

IZMIR

IZMIR
by Mac S. Pope
Copyright requested
October, 2000

PART 1

Downstairs:

Before dawn, before the first yearning wails from the muezzins high up in slender towers all around Izmir; before first light Barney and Isabel walked, bundled together, from their bed, outside on to the wide, cool, marble floor of their apartment balcony. At that hour they were still naked although she'd wrapped herself in the top sheet and he had pulled the blanket around himself. They went out every morning into the clear air under diamond stars, to smell Izmir: the great ovens of the city's factory bakeries were at high production then and filled the air with sweet, milky, yeasty odors of browning bread and rolls. Izmir and all of Turkey was peaceful under a white moon still as a hanging ball. Always at that hour the air was balmy and sensual as light ether, the views spectacular- from the dimly lit boats bobbing on the navy blue glittering wash of open bay below them, to the palm-lined streets that radiate up from the bay, past their building, on upwards to the hills overlooking Izmir- those hills crowned by Kadife-Kale, the ancient "Castle of Cushions"- the crumbling walls of Alexander the Great's summer palace.

Isabel spoke the first words of the day as they embraced leaning against the balcony's low wall: "Dahlin, time for you to get dressed and go get us a warm loaf. I'll have the coffee ready and the peanut butter and jelly 'n some orange juice..." Her smiling, untanned face glowed iridescent blue under moonglow, she was hard to leave. "How about dates and sweet olives, hunny?" Barney asked, still kissing her.

"Those too." she said, kissing him back

"We'll eat on the veranda, okay?"

"Out here on the terrace, dahlin "

"I'll get some fresh yogurt too, babaganush, ..." He broke off the kiss.

"Umm, whatever." Isabel said as he padded off.

"I guess I'm lucky!" she smiled to herself walking into the kitchen, "No woman, except 'Blondie,' in the comics, gets called 'Darling' these days. She recalled they started calling each other 'dahlin' and 'hunny' the same day they had met Jamal and Shamika, the young African American couple who lived in the apartment above theirs. Before them that kind of lovey talk would have seemed goofy, but after watching those two clutch and merge on impulse whenever they came near one another, after hearing Jamal call Shamika sugary names in his Barry white low register voice and hearing her feminine high, southern-sexy responses both Barney and Isabel came away believing that after a whole year of marriage they were looking on real human love for the first time. They had decided to copy Jamel and Shamika whole. Before that they had modelled themselves on two characters in a 1930's movie, sporting around in tuxedo and a silk dress. "I think we started our bogus lifestyle with that movie" she thought as she measured coffee grounds. "But don't knock bogus" she warned herself; "bogus got us where we wanted to go, so far." she balled her fists for emphasis. "bogus got us diplomatic status, Izmir, incredible salaries, class careers,- prestige up the ass! Bogus is good, she said seriously; it brought us our best friends, Jamel and Shamika - and they say they're at least as bogus as we are!" She chuckled, thinking about their stories so far.

Both Barney and Isabel had been raised in orphanages; She in New York, He in Columbus, Ohio. They had been ordinary looking, introspective children, not exactly what Mr and Mrs America were looking to adopt, so few of the prospective adopters paid them much attention. Approaching their early teens they each decided to abandon Happy Family ideas and concentrate on their daydreams.

They met by coincidence. Their orphanages had sent them to a joint college prep program for poor kids with decent I.Q.'s. The both of them had scored near-genius on paper and suddenly they were hot property. That drew them together to joke about the stupid irony of the whole thing.

IZMIR

"Adopters!" Barney had intoned in his scratchy baritone, "Dumb bastards missed having a couple of smart bastards!"

"Are you bragging?" Isabel had asked, she could see the self esteem showing off in Barney's shining brown eyes. She liked him. She understood that he, like her, was excited about the possible roads their intelligence might lead them on. As the two grew closer they started sharing- first orphanage jokes and stories, then, after awhile, private dreams: Barney wanted to be a CIA operative, nothing less. He felt he had an almost photographic memory, a passion for intrigue, adventure, maybe even danger. Isabel wanted the State Department, the Foreign Service- overseas; she'd read novels about diplomatic colony life. She was handy with languages, loved statistics and economics and learned a lot from the library reference books she'd consumed. As they plotted their plans ran together; they applied to Columbia University for prestige school backgrounds and both received full scholarships. In the year of their Cum Laude graduations they changed their names and they got married. They had heard things about the Agency and the Foreign Service; that they were still "Old Guard" despite all their claims of reform and diversity. A good Eastern school and a good Eastern name still meant a lot...people said. Barney's last name had been Padgett; they changed it to Barnaby Girard (Philadelphia Girards...?) Her name had been Isobel Belensky; she became Isabel Chapin, good Manhattan stock. They looked good; she with ginger colored hair and blue eyes, he with agent-short brown hair, deceptively clean cut face, physique buffed up by manic training. When they sat the Agency and Foreign Service exams and interviews they were'nt even asked about their origins - the powers that be had their folders; they may have presumed that two society debs had given away their unwanted babies years before, and those good blood lines had come together nicely on their own. Luckily the background checks, which discovered the legal name changes, came after the agency selection process. They were each contracted and were even assured that they would likely be posted jointly on overseas assignments.

