, some high-class prostitutes, which latter are usually unbelievably pretty and extremely sexy. They came to celebrate the minister's beautiful, blond wife's birthday. She was twenty years old and her name was Nourhan. The guests sat as couples and groups, laughing loudly, coarsely, and drunkenly. Their faces luminously radiated lechery.

When the sounds of music fill the air, they fill the spaces between their bodies with hugs and kisses, dancing. The space is filled with perfumes, odours, heat of lust between eyes, bosoms, and loins.

The conversation ranged among politics, life, commerce, but mostly about security in Iraq — they were just like butterflies fluttering around a fire.

All were delighted by the music for so long, drank too much; inebriated heads turned and tongues usually discreet became loose, conversation flowed; glee, laughter, shiny smiles, and flirting glances filled the air. Eyes met, hands touched, aroused shivering lips kissed.

Delight and joy overwhelmed the gathering, thus swelling their lust lavishly.

Nourhan's twentieth birthday is today. Her elevated breasts and the expression in her eyes reveal the swift maturation of her femininity. She stands with Fakhri in one of the corners, watching the belly dancers. They both hold whiskey glasses and smile regularly as if to hide their conversation from the crowd.

“Happy birthday, madam. You are actually shining tonight.”

“Thanks, Fakhri, I cannot thank you enough for what you did in preparing this party.”

“It is my pleasure, madam!”

Her eyes wandered, as if she waited for the arrival of someone, which made Fakhri curious, so he asked her, “Are you waiting for someone important?”

“Yes. I have a journalist friend whose name is Noor. I recommended —”
Before she could finish Noor entered the ballroom. She has a Snow-White beauty, and the crowd did not hide their admiration. She looked like a dancing fountain of love, standing at the entrance. Nourhan hurried toward her to welcome her warmly.

“How are you, love? Miss you like crazy.”

“I miss you more, Nourhan. If you knew what I had to do, to convince my father to let me come, it was a miracle that I obtained his permission.”

Fakhri’s hungry, rude eyes starred lustfully at Noor’s body. He started to compose nauseating mental sexual scenes; it was obvious that he had fallen for her. He was watching her laughter, her movement, even each flicker of her eyes, and the way she sucked the juice from the glass with her pomegranate-red lips. His urges were so compelling that he immediately moved towards a middle-aged woman and quietly pulled her out of the crowd from among her friends. Then he whispered in her ear. She smiled and glanced slyly at Noor from afar, and then winked to Fakhri to show that she accepted his request.

“I want her tonight after the party.”

“You are sneaky, Fakhri.”

“You know how I plan for anything.”

“How much is my commission?”

“A Mercedes just entered the country; it’s in customs now. It will be transferred to your name.”

She looked at Noor and replied resentfully, looking fiercely at him, “The girl is worth more, Fakhri.”

“Your husband’s nomination to the parliament will be done soon; do not be greedy. You know that I always accept your requests.”

“All right, you will have her after the party”, she said resentfully, because Fakhri’s offer was cheap. They parted, and Fakhri kept staring at Noor. She was laughing with Nourhan, absorbed in their conversation.

“I will never forget him, Nourhan, though a year has passed since he died.”

“You will forget him, sweetheart. You are still young.”

“How is your marriage, Nourhan? I hope you are happy.”

Nourhan looked at the floor dumbly, as if the question hurt her. She frowned a little, and then put on a forced smile and said, “Thanks be to God. As long as he satisfies all my requirements, the rest does not matter.”

Noor understood that the minister is busy fulfilling his desires; Nourhan is merely an object the minister possesses to satisfy his lust, only when he does not get a new piece. Then he leaves her the same as any antique in one of the house corners.

The minister's phone rang while he was involved in a political discussion with his friends, so he excused himself to answer it.

"Hello."

.....

"When?"

.....

"Well, put him in jail until you receive further orders."

.....

Then he hung up to call another person . . . or more correctly, another type of woman.

"Jowana, your husband is under arrest. Do not worry. I will take care of him. The most important thing now is that you are all right — leave the rest to God and me."

.....

"I am celebrating my wife's birthday now. I will call you tomorrow. Have a good night." The minister glanced at his watch and returned to his company.

It is 12 o'clock. Now all have gathered to blow out the candles on the cake. Each has his share of the cake.

The pretty woman who was assigned to lure Noor was monitoring her closely. Noor had become her top priority to earn the promised fat tips from the minister's assistant. She attracted Nourhan's attention to other guests and the presents and started to befriend Noor, chatting with her.

After Noor and the woman had chatted for a while, the latter said,
“Honestly, it was a pleasure meeting you, Mademoiselle Noor.”

“Me too. I wish we had known each other earlier. You are truly a very chic woman.”

“Don’t you worry. I will never let you go. To strengthen this newly born friendship I will drive you home in my car.”

“No, Om Amir, that is too much. You are embarrassing me.”

“You are too generous.”

Fakhri’s shadow appeared from afar, following them with his rude gaze. He was dead serious to have Noor in privacy, and he did not give a damn about the consequences. What will happen? The country is lost, hundreds of people are getting killed or lost and no one cares. His will melted at the look in her eyes as she smiled while talking and chatting so innocently with Om Amir.

Fakhri’s imagination went wild with images of bed and fulfilling his darkest desires with her, until he was awakened from his dark imagination by the ring of his phone. He answered it.

“Yes, sir. I will take care of him tomorrow, do not worry.”

He hung up and continued devouring Noor with his savage gaze. He was sexually aroused, starting to sweat out of his tension, as if there were not another woman in the whole world but Noor.

At about two in the morning, the music began to dwindle; the crowd started gradually to leave.

“Noor, I will drive you home in my car, dear.”

“I am afraid that will be too much, Om Amir.”

“Do not worry. My car is a brand new model. It will not cost me anything to drive you.”

Noor excused herself from Nourhan after spending a wonderful night with her, where she dropped all her sorrows and sadness, and kissed her goodbye.

“I will call you, Nourhan.”

“Thanks for coming, Noor. I will send a driver to take you home.”

“Don’t worry. Om Amir will drive me home.”

Nourhan did not object; on the contrary, she smiled assuredly. The two friends parted, and it was not long before Fakhri also withdrew on the pretext of exhaustion.

Fakhri had prepared everything in the space of a few hours. A kidnap of a virgin —why not? There is no law in Iraq. Such incidents occur repeatedly, easily, and continuously in such a strange country, with its ephemeral laws and authority. There is no serious accountability or prosecution for murders. Iraqis live by laws of the jungle. Traitors had done the deeds before the invaders did. This homeland has no owner now.

Fakhri premeditatedly, haphazardly, planned for the kidnap of this young rose. He was following Om Amir’s car. Only a few meters separated the two cars, as the streets were empty late at night.

“Have a chocolate, dear.”

“Thanks, but I’m full.”

“This is very rare and special piece of chocolate. A relative brought it from London.”

Noor took one piece from the small-engraved box. Om Amir winked to Noor to have another one; on condition, she tastes it, to tell her opinion.

Noor did not refuse and ate the chocolate. After only a few minutes, she fainted from the anaesthetic. Om Amir patted her cheeks gently to make sure she was sedated, and then pulled out her mobile phone and called Fakhri.

“The meal is ready. I will park somewhere safe and you come to take her. If you want the truth, your choice is excellent. If I was not straight, I would be ready to sleep with such a beauty, and I would pay you whatever you want.” She laughed seductively.

Both cars pulled into the corner of a dark, empty space and parked. Fakhri hurried to Om Amir’s car and threw a pile of banknotes, which Om Amir picked up without a word. He quickly lifted Noor’s body onto his shoulder and like lightning returned to his car. Om Amir did not miss the chance to take several shots of him with her hidden camera while he was carrying the body. She then drove to the main street, leaving Fakhri and Noor to their destiny.

A great explosion occurred the next day in New Baghdad. Human remains splattered across streets, roads, and crossroads. Sounds of wailing, mourning, and crying filled the air, and blood covered the streets and pavements. Baghdad has a daily date with death.

A’alouh watched the scene coldly, smoking a cigarette butt. He went closer to the detonation site as if fulfilling his desires from the scenery of the splattered victims. After taking his fill of the sight, he inhaled the last puff of his cigarette, threw it away, and left, leaving behind him the pedestrians busy helping survivors and collecting human remains.

These sad times were not exclusive to a certain social class; the death and destruction was inclusive of all Iraqis. Noor's father was restless, as if sitting on a seat of hot charcoal, in pain and shock for his missing daughter. They called Nourhan, who confirmed that Noor left for home with a woman, and promised to check and call back.

The father sat among his sad family members, who had gathered out of their worry about Noor. Her mother did not stop crying and wailing for a second. Three of her brothers were present. One of them, Nabil, was in the uniform of a first lieutenant in the police force. A 10-year-old girl was crying out of fear. Their fears grew when Nourhan called again confirming that Noor had disappeared. Om Amir had told Nourhan that she saw Noor safely to her street. Afterwards, they could not reach Om Amir again, as if she had been a flash of lightning in rainy skies.

Nabil tried to use his connections to reveal the secret behind his sister's disappearance, alas in vain. Thousands like her disappeared without a trace. Kidnapping a person in Iraq was easier than having a cup of water.

8

The Hunchback has gone too deep and far in the worlds of crime and treason. He never thought of his country, which was being turned into ruins by the likes of him.

Even Iraqis themselves were lost. Are they the jinks; or are these bad luck times? Wherever you turn, all you hear are complaints, a sigh, or gushing tears.

It is common to find someone cursing, saying that times are tight, virtue is less, that these times are sadder and lonelier than the previous regime.

Man could be unjust to his times, feel frustrated for no special reason but to escape his bitter life and dry reality to a safe sanctuary of the past that resembles the darkness of the future, as a way of seizing hope and healing wounds.

We are in the era of wolf packs, my friend. Here, man circles into a ring of fire, until either he dies or maybe lives to escape it.

The Hunchback continued to execute his criminal operations, supported by Dr Salem. The latter provides all the killing machines and detonators, control devices and packages.

The Hunchback in turn distributes these among his armed group that grows dominant in an unprecedented way even among world mafias.

The latter, as if targeting scientists specifically with a doomed fate, killed innocent people, such as university professors, doctors, and officers, in cold blood, condescendingly, and smiling dryly.

The Hunchback had a freezer room to store the bodies of assassinated persons and those executed by governmental militias or the authorities. Bodies are secretly transferred in the dark to the Hunchback's custody for storage, and later, mass burial without death certificates for large sums of money.

On one of these dark black nights, a body of a young, beautiful female was among the corpses. Though dead, it was much prettier than if it were alive. She was a victim like all the other bodies. The Hunchback seized the opportunity of his workers being busy burying bodies and headed to the young girl's body, touched its cheeks with a sly smile and said, "If you were alive, would you allow a Hunchbacklike me to touch even your hair?"

"No", he coarsely replied. "But now, I can rape you among these dead bodies. You are all dead." He started to unbutton his trousers, but Salman's sudden entry into the room made him pretend that he was examining the dead bodies. "This body is intact", he said, "but we must hurry to bury them, as tomorrow we will receive a large number of guests."

Here in the cemetery concepts are reversed. Instead of people visiting in memory of the dead, it has become a trade centre and a place for endless rapes. God forbid if we heard the dead's complaints about the acts of the living. We would hear chattering wails and mourning. Springs of mercy have gone dry on earth. Women who delivered their beloved ones to death and widows become slaves in our doomed era. They work as servants, to become the object of not only rape but also murder.

Rape

She jumped to her feet out of panic and horror on an inauspicious day. Her pain was lost in the vigorous currents of fear coursing through her body, and she shouted, “Where am I? What is all this blood?”

The woman screamed, but she realized that her hands and legs were cuffed. Fakhri sat in a rocking chair coldly rocking to and fro, smiling triumphantly. The room was large and richly furnished, with a king-sized bed and elegant curtains. An acute crime of rape was committed last night without the victim’s consciousness.

“Relax. You are in my palace. No one will hear you. You are a guest.”

He puffed a thick cloud of smoke from his cigarette, rested his elbows on the arms of the chair, and leaned forward with his head as if getting ready to attack. Nothing matters for him now. He has obtained his sexual satisfaction; he still feels the numbness in his head and the relief. He rocks in the chair coldly, refreshed, wearing his red silk robe over his naked body.

Noor did not believe what had happened. After a while she recognized that she was not sleeping and that it was not a nightmare. That she will not wake up shortly to find herself in her mother’s arms. All of a sudden, she realized that she had been cursed by a wolf’s violation. Screaming did not help; her voice grew faint, and she only became weaker. She surrendered to her status. Her body shivered and she was terrified to death. In vain, she screamed for help, and her cries dwindled into silent crying, but her suffering did not end. Fakhri continued talking insolently.

“I must have any woman I like. You were the classiest among them. If you keep what happened private, you shall have whatever you desire.”

“Damn you.” She spat in his face. “How dare you do and say that. I swear by God, if I have only one day to live I will make you pay for that.”

“Then it is war between us. You will change your clothes. The maid will take care of service. I shall have you whenever I like.”

Noor could not stand his words and started to scream and cry. Fakhri came close to her and fondled her hair. Noor resisted and spat on his face repeatedly, but that only aroused his meanness. He started to laugh.

He slapped her several times, then grabbed her hair savagely and said nervously, “My men and I will have a lot of fun with you.”

Deep, painful silence prevailed, and then he slapped her harder than before, so strongly that she fainted. Fakhr shouted for the maid. A svelte, beautiful woman like a white rose, who has the traits of a woman in her forties yet is still slender and pretty, entered the room and said in a soft voice that echoed, “Sir.”

“Take her to the bathroom, put her under the shower for a long time, and do not uncuff her.”

Then he went out of the room to make a telephone call to Dr Salem.

“Hello.”

.....

“Dr Salem, I hope you can visit today. I want you to increase the heroin dose. Your pay will be doubled. I want you to leave her a useless corpse.”

.....

“OK. I will be waiting for you.”

.....

