

Christian vs Muslim

The powerful light of flashlights cut through the darkness of the tunnel, illuminating the gloomy walls of the abandoned mine. A group of young men walked forward, unhurriedly but confidently. They chatted merrily, their cheerful voices echoing deep into the tunnel, breaking the silence that reigned there.

- How much further is it, Said? - Bill asked loudly.

- Just be patient, we are almost there. - Said answered him a little irritably.

Bill smiled, amused by Said's Arabic accent. Bill was impatient, for he was on the verge of a great discovery. Who would have thought that he, an ordinary American college student who had just decided to spend a holiday in Austria with his friends, could discover something worthwhile? However, he was very lucky that his Austrian friend Jacob was also interested in archaeology. In fact, it was through this passion that they had met. Bill remembered for a moment how fiercely they had fought with Jacob at a history forum, discussing the technology of building Egyptian pyramids. Then, in the heat of heated discussion, Bill had called Jacob an "idiot". Now, two years later, this same "idiot" invites Bill and his friends to visit him. Life is unpredictable. Bill was going to Europe to have fun, but life gave him an extraordinary chance, a chance to write his name in history, and Bill was not going to miss it. Yesterday he was walking around town with his friends, fooling around and eating delicious Austrian sausages, and today he is wandering through the tangled, dark passages of an abandoned iron ore mine. All thanks to Jacob. Jacob was a tall, thin, pale young man, with large facial features, a piercing gaze, and blond hair that stuck carelessly out of his head like straw. Bill could still see his pale face, his eyes glistening with excitement, as Jacob tried to explain to Bill in a broken, shaky voice how lucky they were. At first, Bill could not understand what Jacob was saying, but when Jacob calmed down a bit, the situation became clearer. Jacob told him that yesterday morning he had been approached by an Arab who periodically mowed the lawn in their yard. The Arab's name was Said and he was a refugee from Syria. Said realized that Jacob was into archaeology after seeing a dinosaur statue that Jacob had purchased on Amazon. Said offered Jacob a deal. The Arab claimed to have discovered ancient rock paintings near the city and was willing to take Jacob there for five thousand euros. Jacob was skeptical at first. It seemed unreal that there could be an undiscovered archaeological treasure right under their

noses. But Said showed him some photos of drawings made at the site, and Jacob was encouraged. These photos didn't look like photomontage. It was obvious that they had been taken with a not-so-good smartphone camera; the drawings themselves didn't stand out against the general background. It didn't feel like they had been cut out of other photos. Jacob asked Said to forward the photos to him and wait an hour for him to verify their authenticity. Jacob sent the photos to a photographer friend of his and received an unequivocal answer: the photos were authentic. Jacob started looking for similar cave paintings on the Internet and almost immediately came across drawings in the caves of Cantabria (Spain), about thirty thousand years old. Jacob's lips began to tremble. No one had ever made such a valuable find in Austria before. Of course, Jacob has no instruments to determine the age of the drawings, but this can be done by other scientists. The main thing now is to make sure that these drawings really exist. It was hard for Jacob to gather his thoughts, he was curious, but he had to think about the next plan of action. Jacob liked to plan; he knew the value of small things. First, the question of money had to be solved. Jacob didn't have half the amount of money he needed. He didn't like to borrow money, and he doubted that anyone would give him such a large sum. That is when he thought of Bill. He is a normal guy, he can be trusted. If he is traveling, he has money. Of course, Jacob didn't want to share the glory, but had no other options. Besides, there is a very big advantage of traveling together - it is safety. Jacob was quite suspicious, so he was afraid of all the Arabs, and he didn't want to be alone with Said. Jacob was in full serious fear for his life. He suggested to Bill that they share the expenses, and Bill agreed. However, Bill insisted that his friend Martha go with them. Martha and Bill had been friends since high school. Martha was a short blonde girl with big green eyes. She could hardly be described as a beauty, but her charming smile, combined with her lively, energetic gaze, gave her a special appeal. She was a cheerful, inquisitive and active girl, always ready for adventure. She was easy going and attended almost every significant event in her town. She had many friends, but Bill was always on her special account. Many of their acquaintances said that Martha and Bill would make a great couple. Bill sometimes thought so himself, but they were only friends. They were like brother and sister. Martha had not doubted for a second when Bill had asked her to go to Europe. And he had no doubt that she would go with them to look for the cave paintings, even though she knew nothing about archaeology and genuinely wondered why anyone would be interested in old drawings. But for her to miss out on such an adventure!

