



# **ZAHRALIZA**

**By: Abdeouahid STITOU**

He was slowly sipping his hot cup of tea and contemplating the ceiling of the room. The room was his whole world and the ceiling was its sky. He used to spend the day and half of the night doing that. Unemployed he was, yet he was not desperate nor optimistic. He considered himself a neutral person; he gave up philosophizing some time ago. He had nothing to do excepting sitting down and “facebooking”. He surfed it all day and night killing time, and it killed him as well.

He had 2111 friends so far. He did not know one tenth of them in person, but they kept his company. They filled his free time that was void of everything since he graduated. It was like a balloon pierced by a needle, so its rubber became similar to the skin of an ancient man.

He studied hard. Sometimes he excelled and managed to pass in other times. He copied the answers of other students many times. At the end, he managed to graduate miraculously. He was a man who belonged to a certain environment, and he could not escape its incidents. Sometimes he felt himself like a ball among the feet of many players; they were kicking it as they pleased, and it did not have a way out.

He let out a deep breath as hot as August, sipped his tea again, and read some comments written on his wall.

*“This is a failing attempt to feign smartness. Have you written that because you really believe in it or because you need to show us you are the wisest man in the world?”*

One of his ‘friends’ whom he did not know wrote this comment on a status he had posted on his wall. He frowned. He always hated this kind of negative people. The last thing he needed at that time was a person who would bring down his spirits to the ground. Deep inside he knew she might be true, but he was by no means in the mood to reply or argue. The solution was too simple, and he always did it without any hesitation. On Facebook things go fast and easy; all one needs to do is to press ‘delete’, and it will be over forever.

In a way or in another without any logical reason whatsoever, his forefinger retreated one millimeter away from the mouse button; he hesitated for one second and decided to reply.

*“Well. I know this type of people. You aren’t actually commenting. You just seclude yourself until you have such a chance to take all your complexes and tensions on a facebooker. It seems it is my turn today that you wrote me such a comment. The truth is that I do not care. Sorry.”*

She replied, and so did he. The tensivity of the argument faded gradually. They bade each other goodbye politely without any affection. They did not arrange a rendezvous. He did not pay much attention to their chat; he just felt that he recovered some of his self-confidence that he would have lost had she won their quick argument. He did not wave

the white flag, nor did he enter a battle in the first place. The argument ended in signing an unwritten peace pack with her.

He smiled in self-content. He thought that he survived an acute night of Facebook depression. Then he roared in laughter, and turned his back to the computer and his Facebook wall and facea crack in a wall in the room. He pulled the pillow strongly to his head, as he always used to do, awaiting the miracle of sleep. And tomorrow would be another day.

It was a new morning. Actually it was not entirely new; it was similar to the preceding ones. The only new thing was that he would lose a new day of his life, and his debts would increase in the debts book of the grocer of the neighborhood.

The first thing he did was turning on his computer as he used to do. He got up, lumbered to the bathroom and washed his face quickly in an attempt to ignore the freezing water. He rubbed his face and looked in the broken mirror that was full with stains. He spent some few minutes until he could see his whole face because the remaining piece was no more than a few centimeters.

He descended the worn stairs whose layout he knew by heart. He prepared himself to one of the moments that he detested; he asked the grocer to give him a piece of cheese and a pack of tea and feigned indifference. He tried to stroke the nose of a child near him who almost bit his finger. He heard the grocer mumbling some words that his debts were increasing significantly and it was time he stopped this non-sense. He did not even try to turn to face him as he was extending his hand to take his order as if he heard nothing.

His pride was abandoning him gradually. He became unwelcomed in a lot of places whether he liked it or not. He wondered what other disasters life would force him to commit.

He bought a piece of “hursheh” food with the last three dirhams he had. He then went home to spend his best time in his virtual world where nobody knew him excepts for very few people. Nobody knew that he was unemployed, that he was in debt, and that his hands were tied.

