



**THE
RAINBOW
MAN**

ETHAN FORESTER

Prologue.

He was watching TV with Lucy when the news came on and told him that life as he knew it was about to end.

Somewhere in Yemen.

The words were spoken slowly, carefully, measured. It was an educated voice. It had probably lived in London somewhere, he thought. Ax knew the man had travelled. He knew that the man was unimaginably rich. "They" knew he had been born in Saudi Arabia, but nobody knew where he really called home these days. They had been searching for him for years, so they said.

"We are going to hurt you now. We are not going to ask any questions. The questions will come later." The voice was soft, almost gentle. "We are going to hurt you because we can. Eventually we are going to kill you, but first we are going to torture you. You are going to be our little Jesus and you are going to beg for crucifixion. For we shall rain upon you the suffering of all our children, that you may be cleansed in the fire of repentance. "

"Your own people gave you up, you know? How do you think we found her, and then you, so quickly? Don't you know that they have plans? And you, a mere soldier are just another tiny cog in a vast wheel you cannot even see far less comprehend. Their plans are much, much bigger than you. They are grand plans. They, however, are arrogant. As you are. Their plans are nothing compared to ours. No matter. Soon it will soon be time to begin your journey to salvation.

Allahu Akbar."

Beginnings.

Ax turned right and walked towards the town centre. He would go somewhere for a beer. Maybe two. He liked walking but he was pissed off with Charlie. He was pissed off with his life. He had nobody to talk to. Maybe he should call Nav. The Navaho. He knew how to listen. Jade was dead. Dead. Who could he tell? No one. He had no one.

Nav would know. There was nobody else. So, he decided to walk. Glasgow at night. Dangerous. Even for him. Even for Nav. But he felt invincible this evening. Then, he heard a van pull up behind him and as he turned he heard another van pull over in front of him. Trouble. This he knew. He made his muscles hard, prepared. One guy got out. He was wearing a balaclava, was dressed in black jeans and a black bomber-jacket. He was also pointing a gun at Ax. Ax stopped then turned and looked behind him. It was the same thing. Balaclava, jeans, bomber-jacket and gun.

Ax watched the first guy walk towards him and knew, he fucking knew he was in trouble. It was in the way the guy moved. Easy. Confident. Like a cat. He gently waved the gun, pointing to the van. "In the van," was all he said. Ax swore to himself, turned and walked towards the van. At the very last moment he turned and lashed out at the first guy with the gun. If he was going go down he would go down fighting. But the man was either expecting his move or was extremely fast. Ax found himself on his knees at the van door, holding his stomach and gasping for breath. At that moment he could smell the rain mixed with petrol on the pavement. "They said you might put up a fight," the man said. Then he sighed and smashed his gun down. Ax barely felt the gun smash into the back of his head before the world went dark and his face hit the pavement. He did not feel the boot in the back of his head.

When he came to he was tied to a chair in an empty room. He looked around. It looked like a garage except there were no oily rags and it did not smell of petrol. Ax laughed at himself. A man was sitting in a chair in front of him, the two goons from before were standing on either side.

"Do you know why you are here?" asked the seated man. It was a deep voice, the words spoken without haste. Ax tried to place the accent but failed. "You could have gotten away, that time," he said, "Of course, we would have taken you the next time."

"We wanted you to see how easy it is. We wanted you to see how easy it was for us. Now you can see. It was easy. We could have killed you."

Ax just looked. True enough. But, that was information. If they had wanted him dead he would be dead. He frowned and cocked his head to one side. "Let me go and I'll show you fucking easy," he said.

The man just looked and said nothing.

"What do you want?" asked Ax.

"Ah, what we want," said the man in the chair. He got up then and walked towards Ax. He stopped four feet away. "Do you wish to live?" he asked. Ax did not answer. It was a fucking stupid question. "You should be dead, you see," said the man. "And if you don't die soon you will be in prison, doing life, for killing Charlie's four goons."

So, this was Charlie's doing, thought Ax. Fuck. He should have killed the fucker when he had the chance.

"We can spare you all that." The man took a pair of black, leather looking gloves out of his pocket and put them on. Ax watched him push the leather tight between his fingers on both hands.

The man stopped then, took a step forward. Stopped, now three feet away from Ax and looked him directly in the eyes. "We are going to give you a choice, you see." English, thought Ax, definitely

English. "The choice is this. Either you join us, or you go to jail for life. Of course, we may have our fun with your first. He made fists with his black-leather-gloves.

Ax screwed up his face again. "Who the fuck are you," he asked. His voice held no fear. Rather, it was a menacing voice, deep and quiet.

"Ah," said the man. "Again, you are a fighter, we were told this. It is good. And you appear to be quite rational, too. This is also good. Who we are? Well, we are not the police, I'm sure you have worked that one out." The man smiled then. It was not a happy smile. It was the coldest smile Ax had seen. Completely without humour, he thought.

"We work for a, let us say security, company. People hire us to, do things. You will join the British Army. Go through basic training. Do some S.A.S training. When you are finished that we will take you and really train you. You will become good at things you do not even know exist. We have heard about you. You have never, and will never hear about us. We think you have skills we can use. You will be very well rewarded. Both financially and in terms of your own freedom. You get to live, for one thing. Still, the one thing you can never, ever do, is refuse to take the work we will offer you. You will, in every sense, belong to us. We have many tools. Tools for different jobs. You will become one of our tools, for one of our many jobs."

Again the man stopped talking and looked at Ax. Ax did not know what to think.

"You are out of your fucking mind" he said. It was half a question, half a statement.