Breakfast: They did'nt eat sitting across the table from one another anymore, now they copied the way Jamel and Shamika jammed their chairs together and sort of reclined together to eat out of the same plate:

"Dahlin', it sucks you can't tell me what it is you do all day..."

"Shhhh, Hunny, the very fact that I do something all day is classified..."

She glanced up at his cheshire cat smile and frowned. "I bring you all the skinny on all the crazy business I handle in Consular Affairs Office... like that incident on May day, when all the Americans in town were supposed to stay off the streets, especially near the radical University district, and of course we got a call that an army G.I. in uniform had struck a Turk student with his car outside the school.. About a thousand Turkish students and street toughs had surrounded him..."

"Yeah , what happened, how'd you keep that from flashing?" he asked.

"Luck!, seems the kids wife was with him and she started bitching at him in the street,- 'he's a loser, wrecked their last car in Texas...' - she threw her bag at him and stomped off..."

"And?"

"And, the Turk men rushed in to cushion the poor guys male ego...they righted his car, -which they'd flipped on its side, even the "injured" guy helped, they patted the G.I. on the back and kept saying "Gecmes olsun!..."

"which translates to "forgetaboutit..."

"Yeh, roughly", she said. "You know Turks, they're like the Americans over here: Unpredictable. Turkey changes people who stay here awhile... alters the DNA, I think: especially in Izmir, which is so sleek and flashy compared to the rest of conservative Turkey. Izmir types drink good liquor, dress like Paris, party at night and love American things - if not Americans in person. And, God, there are thousands of Americans in Izmir; Army and Air Force units, the NATO headquarters, my Consulate people...all with spouses and rugrats aplenty."

Everyone lived in downtown Izmir, sharing luxury midrise apartment complexes with the Turkish upper and middle class; social interaction between the two worlds came mainly through the black marketing of goods from the PX and Commissary supermarket, and that thrived. High ranking military and civilian officials and their wives did genteel crime with their Turkish and foreign counterparts, exchanging furs, silks, cognac and cigars for cash to build their retirement rocking chairs. Enlisted people dealt in cigarettes, liquor, blue jeans and

IZMIR

canned goods through shyster entrepreneurs. Turkish law prohibited US military investigators from operating in the country and although the traffic was officially illegal, only the most inept Turkish detective failed to show a pack of Marlboros in his shirt pocket.

Isabel thought of Jamel and Shamika's apartment upstairs - A shrine to the black market, they called it; a stunning place of handmade white leather sofas and chairs, rose quartz tables, breathtaking oriental carpets: Sarouks, Milas and Isfahans, with embroidered kilim covered cushions everywhere. Not bad for an Army two-striper, Jamel would say when Barney and Isabel visited.

Not bad at all: Jamel's Public Defender and his Army recruiter back home in burn-out Brooklyn had managed to have certain misdemeanor charges against him go unprosecuted, allowing him to enter the military. Shamika was pregnant with their first child, Marisa, then and he kept his promise to marry her, take her out of her unheated tenement room and bring her to his first permanent assignment. Jamel said they looked so shabby and scared, going through Istanbul airport, that even the beggars looked away, embarrassed.

"Look at us now, though!" Jamel could rightly brag. Because after about only six months of Brooklyn-style merchandising and socializing with the "fellas"; cadging and boosting ration cards from nonsmokers and nondrinkers, both of them hustling. Jamel and Shamika had made themselves a power name in Izmir. Normally, junior enlisted families found quarters in far less glamorous apartment buildings, but the two had the money and the ambition for the best. Normally, the Turkish Generals and other old families would not

have tolerated their social class in the building, but word quickly went around that Jamel and Shamika were Muslims. The Turks took pride and pleasure in their presence then; and they were Muslims, at least technically; Jamel's Dad had been a firebreather Black Muslim but his children had fallen away soon as they reached their teens. Jamel had remained a "social Muslim" never foreseeing that someday that might be an advantage. Shamika followed her husband, lovingly, but tended to backslide to Baptist sometimes...

They were the only known American Muslims in the US colony in Izmir and the Turks looked after them like pet cats, helped them shop the bazaars, fed them bits of Turkish and temple Arabic, and showed them off - in cabarets, at their homes, at the Mosques... The Americans, including Jamel's Commanding Officer, treated them with cautious "Sensitivity".

On their way out of the apartment building Isabel reminded Barney of their supper date at Jamel and Shamika's in the evening. They'd wear their new caftans - Jamel and Shamika relaxed in long slinky-looking caftan-gowns all the time, while they had sat around looking like the Mertzes...

They had learned so much from those two. Learned how blank their own years of living in institutions had left them. Learned about high emotions, watching them argue so heatedly that Barney and Isabel thought the floor would split open beneath them. Then, amazingly, Shamika would approach Jamel, he still silent and pouting - touch his arm and say:

"Y'hungry?"