Never in her life! Jacob liked Martha, so he didn't want to take her with them. Unlike Bill, Jacob was not so careless and realized how risky their trip could be. Firstly, travelling through unexplored dark caves could easily lead to injury, and secondly, there was no telling what Said might have in mind. Jacob did not want to put Martha in danger, but he gave in to Bill because finding the precious drawings was more important to him. Another boy, Tom, had come with Bill, but no one had even offered to take him on this trip. Tom, like many boys his age, was obsessed with sex and initially saw the trip to Europe as an opportunity to meet a European girl. He quickly met an Austrian girl and spent most of his time with her. In the rare hours that Jacob and Bill saw Tom, he bragged about the uninteresting details of his European affair. Jacob was annoyed with Tom. So, the composition of the expedition was determined. The money issue remained to be resolved. Jacob, with a broken heart, pulled out of the stash of two thousand euros, which he had set aside for a trip to the ancient and mysterious Machu Picchu. Bill begged two thousand from his parents. Martha had another thousand. Unexpectedly for Jacob, the money was found quickly enough and the next day they were ready to go. Jacob arranged to meet Said in the morning and began to prepare for the journey. Jacob looked at a map of the area on the internet and roughly understood the location of the coveted drawings. The information he had found on the internet about the place made him nervous, but in this case, he was willing to take the risk.

Bill, on the other hand, was not worried about anything. In his sweet dreams, he imagined how he would bask in the bright rays of glory. He would be shown on television; the whole world would know about him, scientists would talk about his extraordinary discovery. He will be invited to famous TV shows in the United States. He will meet celebrities. Lily, the girl who didn't want to date him in high school, will bite her elbows. She will call him, but he will answer her arrogantly and coldly that she has missed her chance. Moreover, his current girlfriend, Susan, his beautiful Susan, will be proud of him. For a minute, Bill was even upset that she hadn't gone to Austria with him, but had chosen to return home to Minnesota. It would have been such a wonderful, exciting moment for their couple. This camping trip could have become a family legend that they wouldn't be ashamed to tell their children. It didn't work out. Nevertheless, Bill was not upset, his imagination, like a raging river, carried him on. Before going to bed, he spent a long time thinking up his solemn speech at the press conference dedicated to his discovery. He was thinking seriously about whom he should mention in his

speech. Bill wondered, if Trump invited him to the White House reception, should he go? Or should he defiantly refuse?

Bill fell asleep late at night with a smile on his face.

Bill stared into the darkness but saw nothing. Said's broad back blocked his view. "Strange... We're being led to glory by a man I know next to nothing about." - Bill thought. All Bill knew about Said was that he was a refugee from Syria and had a daughter. "I should have known more about him before I trusted him with my life." - Bill continued to think. "How did Said end up in these deserted places? Why didn't he call the local media himself and claim the discovery? What's really on his mind?" - Worried thoughts swirled in Bill's head. Bill quickly dismissed them, but the fear remained. "Said must have been wandering around these parts for nothing. When he stumbled upon the rock art, he realized there was money to be made. He doesn't care about discovery or fame. All he wants is money. - Bill decided. This conclusion calmed him a little. Bill was anxious to talk, not to be alone with his troubled thoughts.

- Martha, how is the mood? - Bill shouted.

- Great! - He heard Martha's ringing voice somewhere behind him.

