

The Presence

Chapter 15 - Tobruk

“Two large helicopters.” Said Kevin. “I’d guess at least a dozen soldiers are going to land at the temple. They might be here for the valuable gold finds.....As I said, we need to be careful.”

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James Lerner had known his birthday was coming up. After all, who forgets their own birthday ? His daughter, Jackie, would probably be about to leave a card and a gift in his kitchen. His comfortable cottage near Harwich, now felt so far away. He’d never intended to mention the big day to the others, as sixty two was beginning to sound quite old. Definitely too old to have fired an assault rifle at a beast that refused to die. James hadn’t been able to save Travis and that too, made him feel quite old. Drew banged on his room door, before instantly opening it. Her smiling face beamed at him.

“Happy birthday, James.” Said Drew. “You have to come downstairs. Beni had his cook make you a special breakfast.”

Nick kept a journal and in case he forgot something, Drew monitored that journal. Of course Nick had a note about his birthday. Nick might still have forgotten about it, but Drew was one of those people.....James would have bet anything, that she’d never forgotten anyone’s birthday, ever.

“I didn’t really want a lot of fuss.” Said James.

“But fuss is what you’re getting.....Be downstairs in five minutes.” Said Drew. “Or.....I’ll bring everyone up here.....With the cake and candles.”

“There’s a cake ?” Asked James.

“Yes there is.” Said Drew.

“Actually, I quite like cake.”

“Then come downstairs.” Said Drew.

James quite liked, Beni Melgar, owner manager of the Melgar Hotel. A guest house really, the sort of place his parents had used for holidays when he was a kid. The hotel was fairly close to the various cemeteries. There were a lot of cemeteries in Tobruk; some would say there were far too many. The city had changed hands a couple of times in World War II. There were German cemeteries, Allied cemeteries and another for those who’d merely come to complain about the noise. One of Beni’s jokes.....He had lots of them.

“Alright.....Let’s get this over with.” James Muttered.

Being a bit of an introvert had suited his career as an accountant. It had even suited being some sort of freelance exorcist. It was things like contrived social functions, which left him feeling he’d rather be somewhere else, anywhere else. James left his small but comfortable room and used the stairs to go down one floor. There were only two floors, the one with the bedrooms and, the ground floor. Everything else was down there, including Beni’s private accommodation.

“Where is everyone ?” Yelled James.

“In the dining room, where else ?” Drew shouted back.

There they all were, sitting around the one table large enough for all of them to sit around it. In the centre of the table, was a large cake, complete with about a dozen candles. James didn’t like the

number of candles, of course he didn't. It was either the right number, or a single candle in the centre of the cake.

"Happy birthday." Said Adie.

"Sit down, James.....The food is getting cold." Said Beni.

The sort of breakfast you'd get in a guest house in Britain. Almost a full English breakfast, which couldn't have been easy in Tobruk. Beni had obviously made a few calls and redeemed a few favours. Everything on James's plate, looked great and smelled....Wonderful.

"Thank you Beni.....Breakfast looks marvellous." Said James.

"Eat.....I think Beni had to sell his soul to get the bacon." Said Drew.

It was a great breakfast, though there were no tomatoes. James ate and when offered more he accepted and ate yet more eggs, bacon and fried bread.

"We're not allowed a slice of cake, until you've cleared your plate." Said Marwa.

"Where did you get the tiny candles?" Asked James.

"Beni's cook knows someone.....Who knows someone." Said Nick.

Nick and Beni were at opposite ends of the table. The grudge between them about Faiza would last a lifetime, James had already realised that. Beni might have called a temporary truce, but he was still giving Nick a few nasty looks. There was something about brothers and sisters. It was as if some brothers took the whole protection thing, far too seriously. Not just in Muslim families either, James had lost a childhood friend, because he'd dated Mick's sister.

"That's it; he's not left a mark on the plate, Beni." Said Marwa. "Please.....Can we have some cake?"

"Light the candles.....No cutting the cake until he's blown out the candles." Said Beni.

Drew lit the candles and James remembered fighting Mick, after he and Rosie had been caught, kissing and feeling one another. To a fifteen year old James, fourteen year old Rosie was the most wonderful, gorgeous girl on the planet. James had never seen Mick again and as for Mick's sister? Rosie had obviously decide the whole matter was too much. She'd got her mother to tell James, that he was no longer welcome in their house. Yes, you didn't have to be born a Muslim, to run afoul of over protective brothers.

"No being greedy.....James has to taste it first." Said Adie.