The blue world untied them again. Despite that he was carrying the cup in one hand and the piece of hursheh in the other, his fingers were moving smoothly on the keyboard.

He commented on some new events and was thinking about a suitable idea to describe his situation. He heard the sound of a water drop falling into a bucket. It was the notification sound of a new Facebook instant message.

- Good morning.
- Good morning.
- Do you remember me?
- Of course. The pedant commenter? (Kidding)
- Yes. This's me. How are you doing?
- I'm fine. I have everything I need at the moment.
- I like it that you can chat in standard Arabic. ‘Franco-Arabic’ that some people use does irritate me. (That mixture between Arabic and French).
- I still find chatting in formal Arabic completely enjoying.
- I'm like you.
- ...
- Are you still angry at me?

- Not at all.
- Happy to know that.
- I'm happy to know you, too.
- I'm not one of those people who ask others to tell them their life story, but I do hope to know more about you.
- It's difficult to do that when you have a photo of an Indian actress as your profile picture; you might be a man who finds it amusing to chat with me.
- Do you need to convince me that your profile picture is actually yours?
- Not at all. Why shall I do that? It's your business believe it or not.
- Ok. Do not get angry. You really look handsome.
- I have nothing to do with that actually.
- Being modest?
- I actually understand how pointless it's to admire something I had nothing to make!
- Well. I promise you I'll set my own picture as my profile picture next time. I have to go now.
- No problem. Bye.

Silence filled the room again. The e-noise ended as it started, and he felt a bit lonely. He could not understand how that unknown person filled suddenly his world. He was not a hasty person; he had gone through too many experiences that he hated hastiness. He, deep within, confessed that there was something peculiar and strange in that woman. To set himself free from these thoughts, he made a small sound to call for a cat and went towards a corner he figurative called 'the kitchen'. A cat came stumbling from somewhere. It was a lame, one-eyed cat. This is why he actually decided to keep it. He always hated those people who only took care of only those beautiful cats. What about the ugly and sick ones? What crimes had they committed?

The truth is that people feign gentility and humanity while all they need is to please themselves before others even when those others are animals. "Oh my God! Look how cute she is!" he thought that a woman would say while clasping her hands on her chest as if she were an angel. Only because the cat is beautiful she actually takes care of it. Weird logic! The truth is she needs to appear as a gentle person at the expense of the cat. This hypocrisy of people made him sick. He kneeled and put the yellow piece of cheese near the cat that started licking it in gratitude. He stroked her head and went back to his blue world.

The night of Tangier started its noisy silence. He rested his chin on his palm while he was looking at the sleepy lights of the port. He always loved these lights since he was a kid when he used to look at them from the window of his bedroom. He used to like that feeling that there were people working hard while others are deep asleep. There were people who just came on a ship from a different world to his own.

When his mother passed away three years ago, the landlord asked him to leave because he needed to sell the apartment. He was then sad and desperate. He had no power for any oral or legal arguments. Nevertheless, he was aware that he was enjoying a position of strength as long as he was living in the apartment and rejecting to leave it willingly. After negotiations that lasted for some hours, he agreed to leave the apartment where he cried for the first time when was born in exchange for living in the tiny apartment near the rooftop rent free for three years. It was too difficult, but he chose peace of mind over conflicts. He knew that the two windows of his new apartment would overlook the port; this was sufficient for him.

The sound of a drop of water falling in a bucket of water.

- Are you on, Khaled?

He turned to the screen and found the message box flickering and temptingly inviting him to come. He gave Tangier and its port a last look as an expression of apology and adjusted his seating position before his virtual blueness.

- Yes, I am on, Huda.
- Facebook showed me you are unavailable.
- Don't count on it so much. I stopped using the device for an hour, so it probably thought I died.
- hahaha. You're really funny. Anyways, how are you doing?
- Good. And you?
- Good. I just miss chatting to you.
- We're all that man or that woman let me say!
- I need to ask you something, Khaled. It's the first request since I knew you. Can I?
- You don't need to ask for permission.
- Can we meet?