"We never joke," said the man. The punch, that long awaited punch arrived. It was hard. Jesus, sweet jaysus it was hard. Side of the face, leather on skin. It hurt. Then, the voice again, "We are going to take you to a place. You will stay there one week. We will give you some training. You will see that we are serious. You will get an idea of who we are and what we do. It will hurt. If after that week you pass our tests we will keep you and your journey will continue. Well, your journey will begin. If you do not come up to scratch? Well, that is easy. We dump you back on the streets of Glasgow and pass a dossier to the police telling them everything they need to know about you. Your life will be over. And you can say goodbye to that little Chinese bitch once and for all. The one you saved? We will kill her first."

The next thing Ax felt was a black bag being put over his head. They pulled a chord tight around his neck. He heard the chair being unbolted from the floor, then felt himself, still in the chair, being carried. The chair was thrown into what he guessed was another van, the door shut, engine started. The vehicle started to move. He had no idea where they were going.

Of course, his mind went into overdrive. He was cuffed and blindfolded in the back of a cop-van. It must be a cop-van, he thought, otherwise he would be dead. Of course, maybe they were just taking him to a kill-house.

Later, much later, he felt the van slow down then stop. They opened the door and pulled him out. Took the chair off. Ax nearly fell to the floor. Two of them took him, half carried, half dragged him. He could feel them, one on each side. Into a police station. It was 30 miles from where they had picked him up but Ax did not know that. Nor did it matter. Ax tried to twist the handcuffs but they would not move. He had red welts on his wrists already but he could not see that. They marched him to a cell, took off his blindfold. "M4" said the duty sergeant. He looked like a large, hairy monkey, thought Ax, a large hairy monkey with crossed, hairy arms.

"Na, he's OK," said one of the cops, "M1 him."

"I said, M4," said the monkey.

So, they marched Ax to a cell. Took his clothes. Ax could see. So he did not resist. He watched everything, everyone. They left him for 30 minutes alone and naked in the cell before someone

opened the little hatch and threw his clothes back in. A voice told him to get dressed. The hatch slammed shut, the noise of it echoing back. Ax got dressed.

He knew they were watching him from the camera on the ceiling. He turned and looked at it, then said, very quietly: "Get someone in here, now." So softly spoken, so quietly, but with so much menace.

When he said that, they came.

They took him for an "interview" with a, what he guessed passed for a female. Her name was Valerie, she said with a false, fat smile. She was short and fat. Blond dyed hair gelled up into spikes. Thick, black glasses. Bright red lipstick over thin lips. Ax just looked at her, like she was some weird specimen, an unknown reptile. She started to ask questions. Monkey M4 man was there. Ax thought to himself. Go fuck yourselves. Valerie started. "Now, Ax, I am here to help you, I'm going to ask you a few questions," she said. Ax looked at her, hard and then asked her if she knew Zimbardo? No. Karl Jung? Who? She had no idea. Then who the fuck are you he asked, with your monkey in the corner. Ax looked at the large man standing with his arms folded and a half smile on his face. Ax smiled back. "You know?" he said, "I bet if there were no camera's here you would take a chance. It is good there are cameras. Because I would beat your stupid little monkey face into the ground, sunshine."

Monkey man smiled. He could wait. Written all over his face. Ax smiled back. He could wait longer.

"Valerie? Are you trained?"

"In what," she asked.

Ax leaned closer before saying, "In, fucking, anything?" He spaced the words, giving her stupid little head time to take in each word. He spoke very quietly, as before. It sounded just as menacing. Valerie looked down at her notebook, wrote, or pretended to write something. If she could even write, thought Ax. "Jesus, seriously, that really looks like you can write," he said smiling and leaning back in his chair.

She did not smile back. "OK, Axel, we are going to take you back to your cell for five minutes, then you will be released." She scraped her chair back and slammed the door on her way out.

What the fuck was going on?

"Idiots," thought Ax. A couple of baby monkeys came and led him handcuffed to his cell.

One hour later someone opened the hatch and threw in a blanket. The hatch was closed before the blanket landed on the floor.

Ax smiled his smile. Nobody knew him.

Ax woke up with a massive hangover. He was still in the chair, the bottle on his lap. He picked it up and thought about emptying it into his brain, then, smashing it on his face. Instead, he threw it and it smashed into a wall. Another day.

Abdul yawned and stretched. Took a huge swig of water. He drank mineral water from a plastic bottle. No way would he ever put that shit they let through the taps into the temple that was his body. Allahu Akbar.

When Ax was waking up three men were walking to the train. When Ax was thinking it was time, at last, to face his guilt and get sober, the three men were on their way to ruin his life for ever.

They got on the train.

Ax cracked three, organic eggs into a pan. Food for thought.

Abdul-Rahim Hussain.

Asim Khouri.

Nasir Al Din Assaf.

All had risen early in the morning, shaved their bodies and made preparations to meet their maker. Abdul-Rahim Hussain looked at the others. "By the time this is over we will be in paradise," he said. He taught maths in the local school. They had said goodbye to their families. For some it was more difficult than others. Nasir Al Din Assaf's wife did not understand why it had to be him. What was she to do, now? Nasir Al din Assaf told her to pray for him and that Allah would look after her. He would no longer work at the bakery down the street. No need to say goodbye to friends. Everyone knew what was about to happen.

They had been planning this for months, now. A short time. A safe time. Not enough time for leaks and weaknesses to arise. Not enough time for the English government to have to cover their tracks. Just enough time to make sure all the details were correct and just enough time to make sure nothing could go wrong. A private word from their Imam had informed them that now was the time. The time to strike back. The last Jihad was to begin and it would begin with them. Allahu Akbar!

Nasir Al Din Assaf worked for the English government, for MI6. They thought he was playing the Arabs. It was not so. He, Nasir Al Din Assaf, was playing them. He gave them information he knew they would already have. And today was his final day. The day they would know, and repent. They knew what he was going to do today, yet they would not stop it. They, too, wanted the carnage. They wanted all the world to hate Islam. They could not conceive of the word "backfire."