It was nice to see Adie smiling again, though there was unsurprisingly, still a darkness behind her eyes. James bit into his slice of birthday cake and it really was, excellent.

"This cake is.....Delicious." Said James. "Really, really.....Excellent."

Everyone said happy birthday again, including several of Beni's guests. For a moment, James had forgotten that it was breakfast time, in a hotel.

"The wrong time to talk business, I know." Said Beni. "I've decided though.....I will buy your truck, if you still want to sell it?"

James could feel the tension as Nick agreed the deal with Beni.

"At the price we discussed?" Asked Nick.

"Yes.....Well, am I the new owner of your old Russian truck?" Asked Beni.

"You are Beni." Said Nick. "It's never let us down and I'm sure it'll give you no trouble."

"I'll miss it.....I always feel safe in our old truck." Said Drew.

"Me too." Added Adie.

"We can hardly drive it back to London." Said Nick. "I can imagine Mary's comments if I parked it in our street."

"Who is Mary?" Asked Marwa.

Nick told Marwa, leaving out none of Mary's quirks and foibles. Including her calling the police with descriptions of those dropping litter in the street. There was affection in Nick's words though, and he told the story with a smile on his face. James too, had moaned about Mary and her antics, but he hoped she was doing well after seeing Bert killed.

"She sounds a monster." Said Marwa.

"Yes.....She is, but Mary does grow on you." Said Nick. "Plus, she's been in the block a very long time."

"I think Mary knew Methuselah's mother." Added James. "Nick is right though, she does grow on you."

"Like warts." Said Drew. "What ? She doesn't like me and doesn't try to hide it."

More cake for everyone, washed down with the strongest coffee James had ever tasted. Despite saying it wasn't the time to discuss business, Beni seemed determined to talk about it.

"I have talked to a few people.....I can get you on a container ship to Turkey." Said Beni.

"I was hoping to step off a luxury yacht in Marseille." Said James. "Turkey will be easier though, I can see that. Far less formalities to go through. Where in Turkey, precisely ?"

"I bet we end up coming ashore at a two dog town no one has heard of." Said Drew.

"Maybe even a one dog town." Added Marwa.

"Would you call Antalya a one dog town ?" Asked Beni. "The container ship can drop you off there, with no awkward.....complications about who you are and why the police of several countries are looking for you."

Beni had almost whispered the last part. He was right though; there'd be the police in many countries wishing to have a few words with them. Violent death did seem to be following them around.

"You make it sound as though we're hardened criminals." Said Adie.

"The police probably think we are criminals." Said James.

"Antalya, the fifth largest city in Turkey." Said Nick. "A major tourism centre and I imagine.....A very busy port. I have to ask.....Us arriving there with our grubby bags and weary faces. Is this legit Beni ?"

Beni was holding it back, but it was there in his face. The hotelier would have loved to leap on Nick and bash the crap out of him. He wasn't the first to feel like that, James had seen the look on other faces. Nick Rees wasn't a bad person, but he could really annoy some people.

"Of course it isn't legit." Said Beni. "You'll be arriving in Antalya without passports you can actually use, without being taken away by the local Türk Polis. My contacts can get you past all that. They'll even supply you with a car, of sorts. I'm only doing all this, because....We were once like family."

"Thank you Beni, it is appreciated." Said James.

"None of this is free; I'll have people to pay." Said Beni. "With luck, there'll be papers too, though they won't pass close inspection. You'll get some cash for the truck, but don't expect too much."

That caused more friction, on top of the already festering old wounds. Part of James wanted to meet Faiza one day, to put a face to the name. She'd certainly left her mark on the lives of Beni and Nick. In the end, Nick shook hands with Beni and a small bundle of US dollars ended up in Nick's pocket. James had to say it...

"So.....We're off to Antalya."

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“There have been so many offers on Nick’s book, even movie deals.” Said Sovi. “Betsy is dealing with them all, but he’s going to be a wealthy man. Come with me on this one, Den. Get known, be animated and quirky, just like they love on chat shows.”

Chat shows weren’t what they were, but the good ones still attracted a decent number of viewers. On the whole though, why watch celebrities on TV, when they were telling every secret they had on social media. Plus, there seemed to be a competition to get naked in their posts. But Rob Fong had a certain something and his late night show, still caused a few waves on a good night. There had been one glitch in his career, when Rob had been unpleasant to a rising actress on live TV. There had been talk of sensitivity classes for a while.....But the public loved him and Rob was forgiven.