Bill knew Martha well and heard a note of concern in his friend's voice. "I wonder what she's worried about. Maybe she has some kind of premonition?" - Bill wondered. Martha's intuition was well developed. But it was uncomfortable to ask, for Said knew English quite well and might take offence. "Bloody decency! Why do you always have to think about other people's feelings? You can't even have a normal conversation!" - Bill was indignant in the back of his mind.

- Have you prepared a speech for the press conference? - Bill asked cheekily.

- I won't forget to thank you, don't worry! - Martha replied cheerfully.

Bill smiled. She always had a way of cheering him up.

- I'm going to say a few words about you. Maybe some good ones. - Bill laughed. - Jacob, why don't you say something?

- We'll make speeches when we see the drawings. - Jacob replied coldly.

- Jacob, don't be so serious! Everything will be fine! - Martha cried.

- By the way, Jacob, knowing your nerdiness, you must have researched information about this place. Why was this mine closed? Is Austria so rich in resources that it would be a waste of iron ore deposits? - Bill intervened.

- I was hoping you wouldn't ask... Of course, I found the information on the internet and it doesn't make me happy. This iron ore mine was closed because of high seismic activity. To put it in human terms, there are a lot of earthquakes here. - Jacob sighed heavily and continued.

- After one of the earthquakes, several workers died....

- And we only hear about it now?! - Bill interrupted him impatiently.

- Tell me honestly, if you had known about this before the journey, would you have gone?

- Jacob asked.

- Of course I would. - Bill replied without hesitation. - But you should have warned us! You should have!

- And what would have changed?

- Have you thought about Martha, wiseass?

- Who told you not to take her with us? I asked you, but you wouldn't listen!

- Guys, don't fight! I'd still go with you. You can't get rid of me that easily. - Martha intervened. - And are earthquakes so frequent here, Jacob?

- The last one was six months ago.

- Every six months? Is it worth the trouble? - Martha laughed.

- This way. - Said interrupted their conversation.

He pointed to a narrow crack in the wall. It was clear from the way Said squeezed into it that there wasn't much room.

- You stay here. I'll take a look around. - Bill ordered.

- Yes, my commander!" Martha smiled.

Bill followed Said. After walking a few meters along the cold stone walls, Bill found himself in a large, dark room.

- You can go! - Bill shouted.

Suddenly there was a deafening thud. Bill felt a sharp blow to his shoulder and fell. A column of dust rose. Rocks began to fall on Bill. He covered his head with his hands and clenched his teeth. The rocks hit his body painfully and after a few seconds, Bill blacked out.

When he came to, Bill felt pain in his back and legs. It was hard to breathe because he was covered in a pile of rocks. Luckily for Bill, the rocks were small and he was able to shake them off. Bill got to his feet and shook himself free. He was relieved to find that he only had bruises and scrapes. There were no serious injuries.

Suddenly a terrible thought pierced his consciousness like a bullet.

- Martha, Jacob, are you alive? - he cried, his voice shaking with excitement.

- I am alive. - he heard Said's harsh voice.

- Martha! Jacob! - Bill kept shouting, ignoring Said. - Damn it, answer me!

But there was dead silence in the mine. Only Said's soft breathing could be heard.

- Martha! - Bill screamed with all his strength. He poured all his pain, fear, despair and hope into the cry.

But no one answered. Bill froze, believing that in a moment he would hear Martha's sonorous, native voice. Seconds passed, but nothing came. The silence became unbearable.

- Please, answer me! - Bill uttered doomedly.

- No one will answer you. Even if they're alive, there are several meters of rock between us." Said replied.

- What do you mean, if?! They're alive! There's no other way! - Bill was outraged. Tears came to his eyes. He realized that his friends had little chance of survival. He understood, but he refused to believe.

- Allah's will be done. - Said replied nonchalantly.

- Damn it! Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit!" Bill shouted, kicking the wall in frustration.

He bitterly regretted taking Martha on this dangerous journey, but there was nothing he could do about it.

