

Chapter 1

'Mabruc' (congratulations) said their department's head laconically, though the circumstances were fit to bestow his inferiors with praise.

He glanced at the rectangular transparent window pane, through which the interrogation chamber could be seen without being seen; and concentrated his gaze for a few seconds in the interrogator and his victim.

'Taieb (good) you did a good job up till now, although we're just at the beginning, and sit down, back to your posts.' He added quite genially, without harassing his inferiors as he's used to.

'Do update me with a few details before we'll go in.'

The younger of the two interrogators, that up to their senior's arrival followed with much interest the happenings in the interrogation chamber beyond the window, and has recorded every detail and word that took place over there, offered his seat to his esteemed department's head.

'First of all, how did she get to London? She is engaged to be married to her relative or a family friend isn't she?' the department's head asked, as he sat down on the unoccupied chair.

'She was a beloved daughter.' The older one among his two inferiors opened up.

'A beloved daughter, but there's the tradition... the family's honor... maybe we should check up if the whole matter hasn't started in her family?'

'Wallahi (by God) we haven't even thought of such a possibility!' the older one remarked with much cajolery. 'We'll check that possibility too ya side (sir). As for our subject matter, she refused to marry her father business associate; she threatened to commit suicide... Her father made much fuss about it but at the end he had to accept her refusal. The solution was to send her abroad, to study. They compensated her ex fiancé', they aren't short of money.'

'How was she recruited then by our enemies?' The department's head kept on asking. The full details he would learn in her complementary interrogation, in his presence within a few more minutes; but he preferred to know beforehand the basic facts and verify it during the counter interrogation.

'In a disco club sir, on the first night that she was tempted to visit such a joint.'

'Is that so?' the department's head wondered knitting his brows, 'and how did they manage to persuade her, but just the main points.'

'One of the students a friend of hers, an Algerian girl, persuaded her to accompany her that place.'

'I said just the main points and I mean it.' His senior reminded him.

'It's a popular club and many of our kinsmen visit it too. Several men asked her to dance, but she refused. But a certain Libyan courted her with elegant determination, and claimed that he has fallen in love with her at first sight; he offered her his ruby ring. She refused to accept it of course, but was very impressed by his gesture it seems; later on he drove her and her friend back to the students' dormitory, and she gave him her mobile number...'

'So it was a procedure of step by step developments, that's how it worked out.'

'That's right sir that Libyan was her first one, and after a short time she moved to his place. That's how it all started.'

'If she isn't a virgin wallahi, we can have the time of our life on her account.' The younger one barged in enthusiastically.

'Ouskut ya jachs!' (Shut up young jackass) The department's head exclaimed angrily.

The young interrogator lowered his eyes and coughed loudly several times, quite shocked; but the department's head seemed to lose all his interest in him.

'To me she looks "tamam" (unscathed) just as new, "ya'ani" (which means) no need for harsh treatment. How was she tamed then? Yes I'm listening.' He turned again to the older one between the two.

'It was very easy sir. We've shown her a few old devices, which were left here from the time Faisel and the "Ingilizi" (the Englishman = Laurence of Arabia) have beaten the Turks, and ended up with the Turkish Empire...' He broke out laughing seeing the broadening smile on his senior's face. 'That was the opening stage and at nightfall we've organized a chorus of tortured victims' shrieks; and just before midnight she knocked with frenzy on her door, asking to meet the officer in charge; that is, she wished to see you ya sidi (sir).'

'Very well,' the department's head nodded his head with approval and with a beaming smile on his face. 'We'll treat her with kid gloves from now on, and if some idiot would dare to touch her, I'll castrate him with my own hands!' He remarked raising his voice, turning his eyes towards the younger one among the two. 'She's raw material of the best quality, if things won't work out as we wish, we can always transfer her to our Palestinian brothers; to atone for her treason as a "shahida" (saint) with an explosive belt and blow herself up among our mutual enemies. But we've to find out still, whether we can turn her into a double agent.' He made a short pause as if he was thinking it over. 'The ties with her operator might have been cut off for just a short while already; anyhow, we can always put up some cover story like let's say, suspicion of false papers or some other trivial cause that brought to her detention; or devise a more sophisticated theory, which would persuade her operator that she has been hospitalized in a Beirut hospital.' He cleared his throat with much show of self importance, turning a reproachful look at the young interrogator. 'Tell Rashid that we're going in.' He ordered and rose to his feet.

Chapter 2

'What's your name ya habibti (my dear)?' The department's head asked with much kindness the young and frightened woman,. He even introduced himself to her with some alias that he invented right on the spot, as soon as he sat opposite her.

The atmosphere has changed from one extreme to the other. The young woman watched him as if he was her savior, who would wake her up from the nightmare, in which she found herself without being able to cope with.

'Amina, Amina Rifa'yee sir...' She answered hesitantly, watching him with entreating eyes.

'Send for coffee and something to eat! Are you hungry Amina?' He turned to her but without waiting for her reply he ordered on: 'Pitahs (flat bread) with honey and move your butt!' He scolded the young interrogator, and the latter left running.