He felt his body going numb. His ears turned red and his left hand started to shake as it always did when he felt nervous. He did dread this moment! Two months they spent chatting on daily basis and exchanging ideas. Their virtual relationship grew at an acceptable pace. On the positive side, she was able to guess what was on his mind before he attempted at writing anything, and she was many times able to know his feelings. He did not deny that he admired her. To be more accurate, he liked the image he imagined. His situation was similar to how a Russian man of letters described the state of mind of a teenager, "I do not really know what I like, but I like it very much".

He was aware that in real life joking never existed in such things. A rendezvous could lead to a massive shock and an entire collapse of that beautiful image that he admired. He acknowledged that he was coward to some extent. Ever since he became addicted to this blueness of Facebook, he found face-to-face interaction difficult in many instances, whereas he was like a supreme master in his e-world.

He was lucky because she had sent him her photo. Asking for a rendezvous meant that she was not lying about the whole thing and that Huda in the photo was the real person he was going to meet. Nevertheless, he was afraid the virtual photo would be tarnished in his mind—her photo in his heart rather than her physical appearance.

- I'm waiting for your answer.
- Do you think this's the proper time?
- Why do you think it isn't?

He could not find an answer. He was actually trying to maneuver.

- I will be waiting for wait you in the Champs-Élysées Café at the Boulevard street around 6 o'clock. Most probably I will be waiting for you there. Take care of yourself.

She did not wait for his answer. She logged out as if concluding the discussion. She hinted earlier about having his phone number, but he declined to give it in a witty way. The truth was that she 'was asking' for the rendezvous, but now she 'is waiting' for it leaving the whole matter at his hands.

He remained fixed in his position staring at the mouse cursor. It was flickering as if his own shaking was transmitted to it. Meanwhile, a far, melodious voice was singing,

“Lonely lonely Monday morning  
And I didn't have no company  
Alright, alright”

He looked from the window and saw an African person from the sub-Saharan sitting on the threshold of the building and swinging his head while singing.

His voice was indeed touching accompanied with a noticeable sadness. He did not notice it when a tear fell from his eye. “You're 'lonely', my friend. I too wanted to be 'lonely', but this loneliness is apparently going to end tomorrow. It'll be Monday, too”.

He pulled his jacket tightly around his chest while looking attentively at the gulls that were playing near him and exchanging shrieks. The coast of Tangier was almost empty. The cold weather discouraged people from going out. He wanted to pass by the coast to speak to it, as he usually did, before turning to the Boulevard street to meet Huda in the Champs-Élysées Café.

His night was distressing; he considered and reconsidered a lot of thoughts. Meeting a woman with whom he had a lot of ideas in common seemed really interesting; however, he was not ready for any beginnings at the moment. The ship of his life was floating on a sea whose surface was calm, but its bottom was in turmoil. He did not need the waves to reach the surface at least at that time. He had taken his decision and made up his mind. He kept a crucial weapon in a pocket in his emotions— reservation.

What Huda was not aware of is that the rendezvous would cost him some money which he did not have. Therefore, he phoned in the morning his friend Munir.

- Awful morning.
- To you, too.
- Tell me. How much do you have?
- 350 dirhams is everything I have. Why?
- Well. Bring me 300 dirhams. I need it urgently.
- But I'll only have 50 dirhams! I want to...
- I'll be waiting for you at home at 1 pm.

Munir pushed the door that was ajar and entered. He and Khaled punched each other as a greeting. After that, Munir started complaining about how badly he needed the money. Khaled remained silent and continued shaving his beard.

- Finished?
- Yes.
- Ok. Put the 300 dirhams on the table. You can leave or stay with me if you like.
- I'd rather leave. I have a lot of things to do.
- Ok. Go then.
- I will. May God damn the friendship with mean people like you.

Khaled roared in laughter. Munir shrugged his shoulders in surrender and put the money on the table.