- Damn it! - Bill shouted angrily. He felt desperation coursing through his veins. His lips trembled and he would have burst into tears at any moment. But a thought suddenly popped into his head: "What if my friends are under the rubble and need help? I need to get out of this damn hole as soon as possible so they have a chance of being rescued! The thought made him pull himself together.

Bill fumbled in his pockets and pulled out his smartphone. He pressed a button and the screen lit up. Bill looked hopefully at the network status. But there was no network. Which meant there was no way to contact the outside world and ask for help. Bill fumbled under his feet and found his backpack. He opened it and pulled out two chocolate bars, a bottle of water and a jumper. Next to the backpack was a flashlight. Bill picked it up and switched it on. Surprisingly, the flashlight worked and a bright beam of light pierced the darkness. The beam moved quickly along the walls, hoping to find a way out. But there was no way out. Bill and Said found themselves walled up in a small room, about eight meters long and four meters wide. Stones of various sizes littered the ground. The confined space and the stress he had experienced were taking their toll on Bill, and he felt a slight uneasiness. It was particularly difficult for him psychologically - he tried to push the thought of his friends' death away, but it kept coming back. Rather than be alone with his thoughts, Bill decided to talk to Said.

- Said, have you checked the cell phone network? Do you have a signal?

- No signal. - Said replied dryly.

- Me too. Did your flashlight survive?

- No. It crashed.

- I have some chocolate bars and a liter of water. I'll split it with you. That should last us a day or two. I hope that somebody will find us in that time.

- All we can do is wait and trust in the will of Allah. - Said mentioned doomedly.

- We won't last long here.

- I know that... By the way, we are on the spot. Just like I promised. - Said announced.

- What do you mean? - Bill wondered.

- The drawings..." Said replied briefly, illuminating the wall with his smartphone. Bill looked at the wall and saw the cave paintings. They showed hunters attacking animals; a man in strange robes carrying a staff with his hands raised to the sky (apparently he was a shaman); women with children. Considering how old these drawings were, they were very well preserved and quite skillfully done. Surely, this was an important scientific discovery for the world. But Bill felt no joy. The price he had paid for this discovery was too high. There was a void in his soul. The great scientific discovery, the coveted prize, the guiding star to world fame - now all this had lost its meaning to him. For Bill, the old paintings were now just drawings on the wall. Bill took a few dozen photographs. Then he crouched down and covered his face with his hands. He felt despair enveloping his mind like a fog. The picture of Martha lying in a pool of blood under a pile of stones came to mind. He felt the pain. If Bill had had a knife in his hand at that moment, he would have plunged it into his heart without a second thought. "What have I done?" - Bill thought bitterly. He wanted to lie down on the ground and fall headlong into an abyss of heavy thoughts and misery. But then he remembered his girlfriend, his parents, and his friends. "No, we must get out! We must survive, if only for their sake!" - Bill was determined. In order to somehow withstand the crazy psychological pressure, Bill decided that it was necessary to communicate with Said. They had to stick together to survive.

- Said, how did you find this place? - Bill began the conversation.

- I wandered around looking for useful things. Europeans often throw good things away. Clothes, shoes, tools and even working machinery are all quite realistic to find in the neighborhoods around the city. I can't afford to buy these things. I went to this abandoned mine, but I couldn't find anything of value. Then I saw the drawings and remembered Jacob. I hoped I could make some money... You know the rest...

Bill was shaken by this simple confession. Of course, it wasn't Said's fault that he wanted to make money, but Bill still held him responsible for what had happened. Although Bill also felt his own guilt and that made him even angrier. Bill could hardly resist making a sarcastic comment like, "How's that for making money on the blood of my friends?"

- You have a job, as far as I know... Still not enough money?

- I live with my wife and child in a foreign country. I am not welcome here. We are strangers and that has been made clear to us. People don't know me, but they already hate me, and at any moment, they could throw me out of the country like a piece of rubbish. Do you think I have enough money?

- Then why did you come here? - Bill couldn't resist asking.