They all knew of Bakr Nadir. None had met him. All knew of his reputation, knew he had given the greatest sacrifice, his daughter of nine years old. Everyone talked about "The New Leader." They knew he was rich. They knew he was funding this jihad. They knew it was the start of something unlike anything that had been before. A great many were going to die. On both sides. But these men? They were not afraid to die, not afraid to meet Allah. Yet, still the men were scared. Who knew of death? They were being driven by faith and faith alone. None of them wanted to die. But none of them could say no. They knew they would die this day.

None of them knew of the drugs fed to suicide bombers to dull their wits.

Abdul-Rahim Hussain had said goodbye to his beautiful young wife three days ago. He was the oldest of the three at fifty-four years old and this made him the unspoken leader of the group. His wife was nineteen years old now, not thirteen any more. They had been married for six years. She was from the same village as he was and had been brought up a good Muslim despite having moved to this country of infidels aged only two years old. He had taught her the ways of the whores he had visited here in England and he could get hard just thinking about the young, hard body underneath all that black cloth. She had learned well and he was sure that other men were jealous of him and his success. Even if she remained, to this day, childless. Perhaps he had taught her too well. Still, he was proud of his good Muslim wife and her hard young body and what she now knew to do with it. He hardly had to beat her any more! She was truly beautiful and sometimes he wished other men could see her, just so they could know how lucky he was. Allah would forgive him for such unclean thoughts, he knew, after all, had she not been given to him by Allah?

As for his young wife, she was proud of her husband, who unlike many men, did not beat her often. She was proud of what he was doing and she was sure that she would be allowed to see him later, in heaven, with their three children Imran, Sana and Khatib aged three, four and five. Her husband had not yet met the youngest of course, he had not been born yet. She would have a son this time, Praise be to Allah. They would meet again in Paradise, of this she was sure. She was not so sure about dragging him away from his many virgins, but she was sure that Allah had a plan for this, too.

Asim Khouri had not said goodbye to anyone. He had nobody to say goodbye to. He hated this

world with a passion and could not wait to leave it and join Allah in heaven. He was looking forward to having a choice of virgins, not like here on earth where he was forced to consider marrying a camel of a woman, just to have children. Why would any sane man wish to do this, he thought? He was not a camel-fucker. No. This life was not for him. He would die for Allah and reap the rewards in the next life.

Nasir Al Din Assaf had two wives and seven children. Allah would take care of them. He was, after all, doing Allah's work. He had written a long essay on the value of Sharia in today's world and how it would help mend the sickness of humans, especially the American and British infidels. It would be published, in his name, by his younger brother, Azziz, after his death. He was not afraid to die as a martyr for Allah. He knew exactly what he was doing and why. His name would live forever. His children, even his wives would talk about him. They would remember him, and how he had helped start and taken part in the final Jihad for Allah. He smiled at the thought.

Not once did it cross their minds that Allah could be merciful towards the "infidels", peace be upon them? No, he thought. They were, after all, second class humans, but, Allah the merciful had given them a choice, die or pay money to live among us. Of course, their wives could be, legally, raped and beaten, but, Allah, Mohamed, in his mercy had said not to kill them unless the infidel refused to worship him, Mohamed. Messenger of Allah. Nasir Al Din Assaf smiled at the thought.

The men got off the train and took a tube train to the station they would soon turn to rubble. The plan was to detonate their bombs in the middle of the rush-hour, sending the maximum number of infidels to meet Allah, the merciful. Praised be his name. Allah would be pleased, and Abdul-Rahim Hussain could imagine the numbers in Hell swelling with the new influx of infidels, writhing in pain as they burned forever. He smiled at the thought. Allah was, indeed, merciful.

The men did not talk as the tube rumbled through a number of stations on the way to their target station. What was there to say? Today was the day and they were all prepared. Allua Akbar.

At last the train arrived and the men got off at their station. Abdul-Rahim Hussain looked around, the other two watching him. They were following his lead so they waited until he moved. The station was packed with commuters. It was 08:54am on a Monday morning. It could be any main station anywhere, he thought. So many infidels on their way to work. But also so many children, dressed in so many colours. Abdul-Rahim Hussain stopped and looked at them, some passing right in front of him. They were not like good Muslim children, dressed in black, quiet, fearful and respectful. No. These infidel children were loud, unruly, even, looking around, laughing and shouting, pointing at each other. But, no, these Kufir children would not grow up to be bigger infidel versions of themselves. These little infidels would be going straight to hell very shortly. Again, he smiled at the thought. Allah the merciful would take them, teach them the correct ways. Of course it was a shame that children had to die, but he consoled himself by remembering how many of Allah's children had been killed by their bombs. Every day. Thousands. And for what? Oil for their huge heated houses? For their huge cars that swallowed four times as much oil as any of theirs? For their enormous TV sets, all the better to see the fornication and blasphemous trash they watched? He knew that although Americans were only four percent of the world's population they consumed over twenty percent of the world's resources. His smile turned into a frown. No. It was a shame about the children, but he felt no regret. They should have been brought up as believers. Soon they would be with Allah, the merciful. Soon, this world would be just a bad memory. He turned to the others and motioned for them to follow.

The men approached a café near the Arcade and sat down at an empty table. A pretty waitress came and they ordered a coffee each. Abdul-Rahim Hussain looked at her with disgust on his face. She was not covered and he could see her face and her legs below the knee. Her tits were trying to make holes in the thin, black blouse she was wearing. He could even see the lines of her undergarments.

She should be beaten of course, he thought. He smiled at her as he paid her, said thank you as he took his change.