He caresses her body mercilessly while she is fainting, piece by piece until it opens up, then he conquers her forcefully, cruelly, as if he wants to punish her, causing her as much pain as possible. He penetrates her without feeling or emotion, without even false or fake decency. He is dealing with her body rudely, vulgarly, and increasingly violently as if he is in a street fight, or wrestling. . . . He feels his own weakness and then subdues it, and returns to the role of honest, dedicated politician’s assistant.

9

Restless, days, weeks, and months passed for Noor's father, while on their bed in front of him his wife was dying of sadness for the loss of her daughter. His officer son has not left a stone unturned in search of his sister, but in vain. The call for [Isha](#)¹ prayer did last long that night. Noor's father felt as if the announcer would not stop repeating the call until midnight without anybody responding to his call. His feelings coursed through his heart. The announcer's soft delicate sound penetrated his sad heart. He put on his shoes and went in his white [jilbab](#) to Abu Hanifa Mosque at [al-Adhamiyah](#).

Doctor Salem was tirelessly and persistently destroying Noor. She awaits him daily now impatiently like any other addict to receive her heroin dose, then she rests her little head on the hard cold floor. If she slept on the hard floor or the soft bed, she was indifferent. All she wanted was to escape into the darkness of her new world.

Fakhri had succeeded in destroying an angel who had long dreamt of a fairytale life — as any Iraqi citizen, she did not ask for much. She was debilitated, weak, and diminished until the day he was fed up with her groans and complaints, and had no further interest in her. He threw her into a small storage room in the palace. He was impatiently awaiting her death.

He actually forgot all about Noor, spending his nights each with someone new, satisfying his lusts as if nothing had happened. Until one day an important person visited. They stood by the storage room in which Noor had been thrown. She was desperate, miserable, dizzy, and

¹The **Isha prayer** (Arabic: صلاة العشاء *ṣalāt al-ʿiṣāʾ* IPA: [\[sʕala:talʕiʃa:ʔ\]](#), "night prayer") is the night-time daily prayer recited by practicing Muslims.

half-awake in pain. Their conversation drew her attention; although it was hard in her condition, she focused her attention on every word they said:

“There is a sample of the new weapon in this bag. You will like it very much, Fakhri. There are a modern Russian hunting rifle and a gun.

Fakhri took the bag and looked inside. “A great sample,” he said. “I will keep it in my office, and then I will call you tomorrow to agree on the amount.”

They shook hands and the unidentified person left. Fakhri stashed the bag in a big safe built inside a wall, which he covered, with a large painting, and then started to change his clothes.

The Hunchback of Baghdad was meeting A'aloush and Sarmad in the latter's house. Each had his paymoney on the table in front of where he was sitting for their efforts in the latest detonation operations. Signs of victory and triumph were evident on their faces; the Hunchback took a sip from his glass of tea and said, “We will bury a relative of someone who is a VIP in the state. We have to do the burial ourselves. You will be with me in the digging process and you will receive a decent amount of money to satisfy your greed.”

“Did the deceased die naturally or was he killed?” Sarmad asked.

“I do not know. The corpse will arrive already shrouded inside a coffin. All we have to do is bury it, then we are paid and say adieu.”

“Why don't you assign such a task to your workers?” A'aloush said dully.

“The deceased is a VIP; he is a relative of one of the ministers. The pay is good as well.”

One afternoon, Nabil, Noor's brother, was summoned to the police captain's office to be informed that he had been assigned to the VIP protection services division in Iraqi's Ministry of Interior. This news should have delighted any officer; however, he was not happy. The disappearance of his sister and their failed search attempts had been tough on him. Even Nourhan could not find out the secret behind her disappearance, though Om Amir has sworn that she delivered her safely to her address and that she does not know what happened thereafter. What worsened his loads of pressure was the loss of his mother to death, a matter that made him disoriented.

The sad officer sat with his fiancée, Elham, who in turn surprised him with her decision to break up. She cannot marry a man whose sister has escaped, or disappeared for unknown reasons, to an unknown destination. He raged and shook his fist at her, insisting that his family honour was one of the best in Iraq, but in vain. His fiancée has decided to break up to marry someone who has proposed to her, a British subject living in London.

She chose him, unhesitatingly, once she heard "living in Europe". He will save her from this poisonous city by spiriting her away to foggy, romantic Europe.

"Please, Elham, will you reconsider your decision?" pleaded Nabil.

In reply, she stood up without a word, took off her ring, and said firmly and confidently, "Good luck with someone else. I have decided, and that is my decision."

She left quickly, as if throwing off a heavy load from over her chest. Alternatively, she was relieving her self-pitying, broken heart. Nabil looked at his watch and reached into his pocket to pay the bill, and then left silently and sadly with his head bowed.

Two emotions were controlling his head that time:

A deep grief, knife-sharp disappointment, collapse of hopes and dreams, which made him restless whether sleep or awake. He was possessed also by an unquenchable desire for vengeance on those who had caused the disappearance of his sister, the death of his mother, and the collapse of his hopes and dreams.

All these sharp feelings were prophesying death and doom. As long as there are kidnappings and kidnappers, the need for vengeance will remain intact. The state is a total failure; politicians are nothing but thugs, they are graduates of slums and alleys, not scholars. They are careless about security deficiencies, corruption, and murder. If these issues were to be rectified, they would certainly be eliminated and put on trial. They are the main source of sectarian violence and conflict in Iraq. They are nothing but hideous viruses that have treacherously infected the old lion called Iraq.

Nabil came to the Ministry of Interior. He was firm, shaved, and handsomely dressed in his full official uniform. Fakhri was informed of the arrival of the battalion nominated for the minister's protection.

Fakhri requested from one of his subordinates a major to meet the officers and evaluate them. Nabil won the honour of protecting the Minister of Interior. Other officers were assigned to other departments in the ministry, one of which was the office of the minister's ceremonies.

The minister admired Nabil's performance, valour, and dedication. He assigned him head of the protection battalion and promoted him to the rank of captain. This in turn aroused Fakhri's interest in befriending Nabil. Maybe he could depend on him and make him his right hand if the wind changed.

The assassination of the Minister of Interior was among Fakhri's plans. One of the political leaders has promised to assign him in replacement of the minister, whose term in office was nearing its end.

He is satisfying his lust with Nourhan, who makes him drool each time he sees her. He is fascinated with her breasts, and her slim waist. He fantasizes about her in sleeping gowns between his arms. He is determined to add her to his collection as soon as he gets rid of the minister.

He called the servant and inquired about Noor. The servant answered that Noor's state was miserable and she was about to die. He ordered the servant to poison her food to expedite her death. The servant refused; but in vain, she tried not to be involved in that matter.

"When Noor dies, we will immediately dump her body somewhere," said Fakhri. "If you refuse to do what I say, you will have the same fate. I have no desire for her body anymore. Next week the house must be clean of this trash, understood?"

10

Treasure Burial

The coffin was prepared for burial; the digging was being supervised by the Hunchback, as Fakhri had requested from Dr Salem.

An elegant car stopped a little while after midnight. Inside were two hugely muscled persons in expensive black suits, white shirts, and black neckties. A'aloush and Sarmad plus the two persons who had just arrived together lifted down the coffin, as it was supposed to be deposited in the freezing chamber in the basement.

The Hunchback unlocked his office in the cemetery. They all entered, and he closed the door behind them. There was a thick, barred iron door on the right side of the room, covered by a dummy wall, which opened via remote control. Beyond that door was a small stair leading to a cellar parallel to the surface. Lights were turned on inside; the four of them went in carrying the coffin, headed by the Hunchback walking steadily inside.

The two bodyguards found themselves in a large rectangular cellar, its ceiling rising a few meters above their heads. Its floor was sooty, but the walls were made of granite. They went on until they were stopped by another iron door blocking the intruders.

A pin number was punched into a concealed electronic board inside the wall to the right of the door and the door opened electronically, surprising the bodyguards with the sight of several numbered locked doors lining both sides of the corridor; these were the freezing chambers built to preserve the dead bodies.

The Hunchbackled them to the room where they should place the coffin. He looked at door number 8 and indicated to them to place the coffin on the ground. As he was about to open the door, he said, “Your trouble is over, gentlemen. You will place the deceased here.”

Then he opened the door. A breath of cold air blew in his face, and a frozen human head fell down. That was more than enough to unnerve the bodyguards to indescribable terror and panic. Pompous and frowning, the Hunchback shouted, “Haven’t you cleared this room?”

He picked up the frozen head, threw it carelessly into the room, closed the door, and with a voice of thunder shouted, “I guess room nine is empty, but you will clean this room thoroughly tomorrow after you dig a large hole for those. The bodies must be preserved in body bags first before placing them in the fridge. Do you understand, you buggers?”

In a single voice, Sarmad and A’sloush answered “Understood.”

The Hunchback went to the next door, opened it, and turned the lights on. It was empty except for traces of blood and small frozen bits of body parts stuck to the floor. He removed a small body part from the frozen floor and shouted at Sarmad and A’aloush, “When you clean a place of bodies, I do not want to see any parts stuck on the floor, idiots. I pay you to work carefully, not carelessly.”

“Yes, tomorrow you shall have this,” replied Sarmad.

The coffin was placed in the room, the door was closed, and all four of them returned to the surface. The Hunchback’s phone rang. It was Dr Salem following up to check that the process went safely.

“Do not worry, Dr Salem. It will be buried tomorrow.”

.....

“Yes, OK. The name Adel Abdul Mohsen will be engraved and fixed on the tomb. That is my mission.”

.....

“Good bye.”

The two bodyguards left in the car in the darkness of night. The Hunchback looked at his assistants and said, “Start digging at four o’clock. Dr Salem will come personally.”

11

Salman and A'aboud were sitting in a café sipping Iraqi tea, as if waiting for an important meeting. It was 11 o'clock. Then the person whom they were waiting for finally arrived.

A tall man wearing black shades, a fancy suit, and a black shirt, and carrying a fancy black leather suitcase, shook hands with the two brothers and sat beside Salman. His accent revealed that he was not Iraqi: in other words, he was Iranian. He handed the suitcase to Salman.

“The bag is full of all you need to execute the operations. The two KIA cars will be ready in the weavers market. The second car should be detonated quarter of an hour after the first one, when people gather to help the wounded.”

Then he stood and disappeared as quietly as if he were a shadow. Salman sipped his coffee, “Our father threw a big load on our shoulders,” he said. “He didn't even answer my calls.”

“He meets people, makes plans, and we have to execute them.”

“Drink up your tea. Then we have to execute today's operation,” Salman said.

“First lieutenant Bariq Al Dailamy will fall into our hands, do not worry.”

Salman looked at the guests in the café. Each was concerned with the conversation with his company. After he felt it was safe, he said, “He will not live long after we catch him. I am eager to separate his head from his body, the [Ba'athist](#) pimp.”

“Then let us hurry and hide the bag and use the remaining time in surveillance for the victim.”

They drank their tea, and then went out, got into a late-model BMW, and disappeared into the crowd.

Baghdad has become a wreck of a society. As soon as it recovers from a disaster, it is hit by several others. Each day a new generation of militia emerges under false slogans that exhaust people. Widows weeping, overcome by their grief. Glances exchange the pain of deeply broken hearts. Souls flap, cry, and then die.

Dry years are dripping over Iraq salt tears that run from sad eyes to resurrect memories full of pain and outrage.

Security disorder, unjustified arrests have become a daily routine. Death squads wander, leer, and lustfully play over murdered bodies, their brutality exceeding the laws of the jungle.

After a long day full of plans and conspiracies, Fakhri returned to his palace for siesta. He has concluded a meeting today between one of his men and Ezz al-Din al-Khatib in the latter's prison cell to reach a satisfactory agreement for both parties. He is about to execute a fatal plan targeting the minister, and he has to choose intelligent personnel.

He stopped at the room in which he had locked Noor. He reached toward the doorknob but changed his mind, scratched his chin a little, and then went to his room. Just as he opened the door, he found Noor waiting, shaking and trembling. Her once rose-red face has turned pale. Hardly able to raise her weak body and with shaking hands she pointed a gun at Fakhri. She has seized the opportunity of the palace being quiet, in the absence of the servant and guards, and sneaked into his room.

“Are you crazy, Noor? Put the gun down, please,” Fakhri said in terror.

“I have promised myself to avenge my honour. God has given me the opportunity to pay you back. You scumbag.”

“I will set you free and I will provide you with medical care, sweetheart.”

“Shut up!” she shouted weakly in Fakhri’s face. He was terrified of her vengeance, that was about to turn him into a corpse.

“You have violated and defiled my body; therefore I will send you to your doom in eternal hell.” She was about to pull the trigger. . . but?

Fakhri closed his eyes and surrendered to his fate. However, hearing the trigger click, the sound of the blank revolver made him feel his body to make sure he was not hit. The revolver Noor carried was void of bullets. She was shocked at her failure to avenge herself. Fakhri did not hesitate but pulled his gun from his belt and shot to kill in the middle of her forehead. She fell immediately dead into her own blood. Her lips opened slowly. He stepped towards her dead body, slowly and coldly pressed her head with his shoe, picked up his phone, and ordered one of the guards to clean the place quickly.

The young woman who once dreamt of a romantic life with her journalist lover is no more. The daughter of a man whose hair turned grey from grief and desperation to see his daughter once again, and who is lying in his bed dying surrounded by his sons and young daughter. The latter was lying there beside her dad and her face was like a masterpiece painting, expressing sorrow and sadness over her father.

Red-Light Night

The election mess started; with it came also fear and horridness, as time has proved that the coming president will be worse than the current.

People growl and groan until they become like gravel between the horns of death and terror. Lively advertisements depicting politicians as cowboys running for the presidency, not to mention cheap methods such as donating food, blankets, or pillows to win electoral votes. Jobless people became politicians nowadays.

After a fairytaled light night, the minister spent with Jowana, both were woken a little after midday by a phone call from the minister's wife to check on her husband. He hung up quickly after a quick, cold conversation with Nourhan. Jowana opened her still-heavy eyes and asked drowsily, "Nourhan?"

"Who else would it be?"

They kissed. Caressing her hair, he said, "I will take you to Germany with me. I will conclude a deal there soon, and afterwards we shall spend few days."

"Oh, thanks, my love. We really need the European atmosphere nowadays."