- And why did the Europeans bomb my country? - Said parried harshly.

- You yourself asked the Europeans and Americans for help! - Bill was indignant.

- I didn't ask. Nor my parents, who died in the bombing. Nor the thousands of innocent people who are no longer alive because of your help! So tell me, who asked you?! - Said shouted.

- Our boys are also dying so that peace can be restored to your country! - Bill objected.

- Then let them go and no one will die! - said the Syrian angrily.

Bill decided to change the subject a bit, as he didn't want to start a conflict.

- Said, but why Europe? There are plenty of rich Arab countries much closer to Syria. They practice Islam there and the culture is close to you...

- The Europeans have promised to help us. There are many Arabs living in the European Union, including those from Syria. And they live quite well. We have all heard about European values, European humanism and compassion. So, we came to Europe in search of a new home. We hoped for hospitality, but in reality, we received indifference and discontent. It turned out that European values are only for Europeans.

- Nobody likes uninvited guests... It is also not easy to integrate them into the economy. Some don't want to work, to learn the language... And you need a lot of money for refugees....

- Do you know refugees? Have you been to a refugee camp? Have you talked to them? - Said asked angrily.

- Uh, no.

- Then how can you judge us? You only know what you've seen on TV. You've only heard one side of the story. Do you think it's every Arab's dream to live in camps like cattle in pens, living on little handouts, just enough to eat? I'm going to surprise you - it's not like that. We also want to live a decent life, to develop, to rest, to travel. As you can hear, I speak English quite well and have started to learn German. And I can hardly count how many times I have tried to get a permanent job. Employers fear refugees like fire! They see us as criminals and don't even want to employ us on minimum wage.

- But you have to admit that it is your fault that you are seen as potential criminals. It is common for refugees to break the law...

- I do not approve of crimes, and Allah does not approve of them. But they do not happen as often as they are reported in the media. For example, you may hear on television that a Muslim has stolen something, but in our religion, this is a very serious crime. The Koran says: "Cut off the hands of the thief and the hands of the thief's wife in retaliation for what they've done. This is the punishment of Allah, for Allah is the Mighty, the Wise." I don't think an orthodox Muslim would agree to steal...

- In Christianity, "Thou shalt not steal." - is one of the Ten Commandments. It's also considered a mortal sin. You see, Said, our religions aren't so different...

- Christians often forget their commandments when it benefits them...

- Do all Muslims strictly follow everything in the Koran?

- A Muslim is "one who submits to God (Allah)". If a Muslim has deviated from the faith, I cannot consider him a Muslim.

- Everyone can doubt, stumble and lose faith...

- It is a very comfortable position... Personally, I have never lost faith, even in the most difficult times. Even now, I believe that Allah will save me from today's situation.

- Faith is good, but let's find a way out of here..." Bill replied, tired of talking about faith.

- I'll have another look around. Maybe we missed something... Give me the flashlight. - Said agreed.

He stood up, squared his shoulders and, taking the flashlight from Bill, began to illuminate the walls. The beam of light, which had become a ray of hope for them, crept slowly, meter by meter, along the walls... The cave paintings, those simple messages from the distant past, came to life for a moment under the bright beam of light and then faded back into darkness. There was something mesmerizing about the sight and for a few seconds Bill forgot where he was, watching in fascination as the darkness consumed the ancient hunters, shamans, women and children... "One day the darkness will consume all of us..." - flashed through Bill's mind. Fear gripped him. He began to think about his friends again, "In what condition are they now? Are they alive?" Bill went to extremes, mentally saying goodbye to his friends, or trying to convince himself that they were all right. And the lantern light was still slowly creeping along the walls, leaving less and less hope. When Said finished looking around the place of their unwilling captivity, they both realized that there was no way out. Said switched off the flashlight and they fell into a heavy darkness, each alone with their own thoughts. Fearful thoughts began to swarm in Bill's head like a swarm of wasps, each wanting to sting him. He tried to distract himself with thoughts of home, of his parents, but to no avail. The silence began to weigh on Bill. When it became unbearable, Bill decided to turn to Said again.