The pretty waitress smiled and told him to have a nice day. She shivered as she walked away. She hated serving people like that. Hated the way they looked at her, as if she were trash. And they never, ever, gave a tip. Fuckers. She would have called them camel-fuckers, but that would be racist, she thought as she walked off.

They sat sat quietly. Three men drinking coffee in the morning. But they would not finish their coffee. There was no time for that. Abdul-Rahim Hussain went over the plan again.

He would detonate his bomb at exactly 09:10 a.m.

The Eurostar from Brussels would have just arrived at 08:57 a.m.

Another Eurostar was due to leave for Paris at 09.17 a.m. That train would never leave this station, and if, somehow, it did manage to leave then it would be met by a bomb when it arrived in Paris.

The passengers from Brussels, and those going to Paris would soon be here in the station. Passengers from Brussels would be slow and tired after their two hour journey. Brussels was the centre of the European Union and the first country in Europe to have Sharia as the law of the land. It was also the first country in the European Union to become an Islamic State. Abdul-Rahim Hussain smiled again. These Europeans were so stupid, stupid Kafir. He smiled and looked around for the last time. They were going to bomb the fuck out of Brussels.

The café was already packed with people stuffing their faces with coffee, tea and pasties. Asim Khouri was looking around also, but he saw only fat and ugly Kafir. The food they were eating was not fit for a pig. He was pleased that the world would soon be rid of them all.

The station continued to fill up with friends saying goodbye to passengers on their way to Paris, and friends saying hello to those who had just arrived from Brussels. They were so ignorant, thought Abdul-Rahim Hussain. Others bombs would greet other trains in other major cities throughout Europe. It had all been planned perfectly. The passengers on those other trains would hear of the bombs in London. They would worry, call loved ones for more news. And when their train arrived it would explode and there was nothing anyone could do to stop it. Abdul-Rahim Hussain smiled at the others, a genuine smile again. Silently they smiled back. It was such a good day, he thought! Allua Akbar!

Asim Khouri and Nasir Al Din Assaf planned to be in the Arcade between the station and the Eurostar arrivals and departures. Abdul-Rahim Hussain looked around. The arcade was packed with arrivals and departing people. It was perfect. His bomb would deal with the infidels inside the actual station - all those changing trains from tube journeys throughout London. There would be hundreds of waiting passengers, friends and family. The carnage would be beautiful.

Each of the men carried a huge bomb in his back-pack. This was also beautifully planned. With the number of Arabs walking around London carrying backpacks the English did not glance twice these days. Each bomb carried enough explosives to destroy the whole station and one square mile around. And there were three of them. There would be no escape for anyone anywhere near where the bombs went off. Even those not close enough to be killed immediately would be ripped apart by the nails. No need for a timed detonation this time. Abdul-Rahim Hussain wondered vaguely what it would feel like to get a nail in the eye? Or a testicle! Oh, Allahu Akbar! Abdul-Rahim Hussain chuckled to himself and nodded.

And then he froze. Suddenly he chilled and his heart started banging in his chest. He commanded his body to remain calm. Three policemen were walking this way. Each carrying a weapon. He knew he should remember his training, but his mind went totally blank as he tried to identify the guns. The policemen walked up to him slowly. Did they not know that MI6 had sanctioned this

attack? Abdul-Rahim Hussain thought of what he was about to do and became calm. He smiled at the policeman nearest to him, noting the finger curled around the trigger-guard of the gun. The policeman did not smile back. None of the policemen were smiling. They were dressed in black and looked dangerous. People had made a path for them to walk through and now they had closed that path and formed a rough circle behind the policemen. Perfect.

Abdul-Rahim Hussain smiled again. "Soon you will all be dead," he thought as he took another sip of his coffee.

The youngest looking policeman frowned and looked at Abdul. Then he turned and asked one of his colleagues. "What did he say?" Abdul-Rahim Hussain was, for a second, rather taken aback. What? He had not spoken. He had been thinking! He now spoke in a loud voice. "Are you reading my mind, Sir? Me, Sir, I was just wondering when my sister will be arrival here! Good day to you, too!" he said. For someone else that day, the universe shrugged.

An announcement came over the public address system. Passengers travelling to Paris should go to platform B. None of the men moved. There was no need to "get closer" to anything. The size of the bombs would do everything for them. They were not heavy, or even large. These days everything was much smaller. But they still had the power. Lots of power. And that is when the young policeman bent forward, finger still on the trigger-guard of his Heckler & Koch MP5SF 9mm sub-machine gun and said to Abdul-Rahim Hussain "Good Morning, Sir. Where are you going to today?"

It was Asim Khouri who answered. He put on a huge smile full of teeth. "We are going nowhere, Sir, we are waiting for our sisters to be arrive on the train, Sir." He feigned an Indian accent and demeanour.

The policeman did not smile and did not look at Asim Khouri. "Can I see some Identification, please," he said to Abdul-Rahim Hussain. Abdul-Rahim Hussain smiled inwardly. This copper was young, east-end by the sounds of it. Easy. The other two

policemen had wandered back behind him, spread out like a fan, one left, the other right. Covering. All three men were now covered by machine guns, although the guns were pointed at the ground for the moment. Still, all three policemen now had their fingers on the triggers.

"Certainly, Sir," said Abdul-Rahim Hussain. He was very careful. Making sure his hands were visible he placed the coffee in the middle of the table and only then did he reach inside his jacket for his passport. It was a British passport, issued in London.

Abdul-Rahim Hussain was a British citizen. "Here you are, Sir," he said as he handed over his passport. "Can't be too careful these days," he said with a smile. "Can you tell me if Hyde Park is open at 10am? I want to show my sister the beautiful England!"