- Are you sure you don't need more?
- Yea. This would do.

As Munir left the apartment, Khaled released a deep breath and murmured, "May Allah place me with those poor people on the Day of Resurrection".

Munir was his childhood friend. He was a carpenter who knew nothing about Arabic literature, on which Khaled had a degree, or about anything else. Although his education



was modest, he embodied every aspect of goodness from his society, and he had always been his best friend. The rich people he got to know for short times constantly let him down. There is a strange connection between meanness and richness. The problem was that most of those rich people he knew rarely sopped talking about piety and good doing. Once they were approached for help, they would flinch away and try to hide themselves in their clothing, whereas the simple people would always surprise him with their generosity and morals. When he was addressing Munir, he did not need to fake or pretend anything; he behaved normally. He knew very well that even when Munir was broke, he would borrow money for Khaled. He would never let his friend down in a trouble.

“May Allah place me with those poor people on the Day of Resurrection”, he repeated.

He was pondering about that while coming closer to the Champs-Élysées Café. It was 5:55 pm. Did she come before him?

He took a deep breath and entered. He examined the faces of the customers, and he could not find her in the first floor. He climbed the stairs to the second floor which was empty except for one person sitting in a semi-dark corner. Was it her?

When he drew closer and could see the face, he found that it was really her. Apparently she did not notice him while she was fixing something in her handbag. It occurred to him to retreat, but she raised her head at that same moment. Their eyes met. There was no way out of the rendezvous.

It has been two hours. He did not realize how time passed at all. Time swallowed him as he swallowed her words and pauses. He removed his weapon of ‘reservation’ and put it aside without even noticing that. It seemed to him that she liked sitting with him, too.

It really surprised him that Huda completely fitted the model he created in his mind. It did not deviate one millimeter away from it.

Love is the set of ideas that we visualize about the man—or women— of our dreams. When the right person arrives, they do not do anything; they just embody that image with their physical being. Deep within Khaled was resisting calling it love because it was too premature.

When he spoke to Huda, he felt comfortable, and he admired her. He did not need to get entangled in love; his love affairs were very few. Only a small number of women loved him, but they did love him genuinely. This was really what was terrifying him.

He knew that it was not easy for any woman to love him because of his reserved character, but when it happened, it was too difficult to set himself free. It was never something he willingly did. Some events would take place and force him to break up. He endured a lot of pain every time he had to break up. It was like forcefully removing a hook from his own flesh.

Huda’s features were fine to a good extent. Beautiful? He actually did not like this adjective. Beauty for him always remained relative. For instance, he considered the limb, one-eyed cat that he kept amazingly beautiful.

When Huda smiles, a dimple appears on her left cheek. One of her incisors protruded slightly over the other. It does not diminish her features; it makes shine more.

- Do you know that hadn’t it for one-second hesitation and one millimeter, I wouldn’t have been here?
- Really? How is that, Khaled?

He liked that she called him with his name without titles. She could remove the formality barriers in a way so gentle that one might not spot.

- I was about to delete your first comment on my post on the Facebook the other day. I thought it too fastidious. However, my forefinger retreated in the last second before it touched the mouse button which would have ended everything.
- Oh my God! How thick you are! You delete the gentle sex so easily from your Facebook account?
- You can rather say so complicated. I haven’t reached this state until I spent a long time surfing Facebook. Long discussions overburden me especially that some people have nothing to do in their lives excepts for discouraging people. They are facopaths if this blend is correct.

Huda laughs and swings her head gently backwards. She moves his emotions again. Are these spontaneous movements or deliberate ones?

- Facopaths? A blend of facebookers and psychopaths? You deserve a patent for coining this term. Anyways, you know well that I'm not one of them. The truth is I was following your posts for a while. I seriously liked them and wanted to write a comment to provoke you. It seems I escaped being delete because of your hesitation.
- So your comment was not a coincidence.
- Of course it wasn't. I was really interested in what you write. I thought that this person either believed in what he's writing which would make him an amazing person, or he's just posting things to fill the vacuum on Facebook.
- What have you discovered.