“I’m not sure, Sovi.” Said Den. “I have no idea what to say.”

“Just be yourself and tell it the way it happened, warts and all.” Said Sovi. “This is as much about your relationship with Stuart, as it is about things that go bump in the night.”

“Our relationship was one night between the sheets.” Said Den.

“Then tell them that.” Said Sovi. “Use some of the emotion I’ve seen. There are no promises, but if the public appear to like you, it might lead to something. Just a few personal appearances would pay your mortgage.”

It didn’t look like Den was going to go for it, which was a shame. Den might not get rich out of it, but there’d be something in it for her. Eventually a film company might even want her for voice overs. But, life was tough and if you didn’t kick people in the ankles and make a noise.....People tended not to notice you.

“What’s this Rob Fong like ? Is he alright ?” Asked Den.

“Being truthful, he’s a bastard.” Said Sovi. “No matter what, never go anywhere alone with him. On the other hand, he knows the game. The female half of the population, those with two x chromosomes. They’ll have a lot of sympathy for you and almost none at all for Stuart. Rob will milk that for all it’s worth.....Which puts him firmly on your side.”

“Alright.....I’ll go.” Said Den.

“Good.....Dress smart but not flashy.” Said Sovi. “No gown covered in glittering sequins.”

“Jeezzz.... Yeah, I’ve got nothing to wear.”

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Mary Seeley had been through a weekend where half her family seemed to be trying to fit in her flat, all at the same time. It was only a small flat and there were a lot of cousins, a few nieces and several nephews. They’d brought food and all in all, it had been a nice weekend. Mary preferred her family in small numbers though and if possible, only the family members she actually liked. Melanie was Mary’s favourite niece and she’d arrived on her own, with a cake in a box.

“How does the saying go.....Sometimes you just need cake.” Said Mel.

The cake had been reduced at the local cake shop, Mel had admitted that. It tasted of coffee and walnuts and didn’t taste at all like something reduced to clear. Mary used a fork to eat hers, while Mel used her fingers. Most people would have been handed a fork and told off, but a favourite niece, was allowed to break a few rules.

“Did you get it at the place near Camden Passage ?” Asked Mary.

“Yes.....Not bad for half off the price on the box.”

“It’s delicious.” Said Mary.

Mel was one of the few people Mary was fairly honest with. No telling her about enjoyable times with Bert, she’d take that secret to her grave. Even the police hadn’t got the truth out of her about

that. Mary routinely told her friends and family what they wanted to hear. Apart from a few notable exceptions, Mel knew everything about the strange goings on in Mary's flat.....And the block.

"So Aunt Mary.....Are you glad to be back ?" Asked Mel. "Have things improved in the block ?"

"There's something here, Mel." Said Mary. "It wanders around my home, sometimes muttering strange foreign sounding words. Quietly though, it never keeps me awake. I know it sounds nuts, but it doesn't scare me.....I know it won't hurt me."

"Do you see it ?" Asked Mel.

"No, never.....I just hear it moving about and muttering." Said Mary. "I don't mind.....I feel safe here."

"Oh dear.....If mum knew, she wouldn't want you living here." Said Mel.

"Now.....There are things we never mention to your mother, agreed ?"

"Alright.....She'll never hear about it from me." Said Mel. "I'm worried though.....Are you really safe here ?"

Mary thought about it for a minute or so. She held Mel's hand, with its fingers covered in cake crumbs. Safe.....Did she feel safe ? Mary felt calm and content, which at her age; would have to do.

"I'm.....Well, I'm not young anymore." Said Mary. "Just waking up and getting out of bed, sometimes feels like a huge thing. But yes, I feel safe. There is something lurking in my home, which has no right to be here. It doesn't want to hurt me though, I know it."

"How old are you, Aunt Mary ?" Asked Mel.

Mary had to chuckle, she'd once told her doctor that her age was none of his business. Everyone wanted to know everything about everyone these days. It had become like a social disease of nosiness.

"Oh, my dear Mel." Said Mary. "I'm not sure if your mother knows my age, and she's my sister. You'll know one day, when you're digging through my bills and letters. My will and everything essential, is in an old cedar wood box under my bed."

"Don't be morbid.....You might outlive us all." Said Mel.

It seemed unlikely, but Mary let that comment go by.

"Have you time to do a little shopping with me ?" Asked Mary.

"Yes, of course.....What do you need to buy ?" Asked Mel.

"Nothing in particular." Said Mary. "I feel a need to be seen in the local supermarket. People should know that I'm back."