"You are in the custody of a minister now, not the Mafia. You will learn politics from me, sweetheart."

A romance scam — the minister fell for it. He was not aware of what had happened behind the scenes. Fatal conspiracy was being plotted by Jowana and Fakhri to get rid of the minister as soon as possible. The minister confided all his secrets to his beloved beauty.

Jowana in turn informed Fakhri of the minister's deepest thoughts. Fakhri was putting the final touches to his plan to get rid of the minister.

Millions of dollars will be smuggled to Germany soon. What was really causing Fakhri to worry was Jowana's appointment as a parliament

member. Fakhri did not like this. It turned matters upside down for him. Worry started to manipulate Fakhri's imagination. What if Jowana ratted on him? To make a deal with Satan, you must be sure that life prepares a hideous abyss ahead. The dirty game compels you to keep your hands and garments clean. Fakhri is now a state official and, surely, he does not want to be put on the crucifix. At least, until, he completes his targets in the currently planned operations.

12

One afternoon, most prisoners were deported from all detention prisons to Abu Ghraib prison. Among them was Ezz al-Din al-Khatib. He was quiet, but feeling unusual great anger and distress deep inside. Evil has crept into his mind, and his handcuffs made him curse the day he was born.

The officer pushed him harshly into a prison cell full of detainees. Full of evil and slyness, his tired gaze moved around the new place. He hoped that if he has an opportunity to escape, he would not hesitate, he remained, sullen, staring into space and absent-minded. He would take revenge on his enemies mercilessly, especially Jowana, who led him to this fate.

He was accused of terrorism. This means he has lost all hope in life. If luck chooses to be on his side and he survives this, he might travel to another country, away from danger.

He chose his place in one of the top bunks and jumped on it vigorously. In the lower bunk was a huge, heavily muscled man with a large head and an old scar on his right cheek. He shouted in terrifying voice, "Take it easy, lame. You have awakened me."

Ezz al-Din apologized without being terrified by the punk's voice, put his head on the pillow, closed his eyes, and thought about his destiny in the coming few days.

In another scene away from the prison, specifically in a large elegant room whose walls are decorated with small carpets and golden scripture, in the middle space in front of each wall sit elegant, soft sofas with vivid, colourful upholstery, their arms engraved with seashells and scriptures, and a large red carpet covers the floor.

She threw a handful of incense in a burner and mumbled prayers as if calling a dead soul or casting a spell. Words came out hot as a response to her prayers; Fakhri did not hesitate to touch a sensitive spot; her overwhelming femininity subdued his toughness.

He was living in an abyss that was dug in his heart, by this woman's nails.

He had what he had from her in the name of love when she consented to give. However, everything has an end. Jowana has extinguished the fires of his lust, and he asked her, "What has changed your feelings towards me?"

"You are the one who dumped me and threw me in the minister's lap to achieve your dreams."

"I did not push you to sleep with him, only to seduce him to get rid of your husband."

She looked at him, wondering, then said, in a tone that conveyed objection, "I did not hear what you said, my spoilt pimp. You are a dirty man, Fakhri. Although I have won a parliament seat by the grace of your master, and I have not forgotten you and I miss your embrace."

"Do you still have a place for love in your heart?" he asked.

"Yes, if you give up others easily. I do not. How I can forget the one who helped me one day and got me out of the streets, opened a hair salon for me. How can I forget this?"

He touched her cheek gently, their lips met passionately, and they drowned in a deep sensuous lust.

Sarmad and A'aloush have already completed the grave digging.

They took a break, and a conversation took place between them that aroused suspicions inside A'aloush. What Sarmad said about the coffin was due to his experience, not only suspicions. However, they are murderers who are proficient in dirty operations. Sarmad's words were more reasonable. Maybe this coffin holds a big secret more than just a corpse. If it were a corpse, it would have been buried immediately. In addition, that coffin was brought by two persons only?!

A'aloush thought deeply about Sarmad's words. Yes, the Hunchback has deceived them, and they have been victims of a dirty plan. The Hunchback is a traitor; he does not value services. He will undoubtedly collect a lot of money from this operation. They have to do something to reveal the secret of this coffin.

13

A bar in Sa'adon Street, not like other bars, as it is a very small, most probably illegal bar. Simple homemade shelves, decorated with bottles. The bartender is a very old man, reticent, preferring silence. However, he radiates amiability. Unlike other bars, the patrons muse silently, as if communicating with each other telepathically or via some sort of a dialogue of their eyes.

The Hunchback drank a shot followed by several others, until booze emancipated his soul like electricity. He looked with a heavy glance at his watch and stood to leave, to head for the cemetery where the corpse shall be buried tonight. On his cellphone he called Dr Salem, who was meeting as usual with some bearded persons; they were officers but not Iraqis.

“Good evening, doctor.”

“Hello. Have you prepared the hole?”

“Yes, and I will immediately go there and await you to bury the corpse.”

“I am waiting for a call from Fakhri, and then I will attend the burial myself.”

“See you there, then. Bye.”

The Hunchback arrived at the cemetery late at night. It was completely silent, but when he came near the hole, he heard Sarmad and A'aloush whispering while waiting for him.

“Is everything all right?” he asked them.

“Yes,” replied A'aloush. “We have completed the digging.”

The Hunchback went closer to them, suspecting that something was going on. “I smell an odour, but I do not know its colour.”

“Do odours have colours?” asked Sarmad sarcastically.

The Hunchback nodded yes; he did not utter a word. They heard footsteps approaching gradually. They were four persons, Dr Salem, Fakhri, and the two who had brought the coffin. There was a conversation going between Dr Salem and Fakhri.

“Do you trust the Hunchback?”

“He is the one who does our Baghdad operations, I trust him with business, and I depend on him on most missions.”

“The coffin is sealed with red wax; do not forget to check it.”

“If the contents of the coffin have disappeared, they too will disappear from the face of the earth, so do not worry.”

They stopped talking when they arrived at the digging site. The Hunchback led them until they reached the freezer room where they had deposited the coffin earlier.

Fakhri was acting as if he owned the place, walking confidently in the corridor between the corpses' freezers.

The coffin was moved to the burial place and examined carefully. It was made of an expensive wood and wrapped in the Iraqi flag. Dr Salem made a sign to the Hunchback, and the latter dismissed Sarmad and A'aloush. “Leave now and your payment will be delivered to you as agreed.”

They left immediately without a word. The two guards undertook the burial themselves, and the matter was done.

A Black Day

Who would believe that a day would come when Baghdad would wear black, especially after the invasion?

People were drained of vitality by the harsh living conditions. Their enthusiasm faded, mouths went dry even to talk, and even their taste buds went dry. People were sick of life, religion, and daily joys. Persons in bodies under a sky coloured with dust that had lost its blueness, clouds, stars, and the horizon.

Nabil was unusually drunk in a bar. Raising his head heavily, he said, "Death in the universe."

He was seen all the time silent, sullen, semi-sleeping, until a sex worker approached him. She was in her twenties; her body was slender and perfectly formed. Her youth has multiplied her seduction and made her irresistible. She rubbed his hair very gently, waking him up where he sat at a table. As soon as he saw her prominent bosoms, his heart leapt at her seductive beauty to the extent that he became lustfully drunk and was possessed by lecherous images. He stared at her provocatively and grabbed her to sit her on his knee. The girl laughed and said seductively, "Do you like what you see? Do you have a place?"

"Is it expensive?"

"It would become cheap, especially for you. The price is three hundred dollars per night."

"Do not worry. I will be your client tonight and probably every night."

"Do you have a car?"

"A 2007 Mercedes."

“Wow, amazing. Have you finished drinking?” She surveyed the empty beer bottles and expressed her amusement, and then shouted, “You want to drive?”

“Don’t worry. I have a strong head.”

She said soothingly, “I can drive if you want.”

Nabil did not hesitate long; actually, he liked the idea. He handed her the car keys and went out leaning on her, and then she asked him, “How will you concentrate with me?”

Nabil did not reply. He left it to chance.

Next morning, Elham was on a date with her new husband to travel to foggy London. After an extravagant wedding held at the Sheraton Ballroom in Karada, she was very sure she had made the right choice. She should have done that a long time ago. Doraid, her new knight in shining armour, was a handsome white man with brownish-black eyes, blond hair, and a pale complexion. He was a humorous, funny, soft-voiced, young man. They reached the airport said good bye to their loved ones. She was so happy; inside she was saying to herself: Adios, you burnt country; I will never come back to you even if you were chosen the Mecca of the world.

She thought in her imagination that she would live a better life, in a better language, with the spirit of an Iraqi wife who delights her husband away from the land of cemeteries.

It was a great day for her. However, it was not the same for Iraqis who were dying inside. Twenty-two big explosions shook Baghdad’s landmarks a little after midday. The Hunchback’s network was responsible for sixteen of these operations. Al-Qaeda announced its

responsibility for the remaining explosions that harvested the lives of innocent civilians.

The victims of this bloody day, on which hundreds of souls and dreams were mercilessly murdered, cast a pall of sadness all over the living souls.

Jowana appeared in the media as a member of parliament denouncing the events. It was only a customary political show adopted by politicians in these circumstances; a routine that should be made in the media continuously, to create the necessary suspense driven by their own greed to make the most gains. They are capable of obtaining all pleasures: the more they get the more they seek. Each day they have a new entertainment; perverted creatures they are, tearing the weak and weary with their claws.

She had a hot date on the night of that bloody day with the Minister of Interior. Nightly he received a softly voiced invitation; he entered to see no one but her pouring two glasses of whisky. She then stretched on her sofa fondling her hair, wearing a white jilbab that covered her body but revealed her topography, smoothly inciting seductive visions.

The round face was clear of any traces of makeup, but was stunningly femininely sexy after removing the MP's mask. Her naturally blond hair clearly shows the vividness of youth without any chemical dying. She did not soothe his usual tension, but left him standing as if testing her feminine effect on him. He was as if seeing her for the first time or visiting her for the first time.

“Sit down,” she said, glancing at him several times.

The minister drank the first glass. Then he thought the second would not do any more harm; thus he drank until he became drunk. With alcohol emancipated in his blood, his gaze was glued to her with the boldness of

a drunk. He let himself loose to his emotions until he rushed into her like a bullet.

He started to move over her body and she received him tenderly, consentingly captivating, while lustfully submissive. Soon he was crowned over the throne of her lustful femininity, drowned into sweet lust, forgetting that he is Mister Minister.

As if it was his first night with her, finding himself in her arms tasting her sex or touching it for the first time.

The Hunchback Burns

The Hunchback's activities have developed; soon they surpass normal terrorist operations, when he orders his subordinates to wear mujahedeens' customs and film them slaughtering victims. He caught Tahseen and delivered him to A'aloush as he had promised. He was indeed slaughtered in front of the camera as an agent for USA. However, the consequences were fatal dominoes falling; they did not end but developed until they burnt the Hunchback.

One day, his evil deeds ricocheted against the Hunchback—he returned home to find his wife murdered. The militias had raided his house but did not find him. Thus, they decided to kill her as a message for him that they were determined to kill him in revenge for Tahseen's murder.

The Hunchback was forced to change his residency. Though his powers were still strong, his life was made precarious by the militias that were breeding daily.

Tahseen had been running a militia called the new era. They were the murderers of the Hunchback's wife. They had identified the killer via their connections, and in their outrage, they sought revenge for the murder

of their boss. Therefore, they started the countdown to take the Hunchback on a trip to hell.

The minister was sitting in his office, his fingers absentmindedly fondling an amber rosary. It was a gift from his wife. He uses it often to ease his tension. Jowana entered suddenly, and he smiled. She sat and seemed upset. A bit concerned, the minister asked, "What's the matter, honey?"

"I know that my ex-husband intends to escape; he might be a threat to my life."

He laughed loudly. "You are crazy. Your husband is in Abu-Ghraib prison. I made sure of that myself. I put him there. You know that even mosquitos do not escape from there."

"There are reports that Al-Qaeda is trying to break into prisons and the government does not care."

"Don't you worry. Our honourable government and the prime minister himself are very keen to provide security. These are rumours about our government. Our government prioritises security and is keen to protect its people, honey, so you don't need to be so pessimistic."

Jowana was not convinced by such words. She knows the components of this failure government. They are nothing but a bunch of unpolitical scum and idiots, an ignorant group that did, as told, by their foreign masters. Jowana remained prey to fear and dark thoughts. She knew Ezz al-Din al-Khatib, who had played a prominent role in killing a minister that was working with him. This minister had been about to get rid of Ezz al-Din, but the latter was faster and by his own hands slaughtered the minister inside his residence, despite the tough security.

She stood up and left the palace convinced that the current minister would not be able to help her. On the contrary, he made matters more complicated, and he had to get rid of Ezz al-Din before he escaped. The minister was confident because his plan against her husband was tight. The court was convinced that he was accused of terrorism as per the evidence submitted to the court. The death sentence handed down against him would be carried out eventually.

Fakhri's plan was to kidnap Ezz al-Din al-Khatib to negotiate with him. Fakhri needed an intelligent person. Ezz al-Din was a unique person in his qualities of courage and strength. Moreover, he was the leader of strong militias in Iraq. Soon the plan to free important prisoners would be carried out in a manner that would convince people it was done by Al-Qaeda elements. He has to guarantee winning Ezz al-Din to his side.

Ezz al-Din must be with us, Fakhri wrote over and over on a piece of paper, underlining the statement each time. He has sent one of his devoted men confidentially for the second time to negotiate with him to get ready for his escape plan. He started his plan immediately and carried it out persistently, initiating the first attempts to negotiate with Ezz al-Din. However, Ezz knew that Fakhri was his wife's lover. Thus, he refused to commit to cooperating with Fakhri, despite his desperate need for freedom.

The talks varied, games were invented, and plans were laid. The political ball found some players. The militia's line game found new players to pull. The minister went forward with his plans, this time ignoring Jowana. He started a new affair with a new secretary in the minister's ceremonial office.

Fakhri was making and steering issues to takedown the minister, whom he now regarded as a dirty toy standing in his career path.

In particular there were millions buried that he thought, he deserved to have more than the minister does. He must seize it before it is too late.