Inside he was furious. If he had to he would explode his bomb right here, right now. The others would go off with his. "Kess Ikhtak!" he said. He was sure the policeman would have no idea what he had said. But if he did have a sister then he, Abdul-Rahim Hussain, would fuck her no problem.

The policeman just looked at him then opened the passport and searched for the photo. It was an old photo. His beard had been short, then, but at least he had had a beard. A few days ago he had shaved his off.

"My wife thinks I look ten years younger without a beard," he said laughing. "I think she is falling for me all over again!"

The policeman did not laugh. An Arab who had shaved off his beard was suspicious. He spoke into his shoulder-radio and repeated Abdul-Rahim Hussain's name and date of birth from the passport. This did not look good, thought Abdul-Rahim Hussain. But if they had called in his passport

number then they knew he fucking worked with MI6! He started to prepare by taking a huge risk and lifting his bag onto his lap. He would do it now. Allua Akbar he thought. A few seconds later the radio beeped then someone said something in a tinny voice. "OK," said the policeman as he handed back the passport. "Thank you, and yes, the park is open between 5am and midnight every day. That will be all. Have a good day, Sir."

The young policeman did not show any disgust as he walked off. He knew where they were going. Fucking insects, he thought. He had no doubt they were going to join friends and family in Hyde Park. He was sure - they would be going to one of the illegal-immigrant campsites. Maybe even steal a few of the Queen's Geese. It seemed as if half of London now lived in the park and hardly an Englishman among them, he thought. Green and pleasant land.

The three terrorists watched as the policemen walked away. Only when they were out of sight did they breath a communal sigh of relief.

"Praise be to Allah," said Asim Khouri. "Peace be upon us all," said Abdul-Rahim Hussain. "Peace be upon him," said Nasir Al Din Assaf.

Abdul-Rahim Hussain kept his bag on his knee.

Abdul-Rahim Hussain looked at the large clock on the wall of the station. 09:01 a.m.

People were beginning to gather at the gate for the departure to Paris. He laughed out loud. "What are you laughing for," asked Nasir Al Din Assaf. "They are gathering at the gates of Hell!"

"Do not talk of such things," said Abdul-Rahim Hussain, frowning.

Abdul-Rahim Hussain watched the pigeons flying between the top of the station and the floor. He looked around until he found the one with the melted foot. There was always a pigeon with a melted foot. "You will soon meet your maker", he said. The pigeon cocked it's grey head, as if it had heard him, a beady eye blinking, understanding, before it hopped off under a table after another discarded crumb.

09:02 a.m. Again the announcement. Abdul-Rahim Hussain looked around as if in a trance. A child waved to him from a buggy. The child's mother, a black woman wearing a Hijab scolded the child in Arabic. Abdul waved back at the child, then smiled, happy that the child would soon meet Allah, praise be upon him, the merciful. Again he thought, how could they say you could not tell? This woman had the eyes of a black woman. Well, maybe it was a man, who knew. He smiled. The ways of Allah were, indeed, wonderful.

09:06 a.m. The policemen approached a group of young people listening to some kind of music system. They were smoking. That was illegal in the station. Maybe they were smoking weed. Some were drinking. Beer cans filled their hands. Nine o'clock in the morning. Disgraceful, thought the young policeman. The music was also too loud. Could they turn it down. The kids were arguing. The police insistent. The clock hit 09:08 am.

The announcement started. "Meeting point for passengers from Brussels. Next train to Paris, platform B, 09:17 a.m."

Nasir Al Dim Assaf and Asim Khouri stood. "Allahu Akbar," said Abdul-Rahim Hussain. "Allahu Akbar" they replied in unison before walking off. Two minutes later Abdul-Rahim Hussain stood up, looked at the sky, smelled the water filled air, fresh coffee and toast, shouted 'Allahu Akbar' and pulled the detonation chord attached to the bomb in his sack.

Not even the pigeons survived the blast. Nasir Al Dim Assaf and Asim Khouri blew themselves straight to Hell at the same time. They died smiling, knowing that God, Allah, the merciful, would be smiling as the children and everyone else in the station were ripped to shreds.

Ax struggled to the bathroom. He should shave, he thought. He had not yet heard the news. He crept more than walked in to see Lucy. She looked like a sleeping angel. Is that what sleeping angels look like, he thought? What have I done to get her, to get this? Standing upright was not easy, she moved back and forth in the bed. It was about to get a lot more difficult.

Ax and Lucy.

Ax was cooking when the T.V report came on. They normally watched the news, not because there was anything interesting, or real, but just so there was something to fill the silence. He knew there was something wrong with this silence but he did not know how to deal with it, or even if he wanted to. But he did want this meal to be perfect. Not because of Lucy. Although it was for her, too. Rather, it was for the pleasure of creating things, beautiful things that would later be enjoyed, eaten and washed down with a superb bottle of red wine. It was something he was working on. A simple pleasure, so different from killing people. The endless hours of watching and waiting before pulling the trigger or pushing the switch. He wanted this meal to be perfect after the endless hours of thought and preparation, the different kind of waiting and by God it would be! Spaghetti Vongolé, lots of garlic and Parmesan cheese! Italian perfection splashed with vodka burnt off at the last minute. A pleasure he would share with his Lucy. He reached over to a bowl and grabbed some mushrooms for chopping into slices. The sharp knife felt at home in his hand as he chopped. He did not know who he was anymore.

Lucy was chopping next to him while they watched Channel 4 on the little T.V. in the kitchen. It was the scale of the damage that alerted Ax. You could see it even on this tiny T.V. This, he knew, was not something the international world would, or could, ignore. Shit.