- Said, you told us you have a child... A girl... What is her name? - Bill decided not to bring up sensitive subjects for a while, so as not to upset Said.

- Her name is Amina..." Said's voice came alive. It was understandable that he was interested in the subject of his child.

- How old is she?

- She is five.

- What's her hobby?

- She loves to sing. She has a beautiful voice. But even more, she loves to draw. Allah has given her the ability to draw well. She is especially realistic with landscapes, animals and bright flowers... Sometimes she draws something for me..." Said's voice was warm and tender when he spoke of his daughter. It was obvious that he loved her very much.

- She probably gives you concerts in the evening, doesn't she? - Bill asked with a smile.

- It happens..." Said replied. His tone softened, and although Bill couldn't see his face, he was sure that Said was smiling too. The atmosphere of the conversation became more relaxed, more trusting. Bill began to think that he had found his way to Said.

- How's she doing in kindergarten? Does she have any friends? - Bill continued to ask.

- She doesn't go to kindergarten. But she has a few friends among the other refugees...

- Why don't you put her in kindergarten? You need to socialize the child... And by interacting with local children, she will learn the language faster....

- We can't put her there...

- Why? - Bill was genuinely surprised.

- Because they won't take her! Because we are illeg... They won't take her, that's all! - Said exclaimed emotionally.

Said didn't say the whole word but Bill understood exactly what he was talking about. "Illegals! That's what he wanted to say!" - Bill thought. Bill felt a little uneasy about what he had heard. He had learned more than he wanted to know, and he didn't know what to do about it.

They both fell silent. Bill thought about how to use the information he had received. Said wondered if Bill had guessed what was meant. Said was angry with himself for saying too much. The silence lasted long enough. Meanwhile, Bill scrolled through the pictures on his smartphone. The faces of his family and friends, happy, cheerful, friendly, appeared on the phone and then disappeared. Bill thought that looking at photos of people close to him would distract him from the current situation and immerse him in happy memories of time spent with them. But this activity had the opposite effect: the longer he looked at the pictures, the more depressed he became. The thought that he would never see these people again tore at his soul like hyenas tearing at the body of an exhausted victim. Suddenly he heard someone muttering in a language he didn't recognize beside him. In the dim light of his smartphone, he saw the silhouette of Said standing on all fours. Said was praying. Although time was lost in their confinement, Bill could tell from the dial on the smartphone that it was evening. Said was performing the evening namaz. Bill watched Said in fascination. The proceedings calmed Bill a little. He thought that since Said was praying, he was not losing faith. Bill felt a surge of

strength and an inexplicable confidence that he would be able to get out. There was something special about the way a man could keep hope alive in the most difficult of times. When Said finished praying, Bill felt better too, as if they were praying together. Bill had been to church a lot as a child and teenager. Although he knew the words to some of the prayers and would sometimes say them when he needed to, he had never really prayed. It was only now, in the dark, listening to the incomprehensible mumbling of a man he didn't know, that Bill finally realized why people believed in God.

Bill's smartphone battery was dying fast, so he put it on low power mode and decided to get some sleep to pass the time. He lay down on the ground, tucked his rucksack under his head and closed his eyes. A slight hunger and heavy thoughts kept Bill awake for a long time, but still the fatigue of the day's experiences took its toll and he sank into the abyss of dreams.

Bill awoke some time later. He felt as if he hadn't slept at all. Knowing his body, Bill realized that only a few hours had passed. He fumbled for his smartphone and looked at the time - it was three in the morning. He could still be asleep, but sleep had left him. Bill tossed and turned for a while, but he couldn't get back to sleep. Heavy thoughts, like storm clouds, were gathering in Bill's head, and they did not bode well. To distract himself, but not to drain his smartphone's battery, Bill took a lighter from his rucksack, turned it on for ten or fifteen seconds, looked at the flame, and then turned it off. And he did this many times. The fire hypnotized him, burning away his anxiety and transporting him back to those distant times when his ancestors, depicted on the walls of this room, also sat around the fire in the cave and stared mesmerized.