14

Elham was living happily in London, and over time, she forgot her family. The long years of war survived as a heavy weight on the shoulders of young men and women. She was able to escape to a happy life, with the young man of her choice. She thought she was lucky. In her eyes her husband was the best man; she never ceased to mention how proud she was of him in meetings with friends or over the phone.

One day, Elham was introduced by her husband to John, who was Doraid's best friend. He was a black athlete, with a huge tall muscled body. John was the only friend of her husband and followed him as his shadow. Jealousy began to eat her heart and kill her femininity. She objected to this relationship, and problems started to shake up her happiness. Doraid insisted that he would not give up his best friend, because they were connected in business which was more important than anything else. She had not yet discovered what connected him with John.

The problems increased between the two of them, draining their marital life. She started calling her family, complaining of the dryness in her marital life.

Her father was not sympathetic, because she had broken up with Nabil and chosen to live in Europe to escape Iraq's harsh reality. Thus, he considers her responsible for her actions, no matter the amount of pain she suffers.

Bluster and a Threat

One day, the Hunchback received a blustering message from unidentified militia threatening to kill his sons this time, in the same way he had killed Tahseen, his ex-rival.

Given that he did not care, he became more persistent and pompous. He recruited all the personnel he could to reinforce his criminal network. Issues evolved until they became bloody armed conflicts in teal-Fadel and al-Thawra districts — now known as Sader City.

While the Hunchback was visiting one of his clients who lived in the Or district, he was fusilladed mercilessly with bullets that spared no one around. His enemiestargeted the Hunchback strongly. His bodyguards hurried to protect him and the fight lasted for half an hour. However, as usual, security authorities did not interfere to stop such a fight. Corpses lay scattered and others were burnt by the fatal modern weaponry. The Hunchback's group lost some and the militia lost some members, but most victims were innocent inhabitants of the area.

The Hunchback realized that his life was in grave danger. He telephoned Doctor Salem to update him on the events that nearly killed him. Dr Salem said that he did not know the militia that attacked the Hunchback, and that he would exert all his effort to identify and punish them.

A few months later, the opportunity became available for the Minister of Interior to smuggle millions of dollars outside the country. He thought also of smuggling the coffin, and so he called Fakhri. What he did not know was that the latter had prepared a plan to assassinate the minister to seize his money and his post, as promised by other officials. He would not hesitate either to kidnap Nourhan. She was a bounty he would not sacrifice. Kidnapping was not new for Fakhri. He was a heinous criminal no less than Uday Saddam Hussein was; but he surpassed him.

The time has come to dig out the coffin, per the minister's orders. Fakhri had to secure the smuggling of the money outside the country as usual. The date has been set, and he has to execute.

In another place, an unpleasant deal was concluded. Sarmad and A'aloush had prepared everything to dig out the suspicious coffin. In that merciless night, they dug out the coffin and opened it. A'aloush tore the cover and the magical banknotes appeared. They were shocked silent in surprise. Countless dollars . . . they were about to lose their minds at the sight of what was in front of them.

These dollars were the power, the symbol of the empire they will build. Adios, Hunchback, we will build our empire and we will be the strongest. The odour of money spread in their souls; they would sniff the heroin, throw away their old garments. They regretted the days they had lost while this treasure was buried; they commented bitterly how stupid they were.

15

The Loot

The place: Precisely, the Amara desert on the Iran-Iraq border, in a burnt land where no souls live, barbed wires extended, surrounding a large camp where Iranian flags and photos of Khomeini and Khamenei flapped and armed personnel in military customs patrolled. There were large hangers where Iraqi youth, prisoners of war, were imprisoned. It looked as if this camp were built especially to execute Iranian operations in Iraq. Not very far from the large camp or the barbed wires were corpses of people savagely executed while their hands were tied, a large number of piled skulls which had lost their flesh and were mutilated.

From inside came wails and painful screams that tore the desert's silence, in vain. As if the guards were enjoying these screams for help, the decisions to kill were always fresh; therefore, each time, the killing was executed in an innovative way. During torture operations, the tormented and the tormentor resembled a key in a rusty old lock, with some sort of lubricant to force the lock open against its rustiness. That is a shameful victory ending a life, leaving the key out there thirsty for another life to mute. The tormentor is Iranian and the tormented is Iraqi, both drowning in a soul-crushing abyss.

DrSalem was in a secret meeting with eight high-ranking Iranian officers in uniform. He spoke to them in fluent Persian. He attended to supervise the extraction of human organs from Iraqi prisoners, to send them frozen to Iran. The sick and wounded have an inevitable fate to die.

“We work hard to secure the delivery of organs safely to Iran,” said the doctor. “Doctors are exerting extraordinary activity in this work, and I will monitor the process myself.”

Silence prevailed for a short while; then one of the officers said in a worried tone, “We have a problem, Doctor Salem. There is a man called the Hunchback. He killed Tahseen, one of our devoted men. Our sources have informed us that he targets our patrols and kills as many men as he wants. This is not acceptable, to have an active militia without our consent.”

The Iranian officer’s words were a shock for Dr Salem, who continued to listen.

“Our patrols have tried to eliminate him, but he miraculously escaped — this matter must end quickly.”

Dr Salem wanted to explain, but one of the officers sitting on the left interrupted him.

“We know very well your relationship with him. That was during General Kasem’s supervision over Baghdad’s operations before he left for the central Euphrates to supervise another mission. We allowed the Hunchback to move for one reason — that he was under your control. However, as matters have reached this far, you have to cut him loose and search for another person to assign the task of serving our needs.”

“Should I kill him?” Dr Salem asked.

“Deal with him very carefully,” replied the officer quietly.

“To eliminate his men and eradicate them,” said another officer, “they must be lured into our circle.”

“How?”

One of the officers who were sitting on the doctor's right hand replied, "We have made a list of his organization members' names and addresses. We have to lure them onto our side for a period, and then eliminate them by assigning fatal tasks with tempting prices, to eradicate them."

The officer on his left then patted Dr Salem on the shoulder and said in a quiet and satisfied tone, "The senior command has instructed the supervisors of Baghdad's operations to reward those who are doing their duties. You will be generously rewarded."

Dr Salem was very pleased with this news. "If the Hunchback is causing too much trouble, I will take care of him," he said.

"Well said."

They stood and left, heading to one of the hangers to have a look at the prisoners who were worn to the end of their limits by the torture received from the armed guards. The officers liked the torture scene and were pleased with it. Dr Salem was neutral, however, not showing any expression at what he saw, whether good or evil.

One of the officers raised the head of one of the detainees from the ground. The latter was sick, weary, and weak. He asked Dr Salem, "Is it possible to extract his organs while he's in this condition?"

"No. The lack of hydration has destroyed everything within him."

Without hesitation, the officer pulled out his revolver and shot the prisoner in the head and left him drowning in his blood, and then went to the next hanger.

Dr Salem's face displayed great tension. "Are they being fed?" he asked.

The officers laughed at his question. “Yes, yes, of course, Doctor Salem,” replied one of them. “They are being fed on fish and meat, otherwise, how do they live? They are our bounty, and we have nothing but them.” He kicked one of the captives until blood flowed from his face.

“They must be fed,” said the doctor. “This is an important issue before the operations, or otherwise they shall die from weakness.”

His advice made him the object of laughter and ridicule among the Iranian officers, until one of them shouted impatiently, “Let them die, Doctor Salem, to hell and doom. It is not our duty to save their lives too. God has created them and he takes care of this mission. Understood, Doctor?”

Dr Salem did not utter a word. He only faked a smile to avoid their mockery, and decided to remain silent. However, one of the officers turned to him and said, “Feeding them is the most trivial thing. Bread and water are enough. Actually, more than enough, otherwise God would not have created both.”

They heard the sound of an engine from afar; it was a beige jeep heading towards them, provoking clouds of dust by its speed. Inside it, there were the driver, a soldier beside him carrying a gun, and a general sitting in the back of the car. He has a dark complexion, a slim body, a parrot-like nose, cruel facial features, and he is wearing a military suit, a beige coat, and dark glasses, although autumn was around the corner. His name was Bahrooz; he was the successor of General Kasem.

The car stopped as it reached the officers, and after they had exchanged military salutes, the general said nervously, “You are too far behind schedule.”

“There are out of control groups who dominated out controlled areas for some while,” replied the officer with apparent respect. “However, matters are back under our control now, and everything is all right. We have called in Doctor Salem and some of his colleagues to safely complete the organs transfer process to Tehran.”

“I will comb the borders myself, and we will cooperate in enhancing and toughening security over the borders, won’t we, Doctor Salem?”

“Yes, Mr Bahrooz. It is my pleasure to cooperate with you.”

“Undoubtedly you know me?”

“Yes. I watched a short movie about you while at a conference. It is an honour to cooperate with you.”

Bahrooz ordered the driver to drive away, and the rest went to complete their supervision of the camp.

One of the officers turned to Dr Salem. “General Bahrooz has put the Hunchback on his list. He will eliminate his elements even if it costs him half of what he has. We advise that you lure the Hunchback as soon as possible, Doctor Salem.”

They silently exchanged glances, and then continued walking quietly.

The Hunchback changed his place of residence after the recent clashes that had rained on him like fatal arrows. Matters have reached to receiving his son Salman’s head in a box that was sent to his luxurious residency. That drove him near lunacy. Add to that, his shock of his wife being killed. He was losing all that was precious and valuable to him. This made the Hunchback very cautious in his moves. One day at sunset, the Hunchback went into one of Baghdad’s poor areas in his luxurious Mercedes. All of a sudden, he and his group were showered with bullets

that killed most of his group members, and he lost his car, as it exploded just after he jumped out of it.

16

Elham entered her house depressed, returning home after being out. She heard voices coming from the upper floor, directly above her bedroom. They were the voices of her husband and John in conversation. Her husband was crying to John and showing humiliating affection. She stepped quietly towards the door, shocked and disbelieving, and started to eavesdrop at the door. Oh mercy, what was she hearing? Both were exchanging words of affection. John was threatening to leave. He was asking her husband to choose between him and her.

Doraid did not hesitate to choose John. In shock, Elham opened the door and stepped into the room. Doraid was paralyzed by her entrance.

“What a shame!” she shouted. “Shame on you! You are a bastard!”

She collapsed in tears, and her husband hurried towards her and slapped her face. “Get out!” he cried. “Was not it enough that I brought you to London? God has created me this way. Get out! You are divorced!”

It was a tough moment, maybe the toughest in her whole life. She had given up her family and fiancé for this gay man, who might be the father of her son if she turned out to be pregnant? She hurriedly left the house, her body trembling in panic, not knowing where to go.

17

Driven by curiosity, risk, and jealousy, Jowana scowled, revealing anger and jealousy at the new secretary in the Minister of Interior's office. The latter was prettier and more muliebral, with her fascinating tall body and exquisite womanliness. Her name was Maiada. She was daughter to a rich, high-ranking Iraqi officer.

Maiada's favourite topic of conversation was sex, exactly as people like to collect stamps or to play chess. She spreads her temptation as she deliberately undoes the top two buttons of her blouse. Thus, when she bends to present files, her tempting breasts are displayed in front of the minister's eyes. She does that with perfection, as if she does not notice his burning, lustful stares.

Jowana was burning inside, her jealousy like a blind wave sweeping away her shyness, inflaming her rage. One day, her rage and remorse exploded in a shout in the face of Maiada when Jowana prevented her from entering the minister's office without an appointment; what made matters worse was the minister's approval of Maiada's wise action.

Jowana's anger burned under her silence and grief like venom that lingered in her veins, until one day she called Fakhri asking for his help to get rid of the new secretary.

Fakhri replied with stubborn quietness, "She will eventually vanish."

Seductively, Jowana begged him. "Nevertheless, she has taken everything."

The minister was treating Jowana with an exaggerated quietness. She contentedly accepted his treatment. You could say that he was treating her badly by day to compensate for his nightly submissiveness.

However, he loved his new secretary now — that was an indisputable fact. She went to his palace veiled by the darkness of night, to find him waiting humbly, possessed by satanic lust mixed with his desires for domination.

There were collateral necessities to get rid of the secretary. However, Fakhri as usual balances his love for women and his personal benefits. Thus, he convinced Jowana that they must get rid of the minister, as he was the root of the evil and the head of the snake.

She continued living in silence, until her contentedness was disturbed by a threatening letter that came to her office ordering her to leave her post. Severe anger and fear consumed her as she read the letter. At first, she was confused, and then she called her office manager and inquired about the sender. He informed her. That letter came via normal mail and was electronically scanned before it was admitted.

This way Fakhri and Jowana became allies. Jowana was flooded with threatening messages. She was living half a life in fear of these messages. Fakhri made her suspect that the sender was not just any person but might be a high-ranking officer, because he was able to deliver these threatening messages so easily to her office. She received them with a trembling heart and closed her eyes to overcome her emotions, that were like an illusionary cruel tornado. She decided to stop her usual lavish life that had started when she became a parliament member by the help of the minister. She ceased to give her usual lavish parties and sex, and she looked gloomy and desperate. She had one goal: to discover the person who threatened her life. Was it Fakhri or the minister?

Her life became as if a rope was getting tighter round her neck, and she started to feel the pressure of crises she never imagined that she would ever face.

One night, while she was sipping wine, her soul was filled with the power of challenge. Her head was a swim with thoughts, her hopes and restless ambitions flowing in her soul. She decided to escape the gloom and fear of these threats and do something with her life. Suddenly, the ring of her mobile phone interrupted these thoughts. Answering it, she was surprised to hear a coarse voice threatening her.

“If you do not respond to our requests, your destiny will be like your car. Now listen.”

Silence prevailed for few seconds. It was broken by the sound of a powerful explosion inside the open garage in her garden. An explosion that uprooted everything around it and damaged whatever stood in the way of its shockwave. Jowana fell on the ground unconscious, her face covered with blood from the broken glass that had hit her.

18

Next morning the minister was very tense when he received the news about Jowana over the phone. He was tense not because of his concern for Jowana's safety, but because this meant that he too could be targeted one day. How this explosion did happen in the green area? It was the safest area in Iraq.