She looked down then up. Their eye met for few seconds. A sensation of shiver travelled down his spine to his feet. Meanwhile, she acted indifferently and stirred the sediment of her coffee.

- You told me you live alone. Where is your family?
- My family lives in Belgium. I didn't need to tell you earlier in order not to damage the course of our relationsh... I mean the course of our getting to know each other. I'm now spending some months here for convalescence. I took a medical leave from my work, and I chose to spend it in Morocco.
- Perhaps you thought that I might be digging for the "papers" of Belgium?
- Not at all. Do not take it the wrong way. I just thought it wasn't the proper time. Now it's appropriate to tell you.
- Don't worry. I've never been interested in migration.
- I know. It isn't difficult to conclude that, Tangier lover.

Some moments of silence prevailed their rendezvous more than once. He was thinking, and so was she. Then they would smile. It was delighting for him that she did not wear any makeup at all. He always hated cosmetics, the odor nails polish and lipsticks, and all members of that disrespected family of deception.

When they left they café, she offered to give him a ride to his home, but he did not agree.

- You insisted on paying the bill in the café, and now you don't need me to drive you home. You're an oriental man!
- I'm actually a Tangierian man.
- Your love to Tangier kills me out of jealousy.
- It kills me that you're jealous of a city.
- The word city is feminine. Women feel jealous of all feminine things when they compete for a man.
- Anyways. I live nearby in Espanyol neighborhood.
- I know surely.

They said bye to each other and agreed to meet again. Her car seemed to him as delicate as Huda herself. She stepped on the gas pedal and did not forget to wave gently with a smile that should be classified as a weapon of mass destruction.

He went home completely exhausted; his heart was full of emotions that he did not experience for so long. How chaotic women can make men! Even his apartment seemed entirely different to him.

He fell on the bed like an unconscious man. His cat, as if she could sense his feelings, looked at him with sympathy mingled with caution. He carried her and put her close to his feet. She rolled up and drew herself closer to him while he was contemplating the moon that was trying to escape passing clouds.

Khaled got up half wake half dreaming. Gentle knocks on the door. Remnants of a dream accompanied him to the door. He stopped for a while to resist his staggering. He straightened up and stroked his hair in a spontaneous movement that did not change his state at all. He opened the door.

- Yea... Good morning. Hi Aziza Rahma! Come in, please.
- I can't, my son. I don't have time. I prepared some kikes and saved your share. I know you like this dessert a lot.
- Oh! I don't know how to thank you! Why did you take the trouble?
- Not at all, my son. You don't know kind your mother was to me. We used to like each other and had a close relationship. May Allah rest her soul in peace. The good ones pass away quickly. You are some of her and of the good time.
- May Allah rest the souls of my parents in peace. Won't you enter at least to rest from climbing the six floors? You're panting!
- Don't worry. I still have another thing to do. I'm going to clean these six floors you have just mentioned. Don't worry about your grandma. All I need from you is not to eat all of the dessert today. I know how crazy you are about it.
- I can't promise you anything.

Rahma turned her back in a slow movement that reflected the age of a woman who aged over 70 years, and she made a meaningless wave. He contemplated her with sadness mingled with a lot of love. Rahma was one of the few people who were still living in the same building since the Spanish occupation of Tangier. She worked with the Spanish as the guard of the building, and she remained in the same building taking care of it, and watching people coming and going.

- "What stories would you wrinkles tell, Aziza Rahma?", he wondered.

The inhabitants of the whole neighborhood call her Aziza Rahma. Despite that she did not have any grandchildren, they all considered her their grandma including the new comers. She was a good woman who belonged to a pure world that would not get stained.