'Amina Rifa'yee, a native of Damascus, a daughter of a distinguished family...' The department's head muttered feigning astonishment.

Meanwhile food and drinks were brought in, and up to the moment that everyone has completed to employ his jaws, neither the department's head nor his inferiors continued to frighten their victim.

While drinking coffee and mineral water, the department's head asked Amina to sum up her adventures.

A short pause fell, the meaningless conversations that his inferiors led on purpose; as if it was some friendly meeting of some old acquaintances, were cut off instantly.

Amina opened up with bits and fragments, hardly audible, from the disputes at home, he flight to London, her first year of studies up to her fourth, the meeting with Murad at the disco club, and her transfer from the students' dormitory at Grosvenor House to Murad's apartment.

'What were you studying and where?' Abdul Karim the department's head interrupted her incoherent monologue, with unreserved curiosity and with a well feigned sympathy too.

'I've studied international relations at LSE.'

'El what, what's the full name of that academic institute?' Abdul Karim wondered.

'London school of economics,' she answered immediately but with a hint of dismay, as if it was some information that could incriminate her.

'Oh I see,' he muttered and turned a meaning glance at Rashid, which meant "you'll have to clarify it to me later..." 'But what caused you to move to his apartment? You a devoted daughter betrothed to another?'

'He swore that I was his entire world, and that's how he behaved in the first three months that I've shared with him, and I was so lonely...' Tears filled her eyes and she lowered her head. 'He behaved with chivalry he didn't push his hands, and up to the moment that I let him he didn't touch me. I was sure I've found the man of my life.'

'You fell into the hands of a pro.' Abdul Karim remarked with a hint of reproof.

Rashid who is the department's deputy and the most experienced interrogator and his two aids, sat as if they were tied up in their seats, the moment the sexual experiences of their victim were told by her.

'Oh yes, I couldn't grasp what he was really after, I thought that he's a pimp after a while, despite the fact that he's a devout Muslim and he wasn't short of means.'

These certain details the department's head had no reason to probe into, there was no need to verify that sort of evidence after Amina's detailed confession.

'He didn't threaten you or ill-treated you? He didn't change his behavior towards you?'

'No, he didn't threaten me and whenever he brought up the matter from time to time and I opposed it, he didn't react with anger or threats. I didn't have to leave him and I studied on freely.'

'And how did he define that matter?'

Amina didn't hasten to reply to that particular question. A nervous tick gripped her chin and it seemed as if she is about to faint.

'Don't be afraid we won't harm you, we want to pull you out of that complicated mishap.' Abdul Karim promised her, pulling out of his repertoire one of his most convincing miens.

'To contribute my share to replace the dictatorial Syrian regime...' She mumbled and burst out into hysterical sobs.

Once again a pause ensued, simply to let her calm down and regain some sort of self composure. A minute passed and Rashid handed her a paper handkerchief to wipe her tears; and right afterwards the moderated interrogation was resumed.

'Alright you feel much better now I hope,' remarked Abdul Karim. 'But what made you change your mind and make all the way to Beirut?' It was clear to him that all these details were recorded during her first interrogation in his absence, but he preferred to hear it from her mouth once more, and compare it with the recorded version.

'He introduced me his American friend, while we had lunch at a restaurant in Chelsea.' She broke off suddenly as if she expected some more questions, and after a short pause she went on. 'It was on a Sunday on the restaurant's first floor, which wasn't crowded as the ground floor. All of a sudden that friend of his popped up. I do understand now that it was planned beforehand and wasn't a coincidence. Murad didn't waste time and explained to me that his friend is a senior agent in some American intelligence agency; and that he's going to be my operator in Beirut.'

'There must be something above and beyond that superficial tale, something much more serious...' The department's head declared his dissatisfaction.

'He's a charming man, I don't know how to explain it... Maybe it was my hope to return to Damascus even with a fake identity and to keep seeing this man...'

'And how long were you supposed to stay in Beirut both of you, before your return to Damascus?'

'A year and a half,' she replied with a heaving bosom, releasing the air caught in her lungs with broadening nostrils.

'At least you know now that they tried to exploit you, that they tried to compel you to betray your own country.' He watched her with a penetrating stare, letting her grasp the full meaning of his last sentence; and the fact that he offers her the chance of her life, the exemption from punishment, from death at the Al Maza jail, or handing her over to her ex fiancé' relatives who would cut her throat or strangle her to death...

'You shall meet your American operator, but from now on you shall serve devotedly your motherland!' He stated emphasizing each syllable.

Amina lowered her eyes and fell into an emotional spasm again.

'We'll protect you; we'll take care of you Amina from now on.' The department's head summed the matter up while giving a clear sign that the interrogation is over.

The jailors were summoned and the department's head and his aides took leave of Amina, as if she was one of the department's regular agents.

The moment they were left alone in the interrogation chamber, Abdul Karim turned to Rashid: 'She didn't tell the Libyan if he's a Libyan at all, nor to the one who stole her heart about her annulled betrothal, did she?'

'That's right sir, she's hidden that fact from both of them.'

'Well, thus her ex fiancé's brother had identified her in Beirut, by sheer coincidence during his last business trip.' The department's head remarked with a beaming smile. 'That significant detail failed them and saved her life, the poor devil that she is.'