His turn will come eventually. Public officials are targeted by the people before anyone else. He called Fakhri to inquire about the matter.

“Have you reviewed the footage from the surveillance cameras, Fakhri?”

“Yes. A black car carrying four masked men wearing black costumes arrived. They crossed the fence, killing the two guards with silenced revolvers, and then planted an explosive package under Jowana's car and detonated it by remote control later.”

“Was it that easy?”

“Everything develops but us, Mr Minister. Unfortunately, nobody cares to develop security here.”

“What about the alarm systems?”

“They were disabled before the operation. The matter was planned beforehand, sir.”

“Then there were people and hidden hands participating in this operation. Not Al-Qaeda, as we thought.”

“Exactly, sir. I will deliver the security report to you as soon as it arrives.”

“I will be waiting, Fakhri. Goodbye.”

Then the minister called his wife, who was at the salon having her hair dressed and nails done as usual, not worrying about a thing at all.

The Hunchback knew he was targeted, thus he kept in the shadows from everyone, even Dr Salem, who did not help him at all. He was running his business via his subordinates who were working in the cemeteries.

He nearly vanished completely, and chose a place that no one could reach, even the devil himself. He had several dens. He was aided by his son. When they sensed danger, they changed their den immediately to a safer one.

Matters got worse for the Hunchback when Fakhri decided to dig out the coffin and found it filled with gravel and pebbles. The disappearance of the money was enough to inflame the minister and incite Fakhri's rage. Even Dr Salem was enraged. They decided to arrest the Hunchback and avenge this.

However, the Hunchback remained invisible and grew more stubborn, increasing his criminal activities by concluding deals with foreign personnel. He also decided to go independent with his business after everyone had let him down. Nevertheless, he did not know about the theft from the coffin, which worsened matters for him.

The unexpected occurred one day when Abu Ghraib prison was broken into after a masked, armed group bombed their way into it. The leaders of a large number of terrorist groups were let loose. This had a major impact on public opinion; the government was accused of being weak, corrupt, and weary. To the extent that, it had proved to be a total failure in running the country — if it was not accused of being involved in Abu Ghraib prison break?

Matters deteriorated and became contradictorily complicated. What happened was the usual short news piece in the media. Nobody cared

whether people were angry or carelessly silent, and it made no difference. Each day scores of people dropped dead like the beads of a broken rosary. Unfortunately, none cared to collect the corpses on the grounds of reality.

Ezz al-Din, along with another terrorist leader named Shanshal, escaped to a house in the Al-A'amel area. Shanshal was one of the Hunchback's close acquaintances. Therefore, when the Hunchback received Shansal's call, he did not hesitate for a second to help his friend. The escapees were in a miserable condition. They were hardly breathing from running fast, their hearts were crushed in their chests, and their stomachs were crushed empty. Sweating like a boxer in his twelfth round, they waited for help from afar.

19

Place: An isolated farm in [Al Tarmia](#), in an area that is not easily accessed by humans. The Hunchback seized these circumstances to build his semi-empire with quite a number of armed men. Hewas sitting at dinner and talkingwith Shanshal and Ezz al-Din, while A'aboud watched and listened to them silently.

“Glad that you made it safely,” said the Hunchback.

“Thanks for your help,” Shanshal mumbledwhile guzzling the piece of meat he had picked from the rice plate.

“Don’t mention it. It is my duty. We are comrades in the same path. Who is your guest?”

“He is Ezz al-Din al-Khatib. He was imprisoned for personal reasons, and I have helped him to escape.”

“Pleasure to meet you.”

“My pleasure, dear sir,” saidEzz al-Din, addressing the Hunchback.

“Your man, Jabar Ouda,” replied the Hunchback, introducing himself to Ezz al-Din with due respect.

The Hunchback left his guests to continue their dinner and excused himself to monitor the unstable situation. He was recalling the past sixty years in reverse while breathing now, exerting unusual effort to understand what has happened. Catastrophes had started to hammer on his head just like bindweed climbing over walls.

After a short while, the Hunchback found outabout the coffin and was astonished by everyone’s betrayal, especially after Dr Salem let him

down. The Hunchback recognized that Dr Salem was luring him to hunt him down. The Hunchback had no other choice but to escape after he deserted his house, especially after losing his wife and elder son. He has to take care of his own life. Otherwise, death will be his inevitable fate.

Ezz al-Din decided to hide under the Hunchback's command until he settled his issues to escape out of the country. However, before anything there were open accounts to settle with his opponents who had put him in jail and made an alliance to kill him.

Jowana came out of hospital and returned to her house, and repaired the damage caused by the explosion. She received several phone calls from her colleagues to check that she was all right. Among the callers was the minister. However, his call did not heal her grudge against him. She was convinced that he was undoubtedly behind the plot to kill her. Fakhri did not take long to visit her and lure her with his compliments and precious jewellery. He told her to be patient and that he was working hard to find those who had planned the plot against her.

Jowana did not hide her fear. How did the killer reach the fortified green area? He must be a high-ranking state official to dare to commit such an act. Therefore, probabilities were that this would be repeated. She was determined that this incident would not force her to quit her post as an Iraqi parliament member nor leave her lavish life to go back to living in the slums torn by war.

The Hunchback decided to assign the first operation to Shanshal and al-Khatib. It was the armed robbery of a small jewellery store in Baghdad.

If the Hunchback could, he would rob the Iraqi central bank. The limited number of members of his gang was the only thing stopping him. Law in Iraq was like a toy; it applied to the weak and weary only. Powerful

people floated above the law; except a few, and those did not include the Hunchback. This operation would help him cover the cost of his men.

Images started to flow in the Hunchback's head. What would happen to him without weapons and money? He pictured himself in a crowd of terrorists being pushed in the corridors of the judicial campus like coffee beans in a grinder, under trial for terrorism according to Article Four and sentenced to death by hanging; Why not? Thousands of others have been executed without any crime, just because they belong to a certain sect. He continued walking on the dry farm grass like a rhino that had lost its horn, each thought interrupted mercilessly by another fear in his imagination.

There was no law. If there was a law, he could not have hidden in Tarmia farms and run his operations himself. What type of country is this?

Gangs were hanging around in the streets; robbing banks was easier than having a cup of water. Politicians were just an ignorant bunch, idiots without any principles; money was their only deity, theft was their religion, and gamblers were their clergies. A bunch of scum was working in the state authorities. Even the prime minister was just a puppet in the hands of his masters. Each day their scandals decorated their careers.

Money treasure was an idea that had always tempted the hunchback. It was deftly digging its cellars in his soul. He has lost a lot of money, but luckily, he did not keep the money in banks — secret cellars were best for such a purpose — otherwise he would not have found anyone to obey him till death, and wander in the valleys of crime.

20

Satan's Steps

A year and half have passed since Elham's divorce in London. She was aimless until she met a young Iraqi woman whose name was Shahlaa. She was a notorious young woman wearing a mask of sanctity to lure Elham. Elham resisted at first, but surrendered eventually under the pressure of her body's desire and the long, harsh days. She felt like a puppet without strings. She decided to take off her veil and wear makeup. It was a big surprise for Shahlaa when she saw her unveiled; the beauty of her face, her fascinating body, and her night-black silken hair flowing over her shoulders like waves of a black sea. She insisted on accompanying her to AlArab café to smoke narghile.

AlArab café was in one of the London streets usually visited by Arab sheiks during the summer. However, in winter it turned into a hangout for youth. Among these was a Moroccan man in his early thirties whose name was Mazen. He was a handsome, tall, and bearded man who worked as a drug dealer and had a network of dealers working for him all over Britain and France. He loved to wander and enjoy his sinful life with Shahlaa. She acted as a pimp by seducing girls, usually using their poverty and social troubles to attract them to Mazen or his web to have a dose of cocaine or hashish. She relied on the remnants of her beauty, in her blue jeans and high heels, to seduce whomever she can to obtain her cocaine power.

It was Elham's turn to be pushed into the web; she was still a fresh piece of fruit that had not yet been chewed by wolves. Soon enough she was

used to sitting in cafés, and started to request Shahlaa to take her to cafés until she got used on going alone in her full make-up.

She entered the café searching with her gaze among the guests. Rolling a tuft of her hair behind her ear to give herself more confidence, she chose a place and sat. Her cherry-red lips, thick, neatly drawn eyebrows, and dark eyelashes masked the tense glare in her sad, exhausted young eyes, though they were covered with heavy make-up. This was the start of her doomed story in London.

One day, Elham ran into Mazen, who was at the café as usual. He had met Elham several times before with Shahlaa, who had deliberately introduced them. Out the back of the café was a beautiful, spacious, green garden; along the back fence stood trees hung with colourful lights. They sat, and Mazen requested mint tea, a narghile, and spiced coffee for Elham.

“To tell you the truth,” he said, “what brings me here is the fragrance, nothing more. This little garden invites me to sit and have my mint tea, and then I return home.”

“Are you married?”

“No, I am single; I live in a villa in Maida Vale.”

“Wow, the area where Soad Hosny used to live and was killed,” said Elham, before taking a deep breath of smoke from the narghile, which had been brought by the narghile boy and blowing a thick cloud of smoke that obscured her face.

“What about you?”

“What about me!”

“Where do you live?”

“I live in the Edgware area, but I will move soon.”

“That is the best thing to do; that area is inhabited by many Arabs.”

“Arabs are everywhere.”

A short period of silence passed between them. Elham started to seem relaxed after smoking her narghile. She was blowing smoke hotly from between her cherry-red lips. Mazen did not hide his admiration of her while she was smoking, closing her eyes, and drowning seductively in clouds of smoke. She simply turned Mazen’s desires on. He did not move his gaze from her sexy body for a second. That made him more insistent to taste that beauty at the nearest chance available.

“I used to walk in gardens alone, enjoying the beauty of trees, twigs, and shoots,” he said ardently. “Time has passed, and I used to live freely on waves of fresh air, inhaling the fragrance of roses without care, until I saw you for the first time. I actually changed — your image replaced every tree, and every lime on each tree; your image became printed on everything around me.”

“It was enough to say you like my figure and imagine me in everything.”

“I am very imaginative; I appreciate beauty, protect it with my manliness, and provide everything for it.”

“You are very imaginative, but not with me.”

“You can widen your imagination if you follow my steps.”

“How?” she said, her interest evident on her face.

“Narghile is not enough to take you to fantasy; it would not give you what you desire. Each fantasy has its own master.”

“How is that?”

“Narghile has a quick effect that also vanishes quickly. However, the fantasy you desire can be reached via other things. Each fantasy has its master, as I said before.”

“How?”

“Do you trust me?”

“Hmmm. I do not know, but Shahlaa recommended that I trust you.”

“Well.”

He took out a small packet from his jacket pocket; it was full of little green bills. He gave her one. She took it and said, “I know these. These are ecstasy bills, aren’t they?”

“Yes. You will thank me for that favour later.”

“Can I take it now?”

“Any time. Especially now. This is a wonderful evening.”

She swallowed the bill with a glass of water. They sat chatting and laughing for a while, until the effect of the ecstasy started to become emancipated in her body. Her eyes became heavy. Her face was an unceasing smile. Her laughter became louder. She forgot her griefs and started to receive her new situation with delight.

After an hour she was very sleepy and requested to leave because she was really about to be in her worst state. She felt as if she wanted to sleep for years ahead. He immediately offered to give her a ride home in his car. She accepted. In the car, he invited her to stay the night at his house due to her situation. He promised to be polite. She accepted, and he drove towards Maida Vale.

She was utterly silent, waiting for him to say what he has in his heart while they are on the way. Though giving herself up to the anesthetization, she was still aware of their words. The lust on her lips ignited his youthful desires. In his sexual concepts, she was nothing but an overdue interest for money paid by a Jew that must be collected. Upon entering his house, she sat on his soft sofa and drank a glass of whisky that he presented to her. Her eyes popped out; she then requested a joint, which she smoked, and then gulped another drink. They started to feel the sense of humour between them. Satan had already injected his poisons in both bodies, waiting for one of them to start devouring the other; all circumstances were available for adultery, so why should they wait? With his fists closed to record another victory in Satan's log at the end of this night. Devils are famous for their patience; they have tirelessly seduced the whole world for hundreds of years. As soon as he touched her hair, she fell on his knees without warning. They lay on the sofa; he left himself to her arms and closed his eyes. They indulged in their joy, taking turns, until the room began to seem wider and everything started to beat regularly.

They did not wake up until noon the next day. She opened her eyes to find herself naked in his arms; just then, she realized what had happened. He was sleeping deeply; she remained looking at him for a while, then threw herself on his arm, closed her eyes, and went back to sleep.

21

In an atmosphere of severe fear, the prime minister decided to make some sacrifices to hide his corruption from the people. He decided to sacrifice some of his ministers under the pretext of corruption. He presented some individuals as scapegoats, framing them as criminals running sectarian militias.

Among the ministers he sacrificed was the Minister of Interior. He left his wife and fled to Russia, leaving behind a fuss all over the media. People were used to such events in this country. Nourhan returned to her family's house as poor as she was before, as the government had confiscated her movable and immovable assets. She remained bewailing her bad luck in her mother's lap, cursing the traitor minister.

Upon the minister's escape, Fakhri's pleasure was limitless. He managed to replace him through his relations, appointing Nabil as head of personal protection for the courage he had displayed in VIP protection. He also usurped the minister's money, as the latter had previously deposited huge amounts into Fakhri's account. However, no money was enough for him — he also changed the office furniture. Soon he denounced the Hunchback as a terrorist and criminal wanted for justice in the daily papers. The hunt for the Hunchback led to several confrontations between the minister's brigades and the Hunchback's militias. He was the minister's topmost priority.

Fakhri also eliminated all his political opponents through detonation of their residencies and by assassination. Baghdad turned into a stage for personal vendettas. Justice was lost, depression prevailed, sin became an inspiration, and human devils were killing each other for power.

Ezz al-Din was not less intelligent than Fakhri. Especially after he knew, that Fakhri had won the post of Minister of Interior. As an escapee, his life became inevitably targeted too; there was no use in showing weakness. Thus, he quickly became more criminally active, in stores mugging and became one of the Hunchback's trusted men.