- Look at the flames! - Said's excited voice snapped Bill out of his daze.

- What do you mean? - Bill replied. He looked but didn't see anything special.

- The flames are deflecting heavily... There is a strong air current coming from somewhere! - Said exclaimed.

Then Bill understood what Said was talking about. The flame was indeed flickering and trembling, and not because of Bill's breathing. But Bill had just woken up and could not think quickly what it all meant.

- Yes, yes... I can see that... - Bill muttered.

- Give me the lighter! - Said shouted impatiently.

Bill handed Said the lighter. Said started to flick the lighter around. He tried to take his time, but his hands were shaking a little with excitement. Bill began to realize what Said was doing. If there is a strong airflow coming from somewhere, you have to find out where. It could be a small crack, or it could be an opening big enough to fit through... All that remained was to find out what it really was. It seemed an eternity to Bill before the wandering light of the lighter finally stopped.

- Here! - Said informed solemnly. - Light this place!

Bill shone the light where Said was standing. At first glance, there wasn't much there. It was just a wall with a massive boulder at the base.

- What is there, Said? - Bill exclaimed unintelligibly.

- There's a crack behind the boulder! The air is coming from there! - Said replied confidently.

Bill went over to Said. He looked behind the boulder and, to his surprise, saw a really big gap. It was hard to tell its exact size because the boulder covered part of it. However, from what they could see, it must have been big enough to fit through.

- We've got to move this boulder! - Bill felt an immediate surge of energy and enthusiasm.

Bill and Said tried pushing the boulder from one side, but it wouldn't budge. Bill tried putting his back against it and pushing with his feet, but it wouldn't budge.

- Let's try pushing it from different sides. - Said suggested.

Bill pushed from one side and Said from the other, and the boulder moved. A little, maybe a few centimeters, but it was enough for Bill and Said to perk up and start pushing with renewed energy. They pushed in bursts, moving slowly but surely towards their goal. Bill and Said only stopped when they reached it. Both were breathing heavily, but they were pleased with themselves. A passage had opened before them, a small one, no more than a meter in diameter, but they could fit through it.

- Let's see what's in there! - Bill shouted impatiently. He got down on all fours and looked inside. - Said, look in there!

- There's something glowing in there! - Said rejoiced.

A faint light could be seen at the other end of the passage.

- I'm going to find out what's in there! - Bill said excitedly and crawled down the passage. Shoveling small stones and dust with his hands, Bill moved steadily towards the exit. Driven by his own curiosity, he reached the other end of the passage quickly enough. A vast space appeared before his eyes, with a faint moonlight streaming through the center. Bill stood up, shook off his clothes and switched on his flashlight. Examining the new space, Bill saw that it was slightly larger than the one he had crawled out of, and that it was full of stones and rock fragments... But most importantly, from the top, at a height of just under four meters, in the middle of this space, there was a quite big crevice, their way to freedom! Bill examined the crevice - it was wide enough, there were protrusions and pieces of tree roots... "We can get through there!" - Bill rejoiced.

- Allah has answered my prayers! - Bill heard Said's excited voice behind him.

- The crevasse is wide enough... We can get out! - Bill confirmed.

- Have you checked for network coverage?

Out of breath, Bill looked at his smartphone, but there was no network.

- Unfortunately, there is no network.

- Yes, I see. - Said was disappointed.

- If one of us stood on the other's shoulders, he could grab the ledge and pull himself up...
- Bill suggested.

- And then grab that root... - Said continued Bill's thought, shining his flashlight on the right spot in the crevice, - It's thick enough... It should hold.

- I agree. In order not to fall down, I suggest we make a platform out of the large stones that are here.

Said nodded, and they began hauling stones together, choosing larger and flatter ones. It wasn't half an hour before they had a solid, stable platform, up to forty centimeters high.