"Ummm, ain' had nuthin..."

"Let me get you sumthin'..." And it would be over. They would step in to each other. The meal would be superb, with plenty for all of them. Barney and Isabel had never seen that kind of anger or love or much of anything else in their orphanage and college cocoons. They had dealt with each other and the world on the surface, jokingly, always imitating, always working to learn the rules and abide by them.

They had gone about their lovemaking like happy rabbits - and their sessions had'nt lasted much longer, until Jamel, big brother patient smile on his noble-looking mahogany face, briefed Barney on the rudiments of foreplay, delay and afterplay. Barney taught Isabel and she ran out and proclaimed him a God - from the balcony - knowing Izmir would'nt hear or care.

Upstairs:

Shamika let them in; her pretty, pecan-colored face bright and welcoming. A peach colored caftan clung to her tall lean shape as she oohed Barnibel's new look.

(Jamel had contracted their names into 'Barnibel' and it grew .3 into their nickname.) The room was immaculate and plush; Shamika's maid was one

IZMIR

of the best in town. There were about eight other guests but Jamel also came to greet them and draw them into the group. There was a mix of people attracted to Jamel and Shamika: a Turk with a doctorate degree, Shiraz -Bey, who worked as a NATO interpreter was there with his wife Ana, who was dressed in an evening gown. There was a young black couple, Jamel's co-worker Reginald and his wife Gladys, both draped in flowing African dashikis, two French tourists Shamika had met on the street came along. Ahmet, Jamel's black market dealer was there with a lithe belly dancer he was obsessing over. The background music playing was an old Ahmad Jamal record, everyone looked cool to each other under the soft glow of red lighting and burning incense.

Isabel was telling the group about an incident that morning at the Consulate. "This Sergeant from Puerto Rico comes running in, eyes wide as dinner plates, he's shouting:

'Theres spies in my building -I must be the target!', I asked him what happened, he says he was standing on the street before his apartment building, his wife calls down from the third floor, says something in Spanish, but he can't hear. After a couple of repeats the little girl of a Turk family sitting dignified on the second floor exchanges glances with her elders and leans down to tell him, in clear Spanish: "Dijo que 'vayase pa' la tienda y traiga pan y leche...y da te prisa-bago!" ("Get to the store and bring me bread and milk and hurry! -you lazy...") "They tipped their hand!" the sergeant cried, they must got lifelong training schools set up for this..." Isabel said she tried to show the man the wonderful time warp he'd stepped through; that he'd encountered a family of Ladino's - direct descendants of the Spanish Jews his Spanish ancestors had driven out of Spain in the fifteenth century. The Turkish sultans had given them refuge but over the centuries they had passed their language down along with their culture and religion. The sergeant was'nt buying any of that, Isabel said.

"If they turn out to be spies its on your egghead butts!" he said as he slammed the door behind him.

"The dummy ratio in the Army has risen above forty-nine percent..." Reginald said, so matter of fact it took a moment for everyone to break down laughing at his joke.

"Excuse my US Army, Shamika drawled... we owe a lot to the system. It 's been good to my man and me; not just these material things either: I took Marisa on a bus trip with other Army wives and kids to the old Greek ruins at Ephesus, down the coast. Well, the bus broke down and we're standing around near the well in this tiny village and the villagers are staring at us like we aliens... Anyway, these Turkish women sees Marisa and goes to pick her up, all smiling and stuff - and suddenly one of our group, a white woman from Iowa, or somewhere, ran over and blocked the women from touching Marisa: 'You Back off!, she said, -give your hepatitis and your TB to your own kind, ladies - this is Our Kind!'

"I guess I had mixed emotions?..." Shamika said. "On the one hand I hated to see the shame on those womens faces as they backed off...Lord, I recognized that... but I'll admit I never felt so included in being American until that moment. I talked to the other colored girls on the bus and they said about the same thing....'Our Kind', goddam! -gave me shivers!"

Shiraz-bey and Ana had never been so happy in their married life as they were with the young Americans, both weere from aristocratic families that stretched back into Ottoman Empire glory. Shiraz-bey was a classics scholar; knew Greek, Latin, German; English was his weakest language and Americans thought him fluent. He had left a professorship to become an intepreter for the US Forces because it paid three times the money... that fact haunted him all day as he sat at his small desk in the NATO support facility office. Unless some officer or sergeant needed a Turkish regulation translated or an explanation of a local custom there was no one for the 62 year old scholar to talk to, nothing to do except reread Islamic poetry verses. When Jamel signed into the unit Shiraz had his mission: young Jamel knew basic Arabic after six years at the strict Black Muslim school his father had sent him to. He knew some Koran passages and enjoyed Shiraz' coaxing him to learn more.

Shiraz introduced him to important locals at Mosque services. Jamel even appeared on the covers of Turkish newspapers, in full uniform, kneeling prostrate with a

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