One day, Ezz al-Din engaged in combat with Fakhri's procession. However, the latter was not among the procession. Nabil faced the attack, showing his courage in resistance, and defeated the Hunchback's attack. Therefore, he was promoted to a higher rank, his monthly salary was raised, and he became Fakhri's right-handman, becoming responsible for the Minister of Interior's palace protection. He imposed extensive security to protect Fakhri's life, showing loyalty and dedication for his master the minister.

Maiada and Fakhri were kissing and flirting in the minister's office. Upon hearing a quiet knock at the door, she adjusted her pose and collected some papers under her arm. Fakhri also adjusted his pose and pretended to read some papers on his desk before he ordered the person knocking to enter. Jowana entered, Fakhri frowned and stared at her with glassy eyes, questioning the reason for her visit. He looked back at the papers on his desk, showing disdain for her unarranged visit, as if he was looking at a dirty, undesired bug in his office.

“You did not expect my visit, Mr Minister,” Jowana said, looking at Maiada with disdain, “but I came for the sake of old times to congratulate you and make sure that you are well.”

With a gesture, Fakhri dismissed Maiada. When they were alone, Jowana said with remorse in her voice, “You deserted me and do not like my company. Why?”

“Everything is fine, but too many troubles prevented me from checking on you.”

“I began to worry. You have changed. You men are slaves to women and drink.”

“Everything is fine. By the way, I will support you for the next parliament. Do not worry. Oh, God,” he said, glancing at the files in front of him, “everything needs arrangement. The country will be ruined. I must punish and stop these traitors and criminals.”

She laughed sarcastically. “Country? Oh yes, God, the father of the country? We all know who we are. The big boss is just a clown in the court of aliens.”

He stared at her angrily, his eyes flaming with evil. “Jowana, what do you mean?”

“You know that this country does not have an owner; we are merely slaves doing as we are told. His Excellency the prime minister is the biggest lie presented to the people. Illusionary contracts, non-existent security, miserable life — even Somalia has not witnessed such misery!”

“Take it easy. You are hallucinating, Jowana.”

“The last contract with the Russian company for importing modern fighter jets cost billions of dollars. Alas, the jets were junk. Inspection of the engines revealed they were originally civil jets, and unusable. They are not worth more than being sold in the junk market.”

Fakhri had had enough of this. He breathed deeply, his eyes becoming wide with rage. “Be sensible. You are just a parliament member. I can cut your ill breath short forever.”

“Is that a threat?”

“Yes it is, and a promise, Jowana. You do not know me yet—”

Interrupting him, she said irately, “I have heard lot of your trivialities. I would like to inform you that you donot scare me anymore. I am sick of and bored withmy situation. Oh,and by the way, I know that you are having an affair with Maiada, the minister’s ex-mistress.” She turned to go, and then stopped, as if struck by a sudden thought.“Oh, I also forgot to tell you, Om Amir’s head was found in a dumpster.”

This piece of news was enough to terrify Fakhri, who did not hide his worry or anger. “What is my relation tothat?” he demanded.“Who is Om Amir?”

“The pimp.”

“Leave the office immediately!”

“I wish you would sober up, Fakhri. I love you.”

“Leave now before I act in my own way.”

Jowana did not speak, but left immediately to avoid his reaction.

Only seconds passed beforeMaiada entered with her fascinating, seductive, feminine smile. She walkedtowards him withher delicate moves, and then bent to whisper tenderly in his ear, “Can I leave, honey?”

“Yes, Maiada, I will wait for you this evening.”

Yes, she is the merciless goddess of chemistry, he thought. She neither covers nor reveals her body with her tight clothes.

“OK, my love.”

Fakhri did not stop worrying over the news about Om Amir. He tried to find the murderer, but in vain, sohe gaveup.

22

Disguised in a black wig and black glasses, Ezz al-Din became a completely different person. He met Maiada in a café in the [Al Zayouna](#) area.

“Your wife is dismayed about Fakhri; there is a plan to kill her,” said Maiada. “I heard Fakhri talking about it on the phone to others whom I do not know.”

“What about the escaped minister?”

“His escape is all forgotten now. However, I suspect that Fakhri is planning something for him.”

“He will never forget his money that Fakhri seized.”

“There are attempts to arrest the Hunchback. Fakhri has assigned some personnel from the golden squad to attack his den.”

He grasped her hand. “I need more details, Maiada. This is an important subject.”

“An officer whose name is Nabil will lead the attack.”

“Do they know the Hunchback’s whereabouts?”

“No, but informers are working hard to find it. I do not imagine that the Hunchback will escape from the minister this time. He is not human. I recently found out that Fakhri kidnaps women and throws them into indescribable misery and agony after raping them.”

“I will take care of him very soon. I need to know his schedule, so I can put an end to him and Jowana. I have lost everything because of him. If it were not for the Hunchback, I would have been lost now.”

Arrogance, vanity and deadly persistence for money regardless of the means were Ezz al-Din's motivators. He hated stability and all that was stable. This recalcitrant rashness has possessed him even as a fugitive. Leading militias, killing people, and the last breakout from prison caused this rashness. He is now at the top of the wanted list.

They parted quietly and disappeared in the routine crowd of this country.

The heat increased in the search for the Hunchback. He was about to be killed if it had not been for Ezz al-Din, who saved him from an ambush that was waiting for him in one of his tours in Abu Ghraib area.

Another time he was about to lose his son if not for Ezz al-Din, who interfered to save the latter's life from a fatal ambush at a dummy checkpoint. The assassins wore the uniform of the local police. For these reasons, the Hunchback decided to leave Iraq, a decision he would not have made if not for the several almost successful attempts to kill him. However, he postponed the execution of this decision until he had settled his accounts with his opponents.

Clashes between the Hunchback and another militia groups increased dramatically, making the latter vow to get the Hunchback's head. Either the Hunchback had to remain hiding inside the farms until he died, or escape to a new country to save his life as well the lives of those with him. That way he would have a new destiny, and it would be hard for his enemies to get him. The hellish reality was that the thirst for revenge was preventing him from escaping, and might cost him his life.

His first mission was to find Sarmad and A'aloush, who stole the dollars from the coffin and put him in that unexpected situation. It is true that the Hunchback has lost his son, his wife, his luxurious house, and a large part of his wealth. His priority now is to preserve what remains and think about saving his own life, as matters were getting worse.

Weak and broken, Ezz al-Din was forced to desert everything. However, he swore to take revenge, and took that mission of revenge upon his broad shoulders. The cruelty he received made him worried, threatened, and hunted while Jowana was occupying a parliamentary seat, lavishly enjoying the government's wealth.

These times are funny. Jowana was homeless, then a hairdresser in a salon. Thanksto her beauty and feminine seductive power that empowers her to seduce even Satan himself, she climbed to occupy an important post. Maybe sex can do miracles. No, that is the reality.

After hard-exerted efforts, the Hunchback received good news about his hunt forSarmad and A'aloush, as their whereabouts became known. They now owned countless properties and had influence over a huge, dangerous militia. However, reaching them wasimpossible due to the powerful protection they now owned. Onlyon one occasion arethey easy to get at, when they are at a nightclub in the [AbūNuwās](#) area accompanied by a few members of their security squad. This is usually the last night of each week.

The Hunchback has suffered a miserable life, and he would never forfeit his right to kill his rivals. He might forgive some of them. How about those, whose hands are dirty with his family's blood, can he forgive them? Evils have turned against him after his hands were stained with innocent blood.

What will Ezz al-Din gain from recruiting himself to help the Hunchback?

He agreed with the Hunchback to provide him with men and money in return. He wants to take revenge too. Then he will leave Iraq forever. The Hunchback agreed and showed his readiness to execute the plan. They cooperated efficiently on their agreement.

Nabil's habit was to use Fakhri —now the new prime minister — in meetings to supervise the implementation of security programs in the ministry and the palace. He made rounds in the palace gardens, checking the guards and the extremes of palace grounds. While he was on his rounds, the beautiful maid brought him a glass of tea, which she presented in awe and admiration for that young, handsome officer. This situation repeated several times, each day her admiration with that young officer increasing, until he responded with another kind of admiration. Though she soon would cross the line of the forties, she still kept her beauty, her fluid waist, her hips, her prominent breasts, her bright, white face. These were enough reasons for Nabil to admire her.

Days and months passed while they were admiring each other. Until one day, a conversation happened between them that made her worried. It was enough to change the colour of her eyes, and furrow that soft brow of hers. When the words came out of his mouth describing his sister Noor and how she had suddenly disappeared from the house. From his description, the maid realized that the girl that Fakhri brought to his house, raped, and killed was undoubtedly the officer's sister Noor.

Oh, God, how would matters go if Nabil knew the truth?

How would he act if he knew that Fakhri had raped his sister Noor repeatedly? He even allowed his friends to participate in such heinous crime while having their red nights with prostitutes.

They violated her body until she became a cocaine addict, and he killed her here in his bedroom, the same place that Nabil wants to secure for the minister to sleep without worry or fear.

She spent many bad days making her life sad, and wore sadness as a dress. She adored that young man, and they had a relationship of a different sort. She knew that he would not marry her; however, she finds

her life between his arms. She finds her tranquillity in his humorous soul. She feared that ugly, repugnant Fakhri would hurt him in one way or another.

She waited impatiently until she finished her work at the palace to meet secretly with him, and spent her night between his arms until she fell asleep. At other times, they stayed awake until dawn, drinking and laughing until the first hours of the morning.

One day when Nabil mentioned Noor's name, recalling some of his childhood memories, her brow furrowed, and she was touched. He could understand from the scattered words she uttered that she, Shireen, might know something about Noor's disappearance; her suspicious reactions made him sense that. However, he dismissed this thought from his mind and ridiculed the idea. The qualms, however, increased in Shireen's heart; she had been deeply affected by that girl's beauty that was wasted by this frozen-hearted man with stony emotions. She knew that Nabil's bravery meant he would avenge his sister, but she did not want to lose him. Her tranquillity soon vanished, her weakness hit its limit, and thus desperation ignited a new power within her. She was breathing short and gloomy, wanting to escape her job.

She knew Fakhri and his tricks, added to which she knew he would not hesitate for a second to kill her if she left him. She was an eyewitness to his crimes, in particular those with women whom he brought to his house then got rid of after obtaining his desires. He was an unrivalled assassin. In addition to the dummy weapons contracts that he concluded with foreign arms traders.

She had also witnessed Fakhri killing his brother for money. The scene was still as fresh in her memory as a movie. How he lured his brother to his palace, where they sat having dinner together, when all of a sudden

without warning he took out his revolver and shot his brother in the forehead between his eyes. Fakhri's criminality has no limits. He kidnapped and raped her too, while she was returning home from school. She could not return to her house, so he forced her to work as his maid. This was her story with a man who was trusted with the security of a country. She was not willing to lose Nabil. He became her home now, as she repeatedly told him in their nights together.

23

One afternoon, Ezz al-Din kidnapped six of A'aloush and Sarmad's men and brought them handcuffed to the Hunchback's deserted farm in Tarmia. Despite the hard torture they received, they showed great bravery in keeping secrets. Then the Hunchback took the gun from Ezz al-Din's hands, ordered his subordinates to put the detainees in one line, and executed them mercilessly by his own hand.

The Hunchback held a grudge against those who betrayed him or let him down. Everything was against him now; the threats to kill him were getting worse daily; if he blinked, he would lose his own life.

Although Dr Salem was cautious of the Hunchback's treachery and changed his residency, his efforts were useless in a country full of killing and bloodshed. Few days passed before he was kidnapped by Ezz al-Din. The Hunchback was surprised to see Dr Salem between his hands. The mastermind behind Baghdad's operations was handcuffed and blindfolded, weak and afraid of an unknown destiny, which has never touched even imagination itself. He would be at the Hunchback's mercy one of these days, oh God.

The Hunchback yelled at Dr Salem with a voice that sounded like thunder. "Welcome to the Hump's hanger, Dr Salem. What is it? Are you afraid of the unknown?"

The doctor was restless, trembling as if bitten by a snake, pressing his knees in pain and agony. In a worried voice he said, "I requested to go to the restroom; they refused."

"Oh, they refused. Maybe it is one of your dirty tricks. Don't worry about it; just imagine that you are without kidneys."

The Hunchback then removed the blindfold from the doctor's eyes and pressed strongly on his shoulders to push him down onto the floor:

“You left people alive after stealing their organs. You left them to die slowly.”

The Hunchback pulled over an old large metal can and sat on it in the old dimly lit room beside Dr Salem. “You agreed with your masters to kill me. Was not I your number one man and right arm, doctor?”

“I did not conspire against you, but you stole the minister's money,” he said as if confused.

“I did not steal it,” yelled the Hunchback into the doctor's face.

“A'loush and Sarmad were the ones who stole the coffin. I did not even know what was inside it. However, you believed that I was the thief and did not defend me.”

“Believe me,” said the doctor, “there were circumstances more powerful than me.”

“Everybody was searching for me. I had to move undercover. I have lost my house and my family. I have nothing to lose now, but you have your wealth. How would you enjoy it if you lost your life?”

“If you kill me, your problems will be worse. Even the Iranians themselves are searching for you.”

The Hunchback's expression changed a little. “Why?” he asked.

“Because you killed Tahseen, and he was one of their best men. Believe me,” said the doctor earnestly, “I was negotiating with them to save your life and set you free.”

“There were accounts to be settled between us. That was the reason for killing Tahseen. A’aloush killed him; he was one of my best men that I trusted.”

“You rushed into that. You should have consulted me; I am your direct supervisor.”

“It was a personal matter. He ratted on my people and me during Saddam’s era. I was about to be executed if it werenot for the miracle of Baghdad’s fall. Now you want to hold me accountable for killing a dog and a traitor dog.” The Hunchback laughed loudly, increasing Dr Salem’s worriedness.

“You will complicate things by killing me, Hump.”

“More than they are complicated now? I do not think that the death of our likes is harmful. At least the country will be clean from the likes of us. We have never thought of this land. We have spread killing and jungle law all over the country. You will remain a dog for the Iranians, your masters, though you lead strong militias. They have seen our treason and our innate love for money. We are the original traitors. We are the killers of holy men, my friend. Who does what we do to his country?”