Lucy stopped chopping tomatoes. She was making a salad. She put her hand to her mouth. “Oh, God,” she said. She kept her hand over her mouth as she turned to face Ax. Ax half turned and looked at the woman in his life. She looked shocked, her eyes large and wide. She was still so affected by world events. Ax shook his head and told himself he felt nothing, he had seen far worse. He had stopped feeling things years ago, or so he thought. But Lucy reminded him of what it was to be human and that was part of why he loved her. She was his unexpected surprise, beautiful inside and out. But not today. Today she looked like someone who had just been told that over 2000 people were

dead in a bomb attack by terrorists in central London. Her face was a white mask, a living question and statement of horror, of disbelief.

Ax turned away from her face and back to the T.V. He shook his head, felt that anger again. At the unfairness of it all. Why was the world so unfair? His eyes crunched up as he pursed his lips into a thin line. The little people always suffered. The rich and powerful always got away free.

Lucy leaned in and turned up the volume.

It was a massive explosion, they said. Experts thought there were at least three, massive bombs used. This one in St. Pancras station in London. Latest estimates said at least two thousand had died immediately and perhaps as many as four thousand injured. Everyone in the station at the time had been killed, so large were the bombs. Everyone. Women. Children. Everyone. It was like Omagh all over again, said one English commentator, but this time? With English lives.

Lucy jumped as the phone rang and even Ax’s heart jumped into his mouth. He bunched his fingers into fists as he let the knife fall onto the chopping board. He clenched his teeth, looked down, then lifted his head and walked to the phone.

He picked up the receiver and put it to his ear but he did not speak. “You’ll have seen the news?” A female voice he recognized immediately. “Yes, not my problem.”

“Oh, I think I disagree. We all think it is your problem, and we really would like you to visit us, soon.” The voice was cold. No humour. No life. Just like her, he thought.

“Really? That was quick,” said Ax, a bitter half-smile on his face. She had basically just told him

they knew, or thought they knew, who had been responsible for the bombings and that it was related to something he had done in the past. His line was not secure so she was limited in what she could say. It even quickly crossed his mind to ask how the fuck they had this number, but, well, they could always get what they wanted, so he did not.

“Yes, really,” said Anne. She was a very, very powerful woman, and one not to be trifled with. Anne Pembleton was the head of MI6 in London, England.

“Anyone I know?”, he said.

“Don’t get smart, Rain. This one is your fucking fault, so don’t get fucking smart. We need you here, a.s.a.p. We don’t think you have a choice. Just get here as soon as you can. This is about you. You killed the kid. Now they want you. “

Silence. Then.

Ax’s thoughts were racing through his head. “They want me?” he thought? Who are they? Him? He looked over at Lucy. She was just standing there. Listening to every word he said, her arms folded across her chest.

“I told you. I’m out. Get someone else.”

Ax put the phone down. Lucy was watching him carefully.

“Fuck,” he said.

“Who was that?” she asked. It was the way she asked it. Not like “who was that,” question. It was “who was that?” as if she knew.

Nothing, he said.

“But, you knew who that was,” said Lucy.

“Wrong number,” he said. I was a lie and she knew it. Fuck.

He turned and walked out of the kitchen. He needed space, needed time. He walked out the door. It banged shut behind him. He needed to think. And maybe he needed a drink, he thought. He knew, deep down he knew he would have to go to London.

In the back of his mind was what on earth he would have to tell Lucy. Lucy still had her arms folded as she stared at the door.

Anne Pembleton sat back in her office chair and offered tea. She was tired and not looking forward to the discussions that would follow. She did not like any of the men here. They were full of themselves and their power. Anne sighed a deep sigh. She knew they all despised women, despised her and her power but she needed them to agree to the second part of her plan. She needed Ax to be involved, to be captured and killed. She needed their money, their influence. She needed their power. She needed the people and forces they would mobilize. She needed them to approve of her plan. Yes. She needed them to get what she wanted. So she smiled at them. They were greedy. All of them. That is why her plan would work. It had to work. Soon she would soon be free, free of it all, free of them and she would never need to see any of them again. Ever.

They were all high-profile people. None of them should have been here. None of them could be seen here, and certainly not together. All had entered the building at different times by a hidden entrance at the back. Any chance sighting would be put down to coincidence and the sheeple would eat their grass and bleat. Their “newspapers” would feed them more grass. They would eat it and forget.

Anne Pembleton.

Anne poured the tea.

She looked at Sam Withers. Head of Global Oil. His company was huge, like his fat face and arse, thought Anne. He was putting up more than his fair share of the money this operation would cost. Of course, he expected, and would get back a larger share of the profits and control. Fair is fair. He would be the easiest to get on-board, thought Anne. He was perhaps the greediest of the three and the one who cared most about image. He had started life as a fat bully in the playground, and in principle that is exactly what he was today. Just older and vastly richer with many more willing victims.

Then she looked at Ethan Harrington. This man had wormed his way into many businesses worldwide. He was like a pregnant grub that never stopped chewing. He sat on the board of two of the largest global banks. He sat on the board of the largest pharmaceutical company in the world, Harrland Industries. The name was a compromise between his own and the company in Switzerland he had taken over - "Farland Pharma". He also had a controlling interest in "C.W.W.W" - Clean-Water-World-Wide. That, of course, was a huge joke as everyone in the know knew that there was nothing "clean" about his water. Except his profits, invested in "safe" businesses under a different company name and shovelled off-shore. They were slowly but surely acquiring all of the natural water on the globe and selling it back to the people for a huge profit. If any sheeple became protesters all one had to do was poison their water supply and if anyone noticed the dead all one had to do was put another starlet on T.V with her tits out and the rest of the sheeple soon lost interest in water.