A new email arrived:

***"Dear Khaled,***

***We would like to thank you for your literary contribution with us. We enclose herewith the wired transfer details of the sum of 350\$ in exchange for the four short stories you published in our magazine.***

***Thank you very much. Keep in touch.***

***Creative Writers Magazines Administration"***

He read the email again and again, and his heart rate became faster. When his situation became too desperate, it was defused. The email that bore the good news shyly arrived.

Finally, he would be able to move freely again at least for a short time. He would not face humiliation during the day nor worries at night.

It was one of the rare benefits of his fondness of writing. Why do people write? He answered this important question while gulping the dessert, “To receive some good dollars, of course”. Then he roared in laughter.

The email worked his appetite up. He swallowed the plate of dessert with a cup of tea while he was thinking of quickly going to the bank to check whether the transfer had arrived or not. He browsed a local news website as he usually did. There was a piece of news that caught his eyes and rose his anger:

***“Tangier Today knew a few minutes ago that a foreign gang could rob a precious painting called “The Moroccan Mona Lisa” from the American Museum in the city—formerly known the American Commission. An informed security source maintained that the robbery was carried out in a way similar to Hollywood movies; the gang, consisting of three members, was in disguise. They used a sleeping gas before quietly robbing the painting.***

***More details to follow.”***

As if you weren't experiencing enough troubles, oh Tangier! They had robbed the remaining remnants of your beauty. One day he read that this painting was for a real Tangierian girl called Zohra. It was painted by a Scottish artist called James McBey in 1952. Zohra, as he read, was still alive, and her grandchildren were living in the States.

He thought, “Thanks God they didn't harm any person” while he was dressing up and getting ready to leave. Suddenly he slapped his forehead as if he remembered something.

“Didn't harm any person! Oh my God. I've totally forgot about my friend Mahdi. He's a private security guard there. What an amnesiac person I am!”

He tried to call Mahdi, but the mobile died out because its battery was empty. He thought that it was really a Hollywood movie for all parties. He put his mobile in his pocket, carried the plate that was empty, excepts for the drawing on it, to give it back to its owner while murmuring,

- I told you, Aziza Rahma that I couldn't promise you anything.

He descended the stairs and ignored the lift that used to work once in every 365 days. He handed the plate to Aziza who was cleaning the stairs of the third floor. She smiled and did not comment. She was praying for him while he continued descending the stairs quickly until her voice completely receded.

Khaled was panting when he was mending his pace to reach the American Museum. He was happy that the news said nobody was harmed, but he was still worried about his friend. He was not actually concerned about any psychological damage. Psychological damage is a matter left for another group of people; those who visit a doctor whenever they feel a bit tired. One of Khaled's recent discoveries was finding out the name of a new disease "*La fatigue*" which would mean tiredness if his translation was accurate.

Tiredness is a disease!

Walking is a sport!

How fantastic! For him walking was a daily activity he did not pay attention to, whereas other people would consider it a sport. Everyone has their own point of view.

There was a big crowd gathering around the crime scene. He was very well aware that most of them were nosy people who were not interested in the incident itself; all they wanted was knowing more to narrate to their friends when they would meet at a corner of at nightfall.

He made his way through the crowd with difficulty. When he reached a metal security barrier, a policeman stopped him sternly. "Entry is completely prohibited", the policeman said and turned to his colleague to resume a conversation abruptly interrupted.

In their youth, people may do a lot of stupid things. Such a thing might be publishing a literary paper out of their own pocket money. Nevertheless, under certain circumstances some stupid things are better than others. Khaled showed the policeman the journalist ID of the paper he published in one of his crazy decisions.

- I'm a journalist. I need some details about the incident. I won't take any photos. I just need some details.

The policeman's face seemed baffled when he examined the ID. His colleague came closer and faking wisdom on his face. He scratched his chin while examining the ID from behind his colleague's shoulder.

- Hmmm. You're the editor of "ABC" paper. Alright. Let him pass, but don't stay for long inside.
- I won't. I'll do my job and leave. You know well that in ABC we must be the first to report the news.
- Yes, yes. You can enter.