“These words are not sensible or appropriate for these times, Hunchback. You will not live like a lion. You will be slaughtered like a sheep. Review your situation while you still have time to regain what you have lost. I do not mean your family, of course, but I will provide you with higher and official authorities. You will not live hunted like this anymore. I will also provide you with modern weaponry.”

The Hunchback stood and kicked the can strongly. His eyes flaming withevil, he clapped his hands and shouted hysterically, “You are a son of a bitch!”

He ordered his subordinates to take Dr Salem out and continued swearing to disperse his anger at the impious doctor. “We should remove your kidneys without anesthetization and throw them to dogs. It is time to execute you.”

Dr Salem was speechless. His rage faded, his heart was racing, fear had him by the neck. He lay as if mesmerized in his pose on the floor. Confused, absentminded, and afraid of what awaits him. His experience in killing made him accept his situation as soon to be dead after moments or hours, how and when, was known only to God. That was inevitable, unless the golden squad interfered, or some other militia, to save him, and that was impossible at that time.

The Hunchback appeared in his hysterical satanic rage, crying, “Your time has undoubtedly ended! Wait for my sign!”

They took Dr Salem by his collar, leading him just as a sheep is pulled out of the barn. Thunder pounded in the sky and rain was pouring down. They threw the doctor onto the mud; guns were pointed at him, waiting to finish him. They were three masked men. Ezz al-Din, however, remained inside, discussing the doctor’s fate with the Hunchback.

“I do not see any wisdom in keeping him alive.”

“Me either. If they know that we have him, they will blow up the farm with their artillery.”

“We kill him. Then he is done,” said Ezz al-Din confidently.

The Hunchback was sitting at a rectangular table, an empty glass in front of him. He held the empty glass with stiff fingers and shouted, “They are threatening me. Put simply, if I kill him they will increase the heat in the search for me. It will be my doom eventually. However, I will not hesitate to kill him.”

“Let A’aboud execute him.”

“Kill him quickly. We still have two others.”

The Hunchback did not hesitate to give his personal gun to A’aboud to kill the doctor. The Hunchback’s son was bloodthirsty to kill him.

A’aboud approached the doctor, followed by Ezz al-Din. Lying on the mud in the pouring rain, the doctor was very frightened, not as tough and strong as they used to see him. A’aboud put his finger on the trigger and the tip of the barrel near the doctor’s head, and pulled him by the hair.

“Have a taste of what you gave toothers,” he whispered in the doctor’s ear.

Then he pushed the doctor’s head away and shot several times, blowing Dr Salem’s head to pieces. Another page was turned over in the life of a man whose name was important and brilliant in Baghdad’s operations.

24

Foggy City London

Elham deteriorated quickly after she became a drug addict. Mazen ceased to show her any respect after seducing and violating her. He started to ridicule her everywhere, at any time. He also ceased to fulfil the needs of her addiction with even a tiny amount of the magic white powder. He became bored with her company, avoided meeting her as much as he could, and ignored her calls. He even used Shahlaa to put her out of his way.

Elham became homeless, after the British government refused to extend her residence status. Shahlaa also kicked her out of her house. She tried to find a job. However her appearance and obvious misery did not encourage any business owner to hire her. She then tried to seduce some youth, so that even for one night she could hide from the merciless winter, the harsh cold; it did not matter for her how or where. However, her ragged hair and dirty homeless face did not help achieve that goal.

Hunger drove her to begging. Once a beautiful woman, Elham's mind is now empty except for how to silence her hunger or how to obtain a quarter of a cigarette, to ease the pains of her brain; she did not even get any alimony from the divorce. He just threw her out and disappeared. She faced a destiny of hunger and misery. He even had withdrawn the marriage documents to make it harder for her to obtain residence status in Britain. He decided to live his life happily with his black lover.

Inside she was angry at the whole universe. Her life's miseries multiplied constantly; she cursed the bad luck that dragged her into being a prostitute.

She pitied herself deeply each time she confronted the echoes of ridicule from her former girlfriends and acquaintances. Sometimes she imagined they pitied her miserable end and reminisced about her past life.

She was taking her new life drop by drop. She added by her stupidity and mismanagement new pain that was wandering in the cold streets of London. What made it worse were her addiction and her self-deprivation to provide even for one cocaine dose per month. No wonder her life turned into a mess and absurdity at the hands of street gangs. She now seeks to escape to an illusionary life to flee the misery of reality.

One day, she remembered Nabil and stole a moment to reminisce about her old lover, when he felt that she loved his words in reply to her question: "How much do you love me my sweetheart?"

"You might have touched my love to you through my fear for you. However, I will repeat it again for you; the whole universe is a sugar grain in comparison to my love to you."

She snapped out of her daydream and became aware of the bitter night. She started to wander through the streets, her eyes looking sadly and bitterly at clothes in closed shop windows. She gazed with tears in her eyes, remembering the fancy night dresses and her wedding dress, then looked at the rags on her body, to realize that the past is past and will not return.

The next night her feet led her to a shabby pub. Maybe a drunken stranger would pick her up and be generous enough to take her to sleep in a bed or give her a crumb of bread. She approached the raucous pub, music and loud drunk voices obscuring all other sounds. Despite the cold night, she sat on the doorstep. Inside, drunken people were having fun; she looked hungrily at their hands holding drinks, her heart longing even for a small shot to whet her thirst. She remained like that until a tall,

svelte blond came out, a young woman in her twenties, a British-looking woman. She took out a cigarette and was about to smoke it. Elham's pose made her pause and realize that Elham was a homeless woman needing food and shelter.

She put her cigarette back in her bag and went back inside, returning with a sandwich and a glass of red wine, which she presented to Elham sympathetically. Elham eagerly accepted the gift and devoured everything. She drank and let herself dream. Chance had given her fuel to satisfy herself; the young woman also gave her ten pounds, and then went back in to continue her night.

Elham could not stand staying any longer. She left the place after having four drinks, wandered the streets, dreamily and contented. She entered an alley that was devoid of people and quiet. It was near dawn. She saw some people entering a two-story building and heard a voice chanting an Azan coming from inside; she felt a bit of security and tranquillity.

Her eyelids were heavy and she was a little dizzy, tired of walking and drinking. She sat in a corner of the alley and fell asleep.

Suddenly she was woken by the sound of heavy footsteps. She turned around in fear and saw the silhouette of a bearded man. The beard gave him the appearance of wisdom. She tried to escape him but did not have the energy to do so. He tapped her gently on the shoulders and spoke to her in English.

“Do not worry. I will help you.”

Unable to reply, she stared at him.

“Where are you from?”

“Iraq.”

“God!” the sheikh shouted in panic. “I am Sheikh Mozafar, my daughter, the sheikh and preacher of this mosque. We are from Ramadi, to be precise, from Fallujah. My wife will help you.”

The girl felt confidence in the quiet and tender voice. She had been longing for such tenderness for a long time. Then she started to weep, while the sheikh with a fatherly gentleness stroked her hair. He took out his mobile and phoned his wife to get ready to receive a new guest.

25

The disappearance of Dr Salem caused a big fuss. A high-ranking Iranian military general called Fakhri and ordered him to send a search squadron to determine the doctor's whereabouts. Maybe he was still alive.

This call was enough to rouse Fakhri from his dormancy. The general's tone of voice caused panic within him. He promised that he would do the impossible to find the doctor. Fakhri guessed that the Hunchback's militia might be behind the doctor's disappearance. However, the general told him in a tone of contempt to keep his miserable opinions to himself. Fakhri spared no effort in the search for the doctor, but in vain. He called his militias, including Sarmad's militia. The latter promised to bring the Hunchback's head very soon. Sarmad was pleased to have an assignment to kill the Hunchback.

Meanwhile, at the semi-empty farm, the Hunchback ordered his men to plant explosives and detonations around the farm's border, and to entice the army to the farm by throwing the doctor's body near the Minister of Interior's building as a message directed to Fakhri. He also ordered them to kill anyone who attempted to enter the farm.

The Hunchback was making his plans after midnight, sitting in an old room. In the middle were a large table, and a bed sat to the left of the door. It was a damp, scary room emanating gloom and creepiness to the soul of whoever entered. The Hunchback with his stocky, flabby body, reddish engorged face, swollen eyes, and blind envious soul that was full of revenge. Entrenched wrinkles covered his forehead and surrounded his eyes; these, with shrivelled cheeks, would make anyone feel discomfort upon looking at him. He was wrapping himself in a grey blanket to shield himself from the dampness of the room in that dawn.

Ezz al-Din, A'aboud, and others who were with him did not doubt for a second that he was oozing alcohol; empty and full beer bottles littered the table.

“His body will be thrown near the ministry building, and it will be reported by one of our elements. We will leave this place soon because they will undoubtedly discover it.”

“This is very dangerous for us, to challenge the minister publicly at this time,” said Ezz al-Din worriedly.”

“There are many places to go, and we will not be safe from danger until we leave this doomed country. He who is completely wet does not fear raindrops.”

“However, Doctor Salem has a special status for the Iranian officers; this will increase their rage with us,” said A'aboud, his worry evident in his tone. “Do not forget that you are targeted, as he told you before we killed him.”

“Damn you,” said the Hunchback angrily, scorning his son.

“What power do we have to challenge Fakhri? Why do we have to make ourselves go through hell?” his son replied.

The Hunchback hit the table angrily with his fist and said in challenge, “We have men and money. Whoever wants out let him say so now.” He looked at the angry, staring faces. “You have until morning, and then whoever wants to withdraw, I will sit him on a spike until death.”

Fakhri made a call to A'aloush and Sarmad and assigned them to search for the Hunchback. On the same day, an unknown person reported the existence of an important person's corpse near the ministry building. After a while, Fakhri learned that the corpse belonged to Doctor Salem. This brought Bahrooz personally from Tehran to Baghdad, to

the headquarters of the Minister of Interior. He entered Fakhri's office suddenly, as if he were the boss, not Fakhri.

He took a seat at Fakhri's desk and started to ask questions. Fakhri could not answer. Bahrooz issued some orders and reiterated that Fakhri keep up the search for the Hunchback. Then, with severe contempt, he said, "Fakhri, we gave you the ministry as a present. Do not let your desires overwhelm you and forget your duties."

"I am at your disposal, sir. However, what happened was beyond our control. Even the prime minister—"

Bahrooz interrupted angrily. "The prime what? Have you forgotten who supports you? We are your bosses. Understood?"

"I mean, sir, what happened is common in this country."

"Common! What do you mean by 'common', Mr. Fakhri? He shouted loudly in Fakhri's face: "This is our territory, not the territory of a militia trying to impose their power or form parties, as they like. The golden squad or Bader Legion or even your armies have been raised and supported by us and with our permission. Anything outside that range will be blown to smithereens. The Islamic empire is the new empire in the east, and it is not a game."

"Sir, the Hunchback—" Fakhri mumbled hesitantly.

"The Hunchback is inevitably dead, especially now that I am handling his case instead of General Kasem. Anyone else who touches our men will be sent to hell with him."

One morning the headquarters in Baghdad received information that the Hunchback was hiding in a remote farm in Tarmia. Bahrooz immediately sent a squadron to verify the news. When the squadron reached the farm, they found the place empty of the Hunchback and his

militia. A few moments after they entered the farm, a huge explosion occurred, shredding bodies and trees and scattering the pieces over the farm. Columns of smoke rose darkening the heart of the blue sky. The success of the Hunchback's ambush proved his skill and foresight.

The news about the ambush agitated Bahrooz's nerves near craziness, and he declared an official war against the Hunchback. Maybe the latter has weaponry that aids him to resist. Who knows? War is deception, especially in the lands of Iraq.

If the general does not terminate the Hunchback, he will pose a real danger.

He stressed to his intelligence to track the Hunchback down, and met personally with A'aloush and Sarmad, who had become prominent in a very short time in the arena of the militia's power.

The Hunchback was not less cunning. He was monitoring the ministry's elements and hunting them down through ambushes led by Ezz al-Din. His goal was to hunt Fakhri before anyone else.

After Bahrooz's efforts to get the Hunchback proved useless, he decided one day to take a squadron and go out in search of his tracks, beginning with the last places where he was reported to be seen. Serious efforts to catch him were exerted until one day Bahrooz got angry in a meeting and shouted at the Iraqi officers and ministers who were sitting there. "Who is the Hunchback? Is he more dangerous than Saddam Hussein or even Bin Laden?"

He glared at the others around the table, and then continued in the same tone, "You are stupid. You are sitting here in front of me like sheep, and he is hunting your men down like a wolf."

Truth must be said, Ezz al-Din has done very well tearing apart the gang of A'aloush and Sarmad. When he learnt that they usually drank at a particular pub, he did not hesitate to visit with his small squad, determined to get them or die trying.

Ezz al-Din's plan was to besiege the pub in such a way as to prevent their escape during the fight. He blocked all gaps through which they might flee and used fatal weaponry to execute his operation. The Hunchback did not hesitate to pay to eliminate his worst enemies.

Ezz al-Din exploited the loud music and drunken voices to cover his approach. His squad then flooded the pub with bullets, sparing mercy for no one inside. It was a fierce militia war and most of those involved were killed. The members of A'aloush and Sarmad's protection squad were eliminated, though they showed unprecedented bravery, preferring death to surrender. Their fate was immediate, as they had chosen.

However, this fierce battle between the militias, the police, and security forces did not prevent such carnage. This was not a unique phenomenon. Most battles are treated in the same way by the government unless the green area is endangered, and then militias race to protect that area.

After Ezz al-Din made sure that his enemies were dead, he returned with his men to [Al Saidia](#), which the Hunchback had moved to recently. He was victorious in battle and proud, carrying the heads of A'aloush and Sarmad.

Bahrooz had no alternative except to avenge himself against the Hunchback, who had spoiled his plans. He ordered Fakhri to prepare a large patrol to invade the new den of the Hunchback and the twenty other escapees in an abandoned house. He stressed to Fakhri the necessity to eliminate the Hunchback before he got even stronger.