But, most importantly, he was a founder of "The Rainbow Group," responsible for the largest import and export of computer equipment throughout the world. Officially. It was also the largest collection of the best assassins in the world who could and did guarantee death once they were paid. They were hired by governments and people with enough money to ensure that no questions were ever asked. He was the unofficial head of "The Atlas Group", powerful businessmen who met once a year to discuss "business" in the world. Or so they said. Nobody knew for sure. The only thing people knew is that after their meetings heads rolled. Positions changed, elections were held, C.E.Os were fired, new ones hired. The Atlas Group was all about profit. At any cost. Nobody was safe. Nobody ever broke ranks and talked about the meetings. Not anymore. There had been one or two in the early days. People who thought that the sheep should know exactly what was happening to them. But after the "accidents" the leaks had stopped. No journalist who valued his life ever wrote about insider trading and deal-fixing. Not if he wanted to live. Everyone knew this. Nobody talked any more about The Atlas Group. Ever.

Harrington would be difficult for different reasons, thought Anne Pembleton. He would need to feel that he was in control. His huge ego would demand that others in positions of power look up to him for the role he had played in the plan. He would need to be given the bait of admiration. Lots of it. It would not be difficult. She would give him a shiny new mirror of public admiration and his self-adulation would do the rest.

Finally her gaze landed on the most surprising and, in many ways, the most difficult addition to the table. Jubair Qureshi was one of the richest men in the world. A Saudi oil-billionaire, the eldest of three brothers who controlled most of the oil coming out of the middle east. He was a very dangerous man indeed. It was said he had connections to all the major terror networks in the middle east. Of course, there was no proof and those who did manage to find anything invariably disappeared shortly after announcing that they had found something. One did not cross Sheik Jubair Qureshi. Not even lightly. Not if one wanted to avoid arrest and torture. Not if one wished to live. Even those of other nationalities who dug too deeply just disappeared. He, too, was a member of

“The Atlas Group.”

Sheik Jubair Qureshi had the least to gain in all this, financially, at least. He was already a multi-billionaire so money would not be enough. Money had never been enough for him. He would need to be seen to be “advancing” the Islamic cause. He wished it to be known that he was a holy man. A man who believed absolutely in Allah, the Koran and Sharia Law. Whether it was actually true, or a ploy to win favour with his terrorist friends nobody knew. One thing one did know, however, was how he supported the American Cartel in the Petrodollar. In the west he played this down, his biggest game being that he was interested in money and that the stupid Islamists would not last for long in the world. But secretly he believed that money in the right place at the right time could be of enormous help in advancing his and other “Islamic” causes. The more the dollar was tied to Saudi Oil the more fragile the Americans became, the more they needed Saudi Arabia. It was already evident. They, the Americans, bombed and killed the shit out of so many. But, Saudi Arabia? They bowed down. The west, America, had ruled for long enough. It was time for Allah to have his will done on earth again and he was here to help. Enormous vanity was his biggest weakness and Anne had plans to feed it. Like Harrington he would not be able to resist. She even had a name ready for him, “Qureshi the Benevolent”. He would lap it up. She coughed to hide her laugh as she nearly choked thinking about it.

Anne Pembleton was head of MI6 in London. A powerful lady indeed and one to be feared - for many different reasons. One did not become head of one of the most powerful spy organizations in the world without having a large set of balls, and word had it that Anne Pembleton had a very large set of balls.

Her young, Japanese partner had died in a terrorist attack thirty years ago and she had never forgotten that fact, they said. Her partner been a passenger on the Pan Am flight that blew up over Lockerbie. Back then they said it was the Libyans. It was not and she knew it, now. That story is what the T.V. were told to tell. Everyone now knew it was not Gaddafi. She had not known then, but she knew now. She had not known when she got the “103 forever” ink on her arm. It was all a huge game - who was told what and when. As head of MI6 she knew many things. Others knew she wanted an end to terrorism and she apparently wanted it yesterday. Word was that she would stop at nothing or anything or anyone that got in her way. Her partner, Midori, had been a nineteen year old girl. A beautiful girl, from Japan. Anne wanted revenge for her beautiful, dead soul-mate. There had been a funeral. But as with so many others, the coffin had been empty. They had never found the bits that would have made up her body. And, so, filled with revenge she had started her plan. Years ago. It was a daring plan. An audacious plan. A dangerous plan. A plan that none around the table were or would be privy to. When she was finished then they would all be finished. When it came to the food chain they were minnows in her eyes, and she dined with the sharks in the deep sea of time.

They were all going to pay the price and she would gut them one after the other without mercy. Her plan had taken years. And now it was ripe. The tattoo had festered, at the time. Now it was a festering memory pierced into her skin so she could never forget.

“Gentlemen. You have all seen the news of the bombings.”

All three just looked at her, waiting for her to continue. It was a statement, not a question.

“That was the start. We think we know who is behind the bombings. I am sure you have all heard of Bakr Nadir.” She paused and looked around the room at the three men, eyes resting on Sheik Jubair Qureshi. “It seems his money and fingers are all over this.” It could not have worked out better. “Gentlemen, we are now ready for stage two, a leak.”

She looked directly at Ethan Harrington. “We are going to release the name of a Rainbow agent to the press. At the same time that name shall be leaked to the terrorists directly. This will get him involved and the terrorists will want blood. His blood. We are sure of this. This will mean that we

must get involved, as a rescue mission, of course. But he will be captured, and when he is captured we will leak to the press that he is a British agent and that he must be saved. This Rainbow operative killed a child in a secret operation a few years back. It was, of course, an accident. We will give the press the name of the father. The father of that child is Bakr Nadir. Bakr Nadir will receive information that this agent is responsible for the death of his child. He will know to which child we are referring and will certainly take revenge. We will leak to the press that the terrorists have attacked our agent for revenge. We will tell them how the man killed the child and then, devastated, how he retired from active duty. The press will love it. The green fields of England will be dewy with tears.”