- It's done! We can start! - Said declared, breathing heavily.

- Said, let's take a break. Let's get our strength back. Get something to eat. We're in for a rough ride. - Bill objected.

- Okay. - Said agreed.

Bill returned to the previous room and got his backpack. He took out two chocolate bars and held one of them out to Said. Said nodded and took it. They ate and drank the water that was also in Bill's backpack. There wasn't much water left, but that didn't matter anymore, because the freedom they had been waiting for was close at hand. Bill set the bottle down beside him and looked at Said. He might never see the man again. The stranger who had become his partner in their dangerous adventure, in which their lives were at stake. He wanted to have a frank conversation with Said before they parted ways.

- You know, Said, today's event has had a big impact on me... I'm really thinking about my future. Do you know what I want to do? - Bill looked at Said questioningly, but got no answer and continued. - If... When we get out of here, I'd like to set up a foundation to help young archaeologists. Grants, scholarships, research support... Our discovery, combined with the story that my friends and I have been involved in, should attract a lot of attention from both the scientific community and the international media. This will help me raise funds for my foundation. And if my friends were to die, I would set up a foundation in their honor. To keep their memory alive, to keep people remembering them..." Bill's voice trembled, tears welled up in his eyes and he could barely hold back the tears. He hoped to hear words of encouragement from Said, but Said was silent. After a short pause, Bill pulled himself together and asked Said what he planned to do after their rescue.

- The money Jacob gave me would be enough to get the documents I need to work officially. I used to work as an electric forklift driver in Syria. It is an interesting, important and sought-after specialty. I want to do it here in Austria. I will also learn German because my family and I want to stay here for a long time...

"Said is pragmatic. He has no dreams. There are only goals... Maybe that's the way to live: set small goals, achieve them and move forward slowly, step by step. Don't look far ahead... Don't dream of something grandiose... Because a dream, like a distant guiding star, shines somewhere out there, far beyond the horizon, beckoning you. You go towards it, you strive, you hurry, without noticing what is going on around you. You look up and do not see

the abyss that has opened up on your way. You could easily avoid it if you were paying attention, but you are too caught up in your dream. Where does that lead you? It could lead to you reaching great heights and one day fulfilling your dream. Or it could lead you to fall into the abyss, to find yourself in such a "pit", in such a difficult situation, that you will not be able to get out. "What's in store for you?" - It's impossible to predict. "Is the dream worth the risk?" - That is up to you. I followed my dream and found myself alone, without people close to me, in a difficult situation where my life is at risk. But things could have been very different! Someone will call it 'fate', someone - my stupidity, but it will change nothing..." - Bill thought.

- It's a good profession. You can support your family and give them stability... But we've had our rest. It's time to get out of here! Get under the crevice; I'll climb on your shoulders and...

- Wait!" Said interrupted him sharply. - Why do I have to stand under the crevice? You stand and I'll climb on you.

- Well, first of all, Said, you're much bigger and heavier than I am, so it'll be easier for you to hold me. Secondly, the opening isn't that big and you probably won't fit through it,' Bill replied irritably.

- I disagree. The opening is wide enough. And I'm a lot stronger than you. I have strong arms, so I'm sure I can pull myself up and get to the top. You don't have the strength... You'll fall down, break something, and then you won't be able to hold me or climb up..." Said retorted.

- Said, well, it'll be a lot easier for me to do a chin-up than to hold you down. How much do you weigh? Definitely over 200 pounds! We're going to fall in together! That's what's going to happen!

- I weigh ninety kilos... You won't have to hold me for long. You just sit on the squat, I give you my hands, you stand up slowly and when I tell you to, you let go of my hands.

- Why don't you do it yourself?! - Bill shouted.

- I've explained it to you already! Didn't you understand the first time?! Or perhaps you have a plan for me. Maybe you want to get out and turn me in to the migration service?! You realize I'm illegal, don't you?! You blame me for the death of your friends and you want

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