The miserable maidsaw that she had two choices: to give up either Nabil or her life, because Fakhri was going to inevitably kill her. Thus, she decided to escape to an unknown place. Without hesitation, she executed her plan by the dawn of that day. Fakhri learnt of her plans and decided to get rid of her immediately, before she disclosed his crimes. He sent his men, led by Nabil, to take care of her. She was charged with treason and terrorism.

Nabil was shocked and surprised at these charges. He could not express his feelings of grief, sadness, or shock in his beloved one. He had had a love affair with a person who was about to nearly cost him his future. If she was really charged with terrorism and treason, he would be forced to execute the minister's orders and kill her.

Maiada, meanwhile, was keen not to lose the minister's confidence in her. She was sparing no effort to do her job, both as a mistress and as a secretary. One day she gave him a quick French kiss with astonishing sound; he was feverishly aroused, blood flowing to his brain as hot mercury in thermometer. This did not last long before his phone rang. Unable to control his emotions or anger he shouted loudly at Shireen, "Where are you?"

"It is none of your business. Keep your ego down a little bit, Mr Minister. I will never forget what you have done. You will pay for it."

Shireen hung up. She was sitting in a dark room with a little window overlooking a street in the Ghazalia area. She peeked out of the window at the dead, empty street. Lighting a cigarette, she gazed at the passers-by, seeing but not seeing, consumed by her thoughts.

"I had to make a double lucky strike from the start," she mumbled. "Maybe Nabil is searching for me as ordered by his master."

She did not hesitate to make a last phone call to Nabil, though she knew he was assigned to arrest her. Surprised, he tried to lure her in and promised to help her because he was responsible for her case now, but in vain.

- “No doubt you believed your master,” she said sadly. “I did not exclude that you are responsible for my case because he trusts you a lot. However, I love you Nabil.”
- “So, why did you run away from me, then?”
- “I do not think you would understand how dangerous the matter is, Nabil. I might admit a huge secret to you that might change your whole world.”
- “A secret?” he asked resentfully. “What secret, Shireen?”
- “Noor.”
- “Noor?”
- “Your sister.”
- “What does that have to do with you?”
- “She was killed.”; Mr. the officer

He started sweating with worry, his eyes widening in astonishment. “How do you know? Listen, if you lie, I am the one who will kill you this time.”

“The minister strangled her just as rotten water strangles roses. He kidnapped her through a pimp woman called Om Amir. He brought her home, raped her, made her a heroin addict, then invited his friends to share her together. Then he locked her in a storage room and killed her.”

This news engorged Nabil's face with blood and stole his breath. He slammed the office walls with his fists. He was sure she was not lying. She described Noor accurately, her long hair, her body, the nice tattoo on her right hip, the colour of her eyes.

Before hanging up, she said, "I know that we shall never meet again. This man is just a drop in the ocean, and if you kill him, there are still worse. They are ruling now mercilessly. Their hearts are full of envy and wrath. Battalions of oppression like clouds of darkness covering all that is right and just. If you want to avenge your sister and regain your rights, you should escape. Do not be anyone's scapegoat. I hope you will be safe from these monsters."

Nabil tried to call the number back, but the line was dead. He became upset and depressed, and desire for revenge was the only thing his face expressed.

26

The minister entered his palace upset by the current events, which had gone out of his control. He started to walk into the kitchen, and then changed his mind. Opening the door, he was shocked to see the shadow of Nabil pointing a gun at him.

That is Nabil himself, another surprise. What brought him here? Why is this sudden enmity? Why is he pointing his gun towards his own boss! As if, the past repeats itself. However, instead of Noor who did the same, he meets Nabil in the same place. How will he avoid it this time? Nabil is a brave officer and a sharp shooter.

“Noor is my sister, Fakhri. I think you haven't forgotten her.”

Fakhri swallowed his tongue, words stopped at his throat, choking, and he stared terrified into Nabil's eyes.

“Your evils have reached the limits, Fakhri. The irony is that I have dedicated my life to protect my sister's killer. I guess your eventual end will be in my hands now.”

In panic, Fakhri looked into Nabil's eyes. Fear spread through his body as if evils of doom were gathering in his gloomy horizon. Nabil warned him not to even think to attempt anything. He ignored the warning and stepped calmly towards Nabil, pretending goodwill, spreading his hands, trying to calm Nabil, offering reconciliation. Nabil shouted at him not to step forward. Ignoring the warning, Fakhri took a few steps more. Nabil shot unhesitatingly, one shot from his silenced gun, followed by a scream of panic and pain. Fakhri's body stayed suspended for a few seconds, and then swivelled and dropped to the floor, dead.

27

Nabil made arrangements and sent his brothers to Kurdistan Iraq to the house of some trusted relatives before he killed Fakhri. He himself escaped to Istanbul, and then decided to go to Britain.

Bahrooz was angered upon learning of Fakhri's murder; he did not receive the news easily. He thought that the Hunchback was behind all these events. That he was a person posing an imminent danger as he had dared to kill the Minister of Interior. Bahrooz did not exclude the possibility that Nabil was one of the Hunchback's men.

To facilitate the process of hunting the Hunchback, Bahrooz ordered his men to publish his photo all over the media. The latter broadcast many lies about the Hunchback, demonizing him as the new Abu Taber, who killed people and destroyed families.

The new monster became widely known in Iraq, that his existence posed a threat to citizens' lives and security. He became the talk of the hour, something like having breakfast. Search operations for him increased greatly, as did confrontations between his militia and the government forces, until the Hunchback ran out of men and money and was unable to block attacks anymore.

That is the phantom, the murderer, who seeks the destruction of unarmed civilian Iraqi people — was the message of the daily media broadcasts.

Arms traders exploited the opportunity to promote their trade and expand their markets through rumours that spread in the country from time to time. Matters inflated and increased; people became frightened by the increasing number of explosions and fabricated videos attributed

to the Hunchback's militias. Clergymen started maximum mobilization; issuing Fatwas to protect their own interest and posts.

The public conversation was—The Hunchback rapes —The Hunchback is the third person in Al-Qaeda — The Hunchback is the predecessor of al-Zarqawi.

One day, an officer issued a statement to the media that he would not tolerate terrorism or hunting down the Hunchback whether dead or alive.

After a while, an unidentified person reported that the Hunchback was in Khan Ben Saad with a terrorist group. The news was broadcast as follows:

“The Hunchback is training a large group of terrorists, determined to invade Baghdad; however, the army is ready, and operations have been launched to invade the Hunchback's den of iniquity.”

Actually, the Hunchback was at Khan Ben Saad with his son, Ezz al-Din, and three others, but in the worst possible condition. The Hunchback had been wounded by a bullet in his right shoulder. The others were in very low psychological condition. Despite the tough situation, they gathered in a large building in a remote area in Khan Ben Saad, but at another address. As usual, the Hunchback took his precautions and belted the building with explosives against a possible attack.

Bahrooz also did not spare any effort to put in place a careful plan. Leading a force that cannot be underestimated, he headed to Khan Ben Saad. Clouds of dust and the stench of blood rose into the air, blocking breath; sounds of explosions and scenes of detonations filled the sight mercilessly, and all attributed to the Hunchback's militias.

28

Killer Dawn

One afternoon, a large army force went out, after the announcement by the head of operations in Baghdad that an attack on the den of terrorism would commence. Fully armed, the force left the headquarters of the Ministry of Interior under the leadership of the new Minister of Interior, Ma'anal-Jaboury. After about two hours, at exactly 8 o'clock at night, the force comprising three tanks, five military jeeps, and a huge number of infantry soldiers besieged the building where the Hunchback and the remains of his men were fortified. Calls were made over loudspeakers for them to surrender, provoking a strong reaction within the Hunchback and igniting his wrath. His squad immediately responded by shooting heavily with BKC machines and killing some of the members of the government force. The fight lasted for five hours, during which some soldiers tried to climb through the fence, uselessly, as they were received mercilessly with the bullets from the Hunchback's besieged militia.

Among those monitoring the operation was Bahrooz, who thought that it would take only a couple of hours. He did not hide his astonishment at the extent of the strong resistance of the Hunchback. He withdrew further back to monitor the operation via night vision glasses. The scene made him nearly confident that the Hunchback was a rival that could not be underestimated. His power in response was an undeniable fact; his bravery must be admitted.

Inside the building, the condition of the fighters was bad, despite the strength of their response to the attackers. Through his night vision

glasses, the Hunchback managed to observe the Iranian general making plans with his officers to eliminate them. His face turned red from the blood flowing into his head. In a coarse voice he said, "This Iranian dog will receive an Iraqi blow that he will never forget. That is only if he lives to remember or forget."

He peeked at the detonating device in his hand and smiled slyly as usual.

Notwithstanding their limited numbers they fought like an army, embracing death, forfeiting life, filled with solidarity and unity in defying the attack. Though the simple weaponry of the resistors; they convinced the attackers of their doom and made them desperate to the extent that they lost all hope to penetrate the building. It was to be or not to be, even if death was my fate.

At half past one, the shooting faded bit by bit; simple shootings only remained between the two parties, both of which were trying to kill the maximum number of individuals. Bahrooz requested more support troops. The resistors have accepted their fate imposed by God, though they were monstrous killers. However, they were defending their warrior's honour, as if repenting their ill deeds by this last fight. Death is more merciful than surrender.

The Hunchback was downhearted by his own fury while watching the general through his night vision glasses from a corner on the second floor of the house, monitoring the enemy's reaction from behind a curtain. The Hunchback's evil character had never prevented him from satisfying his pleasures, planning murders, earning the respect of traitors, oppressing the downtrodden, reckless of consequences, entertaining his nights with requiems, and usually singing above gravestones. However, his rival is strong and fighting cannot be evaded.

Death stepped closer to the Hunchback, and the general smiled for the first time since the start of the operation. Writing the first lines of success to terminate the resistance, he ordered his forces to strike again. The fight renewed, the blood and carnage spread; however, attempts to penetrate the fence did not record any progress, though it was partly collapsing. The all of a sudden General Bahrooz said, “Colonel Saeb, I wanted him alive, but now I have changed my mind. Bring the artillery and destroy the house over their heads.”

The Hunchback noted that the general was issuing orders. He knew their end was near. He took cover in a corner of the house but kept the fight alive, defying the attackers. He was a sharp shooter and cost his enemies a lot, while monitoring the attackers so he could direct his men to block the impetrators and encouraging them to hold their position.

Artillery nozzles were aimed towards them and started to bomb, demolishing the house over their heads irrespective of the bravery of the resistors. Columns of smoke rose until it covered the place.

The fight faded, after a long, fatal shelling. The smoke was washed away; the rubble and debris of the house appeared. The front walls were demolished. Bahrooz searched for the Hunchback’s corpse with his glasses. Then he sent some soldiers to comb the place before his entry. The house was scary; all of the resistors were dead, their remnants scattered in every corner. The soldiers’ hearts trembled. Their fingers ready on the triggers, few of them went into the semi-demolished house. Darkness started to fade away, revealing clouds, the light spreading slowly, revealing the resistors’ corpses covered with dust and blood. One of the soldiers signalled to his comrades to enter, after verifying its safety, shouting that all were dead.

Bahrooz went in in front of them. Proud and victorious, he told the officer, “We will go in and film the place. You can inform the media that we have eliminated fifty persons of the topmost Al-Qaeda terrorist groups.”

Nevertheless, that there were only five resistors.

“Yes, sir,” said the officer.

When the general reached the fence, one of his soldiers, who was standing over the Hunchback’s corpse, called out, “Sir, this is the corpse of the dog as I saw it on TV; it is the Hunchback himself.”

The Hunchback was lying on his face covered with blood, the soldier’s foot on his back; the soldier taking pride in eliminating the long-threatening danger. He moved towards the general to lead him to the Hunchback’s position. The general was eager to have a last look at his rival. He was smiling in vanity, covering his thick traits. Once he knew the Hunchback’s position, he dismissed the soldier.

Thus, he entered the house with his usual pride and rude smile. Suddenly he stopped, paralyzed. His eyes widened and his daring smile faded, replaced by the impression that he was about to screech. He quickly looked at his soldiers spread all over the place, smiling, busy with their victory, unconscious of the evil about to hit them. Bahrooz realized that his screech was too late and useless. The scene was like a slow motion scene from a war movie. Azrael, the reaper, was hovering above their heads, muting Bahrooz’s voice, about to harvest their souls.

“The corpse has moved. Oh God, he is moving.”

The Hunchback’s head rose heavily. Regaining a bit of his consciousness, he threw a lingering look of death at his rival, holding the detonating device with his right hand. It was only for a second, to keep

the general company on his journey to hell. As if he had lived his life to achieve this dream.

In a moment of unprecedented bravery, he pressed the button and borrowed his last smile from the reaper. A huge explosion blew to smithereens most of the soldiers, tearing apart their bodies and vehicles, sending their souls and other debris to the skies wrapped in thick black smoke.

Bahrooz was killed with all his dirty tricks. His body cells that had been poisoned with the killing of innocents on the lands of holy men were scattered to the four winds. The Hunchback mumbled something that Bahrooz heard before he died:

“I would have preferred to be executed by Saddam’s hands, rather than Persian dogs.”

The next morning Iraqi media channels broadcast the news.

“Death of Al-Qaeda leader in Iraq; Abu Taber the second, died along with one hundred and seventy persons of his militias”, They were eliminated on their farm, which was considered one of the main headquarters for the terrorist group in Iraq. They had been planning a massive fatal attack on Baghdad.” A nationalistic song concluded the statement.

Most of the naïve celebrated the news, thinking that terrorism was over, forgetting that the true terrorists were the rulers.

Nabil left the country for Istanbul, and then headed to London, leaving behind unfinished stories. Stories of millions of men, women, children, and dead officials that were replaced by rotten and worse officials; as usual those were only slaves. The true rulers were foreigners, enjoying the country’s wealth and innocents’ blood. Spreading sectarianism, fires,

and explosions that suffocated compatriots; they knew that the statusquo was a complex disaster.

Will the devil reappear? Who would it be this time?

Author's works:

Nisreen

Letter Written By a Man in His Forties

The Destiny: Diaries of an Iraqi citizen

The Era of Women