Chapter 3

'Taieb,' (good) the department's head said. 'Take good care of her Rashid I count on you, see that she'll get the same food that the prison staff gets; and stay in your office this afternoon and evening, I may call you in a few hours time with new instructions.'

'Aioua ya sidi.' (Yes sir) Rashid answered him and stood up and his two colleagues followed suit, waiting patiently till the department's head will leave.

Abdul Karim did not lose precious time and went immediately to his boss office, the head of the Syrian internal security service. He entered the ante room and told the secretary to ask His Highness whether he may see him due to an urgent matter. He was sure that His Highness Nizar Faras would accept him without delay, for His Highness wished to be updated about the interrogation's results of the caught spy.

The secretary turned to His Highness through the intercom, and the answer was positive and was heard loud and clear in the narrow space of the small ante room. Abdul Karim went over to the door opened it up and entered to his boss spacious office.

'Do sit down Abdul; I understand that the interrogation is over?'

'Yes sir and the results are very encouraging.'

'She's a Rifa'yee so how can you define the results as encouraging?'

'I know sir and may I remind you sir that she was abducted yesterday in Beirut without the knowledge of her American operator after he took her to the Lebanese Capital.' Abdul Karim made a short pause afraid he might have offended his boss. 'With Your Highness permission I wish to add some more reasons.'

'Go ahead Abdul I'm listening.'

'She wasn't trained yet sir; she's supposed to pass a training period of eighteen months in Beirut, and she'll beguile the American and serve us as a double agent.'

'What about the relative of her ex fiancé that spotted her in Beirut, he might spread the rumor?'

'We'll thank him effusively for his efforts and tell him that she isn't his brother's ex fiancée she just looks like her, and that she's clean and was released.'

'Something should be done to her features, not us of course but the American will surely take care of it. What's his name and what do we know about him by the way?'

That's why this wise man was chosen to be the organization's head, Abdul Karim realized with sudden insight, worried by his own carelessness in this certain case.

'It was a very mild preliminary interrogation sir. We'd to persuade her that she's safe with us, but while preparing her for her mission we'll know all the needed details for handling her sir.'

'You've my permission to employ her Abdul, but do it fast and meticulously. I want to know who the American is, and who's the man who introduced her to the American.'

We'll do our best sir, but it's a difficult task sir; I mean to find out the details of the Libyan that passed her over to the American. She knows just his first name, and she never had a chance to check his papers so naïve she is. She was studying five days a week sir at the LSE in London at that time, and during the weekends he took her to the country. He never told her anything about his past, family or how he could afford the high standard of living that he enjoys.'

'The Libyan details' aren't exactly our problem but we'll have to inform our colleagues at the Idarat al Amn (the external intelligence agency) the details that we've on these two subject matters, the Libyan and the American; they could be Mossad agents, and we'll have to do our best to bump off the Libyan.' His Highness coughed slightly. 'So I expect you Abdul to pump out of her all the details that she knows and remembers of her first lover, and with the American you'll have to deal very carefully.'

'I and my department's personnel will do our best sir.'

'I'm glad to hear it Abdul and I do rely on your men and your efforts, a cigarette?'

'Thank you very much sir!' Abdul Karim hastened to thank his boss for the unexpected gesture of trust his boss endowed him with, and pulled a cigarette out of the pack in his boss extended hand. He pulled out his gold lighter and bending forward lighted his boss cigarette, and then his own.

They smoked a few seconds in silence, and His Highness had a few more words to add.

'Although that episode seems as if to ensure that our country is clean of Mossad agents, we must be very cautious; for this case could be a diversion to keep us busy, while our enemies will sneak their agents into our country... So you'll have to deal with this Rifa'yee case all by yourself Abdul, and send all your men all over our beloved Capital in a state of alert.'

Abdul Karim nodded his head obediently, and crushed his cigarette butt in the ashtray

'You may go now Abdul with Allah's blessings.'

Abdul Karim thanked his boss again with a bowed head and asked out of politeness his permission to leave.

He went straight to his office, and entered it without paying attention to his secretary that stood up and greeted him humbly with a bowed head; in his office he went over to his desk and opened up the left upper drawer in it. He took out a pair of keys, it were the keys to a hideout apartment in Tal Kurdi Street at the Adra district. He phoned Rashid to meet him immediately in his office, as he was short of time. He had to prepare Amina in no more than one hour, and drive her back to Beirut.

Rashid reached his office right away, and Abdul Karim instructed him while Rashid was standing and ready to leave. to prepare a patrolling plan that would cover every district of the city; and then to summon all the department's personnel all those who were available, and divide them into groups; a task that would surely take several hours, while he will return at the late afternoon hours or at the evening to check the plan his deputy will prepare and to brief his men.

'I want you to work on that plan, and afterwards to summon every one of our men at the big convention hall downstairs no matter what they're doing, is everything clear Rashid?'

'Yes sir and you can rely on me sir.'

'Fine I'll be back at about six pm plus minus and I expect to meet all my men under your supervision. You may go now Rashid.'

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