A laughter was about to escape. It seemed a pretty reasonable stupidity that he had chosen the name ABC for his paper because it did not reveal the literary genre of the paper. It was a name that would fit well everywhere.

Mahdi was resting his head on his forefinger and thumb and lying his exhausted body on a plastic chair. Feebleness was evident on him. Khaled drew closer to him and patted his shoulder in condolence

He knew well that speaking in such situations could add insult to injury, so he let Mahdi initiate the conversation while sitting near him on the ground.

- Why have you taken the trouble to come? You might get involved in problem in such an event, you fool.
- There isn't a graver disaster than knowing that your friend is in danger while you're reading the news and toying with your toes as if the news doesn't concern you.
- You're a good man!
- You evil! Tell me about you. Have you got hurt
- No. At all. They released a barely visible sleeping gas. After that I found them waking me up. I'm still dizzy a bit, so they didn't take me to the hospital.
- This's a serious development... and organized crime in the heart of Tangier... to rob a painting! It seems like one of those thriller movies.
- They were three people dressed like regular tourists. It's too difficult to suspect them.

Khaled felt that his friend was feeling guilty as he was the security guard in the area.

- No other person would have known their intentions. You—and any other person who does a similar job—act according to what you see. Only God can know the intentions of people.
- They need me to know even the intentions.
- Well. The most important thing is that you're alright. I'll go now and call you later. I think you have a long day ahead.
- No doubt, although there're cameras that would show them everything, they'll enjoy interrogating me. I know they will.
- Don't worry. Be patient.
- I will.

He left the place and looked at the complete chaos of people. He visited the museum once in the past. He was still able to remember how he tried for long minutes trying to escape the looks of Zohra or Zahrliza (The Moroccan Mona Lisa). He was trying to prove that there was something wrong in its 'Monalistic' nature.

It was because of his childish stubbornness, and that desire to prove that what we have does not match what we import from the west. He used to think so, but the passage of years made him wiser, and he became aware that his country and city had more antiquities and traditions than the whole world.



When he took his mobile out of his pocket to check the time, he remembered that it went off because its battery ran out. He remembered too his rendezvous with Huda in Villa Josephine Café in Jebel Kebir.

- Oh my God! How did I forget it?

He remembered that Huda asked him yesterday in a quick Facebook chat to see him in the morning in the café to enjoy looking at Tangier stretching and shaking off her laziness and the remnant dews.

They agreed to meet at 11 am. He asked a passer-by about the time, and it was 11:30. He was 30 minutes late. He loathed himself because he always hated waiting even if waiting for a friend let alone making a woman wait a man she just knew!

He took a taxi and asked the driver midway to wait for him to withdraw money from the ATM. He arrived in the Café after 15 minutes. Just before he got out, the taxi driver said,

- Don't you think that I was right, and they were unjust to me?

Oh! The driver was talking all the way! How could not he hear him? His body was in the car, but his souls was sitting with Huda in the Café apologizing and asking her to wait for some minutes.

- Of course you are right. People these days have become like monsters. They don't respect kind people like you.  
- This's exactly what I say to them.

He entered the café and looked at the faces of the customers in the terrace, but she was not in there. He looked for her in the internal hall, but there was no trace of her, too.

- Where are you, Huda? Do you now think I'm one of those who don't keep their words? The worst people ever are those who break their promises, and now I'm one of them in your point of view, and yet your mobile is off! Are you punishing me?

He had earlier asked the waiter to charge his phone. He tried several times to call her, but that was in vain.

The night fell quickly, and the darkness of night took over light. He went back to his apartment and logged into his Facebook account waiting for Huda to show up any minute.

The website was as empty as a ground that just witnessed the end of a battle. The wind was whistling in the virtual, blue world. It was a gloomy wind.

It seemed that what he feared had already happened.

There always has been worse than the worst.

What is worse than no relationship is an amputated relationship.

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