She smiled, then. A sick, evil smile that contained no humour.

I am sure you have seen reports about the bombs here in London, and the bombs in Paris, Munich, Madrid? There will be more bombs. We are sure of that. We have intelligence from a dozen European agencies. There will be more deaths. It will become quite horrible for everyone. Except us, of course,” Again she smiled. “All we will have to do is sit back and let them kill each other.” With that she smiled, tilted her head to the right, and turned her hands palms up in a “what can ya do?” gesture. “We will give the Television Stations access to everything and they will broadcast it all. Public opinion will be massive. On both sides. The sheep will focus on the killing and while they are bleating about that we will steal the oil.” Anne looked around the table. They were nodding and smiling. Looking at each other as if they had done something well. They were so gullible, so stupid, she thought. All they could see was their money and power increasing. Anne would have a new life. A life of freedom. And, she thought, they, these pigs before her eyes would all be dead.

Anne stood up then, and served the tea herself as there was nobody else allowed in the room.

She waved a long, slim hand and said “So, Gentlemen.” At first nobody spoke, then.

“So, what, exactly, is the plan, Anne,” said Ethan. He smiled a private smile at his words, clearly showing his disrespect.

Anne Pembleton leaned forward and carefully placed her gold pen on the table in front of her. She screwed up her eyes, cocked her head to one side and looked at each man in turn.

“I will answer your question with a question,” she said.

She put her hands behind her back, pushing out her breasts, knowing that they would be looking at the bumps in her shirt.

“How far are you willing to go?” Of course she knew it was a double question. She knew they would try to fuck her, given half a chance. Not out of love, not, even, out of lust. No, they would fuck her to show that they were in control and that she was just a bitch. She smiled before she spoke. “How far, Gentlemen?”

She had spoken the words quietly and there was silence in the room. The men looked at each other, each unwilling to be the first to speak, the first to fill that silence with intentions, his own intentions.

Then, Sam Withers sighed heavily and spoke.

“Anne, you know us all,” he said, “there is always a price and I’m sure we all know that. You know that too, so what is your point?”

“How far are we willing to go for what?” It was the voice of Sheik Jubair Qureshi, cold and hard.

Silence. Then, “I’m sure that each of us here is willing to pay whatever price is asked, if it furthers our aims?” continued Sam Withers.

Anne ignored the Sheik, locked eyes briefly on Sam, then, looked again at each man in turn. Each was hard in his own way. Each man had a lot to lose but more to gain in money. She wondered if

now was the time to play her hand.

“O.K.,” she said, “here it is.”

“We know that Bakr Nadir is behind these recent attacks. We believe he has only just started but we also believe he has been preparing for years. And now we believe that he is preparing something big. Much, much bigger than anything before. Indeed, we believe he has a new group, that they have been existence for years and that he is much more radical than anything we have ever seen. We believe he has been putting people in place for years, that he has planned this revenge for years. We know he is behind the bombings and I believe I have a way to find him and deliver the leak I talked about.” She paused. There was no reaction.

“My plan? I want to bring total chaos the the region. I want to cause an all-out war in the middle east. I want all the Arab nations to unite against the United States and Britain and NATO and I want for us to crush the Arab nations into total submission. The Muslims seem to like the idea of submission. Their whole religion is based upon it. The U.S.A is the largest military machine the world has ever seen. It spends more than the rest of the world combined on weapons alone. We will use this might to wipe out any and all Arab resistance to the west controlling if not owning all of the world’s oil. When we control all of the oil, we control all the money and power in that region. When we control money and power we control the food. And when we control the food supply we control the population. Control that population and we control the world. We will all be rich beyond our wildest dreams. Russia and China will have no choice but to submit to our wishes. They cannot survive without oil so they will do as we wish. They know they cannot defeat our military so they will negotiate for oil. Nothing will move without American controlled oil.”

She slapped her hand on the table as she finished.

“You mean American and British controlled , Saudi Oil, surely,” smiled Sheik Jubair Qureshi.

Anne looked at the Sheik. Then she smiled. She doubted if anyone in the west knew just how many Arab populations were being lied to and cheated by men just like this. Exactly the same as Americans and British and all their western counterparts.

Ethan Harrington spoke quickly, without patience. “America will use Britain as a base again. A war with the whole Middle East? Iraq will seem like a playground brawl by the time we are finished. And, by the time anyone takes notice we should have total control over the whole area. All the oil will be ours. We should have done it years ago. Make sure it works, this time.”

“And the Saudis?” asked Jubair Qureshi. With that question he had shown Anne his cards. He obviously felt no loyalty to other Arabs. Ethan Harrington was not so sure and Anne could see it. Excellent, she thought. When it came time to be rid of them she could pit one against the other.

“And the price?”, asked Sam Withers. “And, no, I don’t mean the price of oil.” He chuckled.

“Sheik Qureshi. Obviously we will need you to smooth the path with the Saudis. We rely on your vast religious knowledge and popular support, and, of course, you shall have our continued support through delivery of the latest weaponry. That should help ease the way, no? Special deals to oil the wheels, so to speak? This war will not be fought on Saudi land. So this war will leave you, we will leave you, as the only functioning Arab nation with some control of the oil. You will have a huge market. Our market. A world market! But what a customer! Together we will control the price of oil worldwide. Everyone wins. Nobody need know that we have a special price and that you have a guaranteed sale. You will all become much, much richer. Of course, millions will die. We are going to war, after all! You will all have to live with that.”, she smiled.

Ethan Harrington spoke up.

“Millions dead? Because of us? They do this to themselves, they don’t need to fight the inevitable,

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