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Jerry Zale hadn't really expected to ever need the gun. Like a packet of condoms at an industry awards function, it was nice to have in a pocket, just in case. Ninety nine times out of a hundred, the condoms went back home, unused. The gun in his hand made him feel better though, after seeing someone lying on the ground.

"Crap, Jerry.....I think they're wearing a police uniform." Said Celia.

It hadn't been a race to get to the temple and there had always been a chance they'd arrive shortly after the Libyan police force, part of their Ministry of home affairs. Not that it mattered, the police could probably be paid for all sorts of valuable information. Two large police trucks were there, with what looked like a body lying near one of them.

"Can we get the car a bit closer ?" Asked Celia.

"No, we leave the car here." Said Jerry. "We'll walk the rest of the way, very carefully and slowly. Anything mildly threatening and we leave.....Never to return."

"I like the sound of that last bit." Said Celia.

They'd stopped at least fifty yards from the police trucks, maybe a little further. The car was their only refuge and needed to be kept well back and hopefully, out of harm's way. Celia even locked it, as they began a slow trudge over the dry, sandy ground. As they passed a bullet riddled Jeep, the door was open.

"Keep an eye out.....I'll look inside the Jeep." Said Jerry.

A typical student pile of dirty washing and a smell of grubby socks. There were a few tech devices, but Jerry had no idea what they were used for. His handgun would get the job done most of the time, but he'd been hoping to find something better. An Uzi would have been nice, with maybe a second Uzi as a backup.

"Anything useful?" Asked Celia.

"No, just dirty clothes and archaeology equipment." Said Jerry.

By the time they reached the body, it was obvious the dead man was a cop. The badge on his shirt pocket, the holster on his belt. He even had the obligatory short haircut and shiny boots. No obvious cause of death, though his head was twisted around at a strange angle.

"I'd better check for a pulse." Said Celia. "I'm not normally a gun person.....But I'll be taking his gun."

"Fair enough.....Check him for spare clips too." Said Jerry.

Celia had done a little medical training somewhere; she definitely knew more than he did. She felt the cops neck for a pulse and put her cheek over his mouth. Just to be certain, she felt for a wrist pulse too.

"He's dead.....And cooling down." Said Celia. "My amateur guess is that he died sometime last night."

"Any guess at cause of death?" Asked Jerry.

"Someone very strong, twisted his neck."

"Like bumping off the Sunday chicken." Said Jerry.

"Oh.....Jerry."

The dead cop had a laminated card in a plastic holder. No wallet, that was probably in one of the trucks. Celia kept the card, but Jerry didn't ask the dead guy's name. That would come later, as part of the story. At the moment, a name would make the dead cop, all too real.

"Keep your gun ready.....We'll look inside their trucks." Said Jerry.

Not exactly modern trucks, they had open backs, where some of the cops had probably had to travel for a couple of days. The cabs were where all the interesting things might be, including a cop radio that could connect Jerry and Celia with the outside world.

"It'll be the army next." Said Celia. "They'll come here in force and seal off the ruins. Knowing the way the military works, they might blow the temple apart."

"And you call me a cynic." Muttered Jerry.

A young man was inside the cab and he was armed. He was pointing the kind of assault rifle at them, which Jerry was hoping to find. The man looked western and quite young. When Jerry gave him a good look over, he looked like a student from the university.

"Stand still.....I'm armed." Shouted the man.

"Calm down.....Are you one of Louise's people?" Asked Celia. "She sent us to see you."

Not the exact truth, actually nowhere the near the truth. Jerry had to give it to Celia though; she knew how to defuse a stressful situation.

"Thanks God.....Someone on our side. When the cops arrived we thought we'd be safe, but after they'd been inside the temple.....They started shooting at us. Naomi hurt herself running away, but Henrike and I are alright.....I'm Kevin by the way. The strange thing is, that the cops never chased us. They seemed to lose interest once we ran away."

"I'm Jerry Zale and as I said, we were sent to see if you were alright." Said Jerry.

"I'm Celia Margolin, the rarely introduced photographer.....By the way, what killed the cop ? I'm guessing it was nothing to do with you guys."

"No.....It was something that found him in the dark." Said Kevin. "There are things that move about at night. We've set up camp in our second Jeep. I only came back to get water and a few tins. Once the cops go inside the temple, I can take whatever I like. They don't come out for hours."

"How far away is your camp ?" Asked Jerry.

"Quite a way, best to take your car." Said Kevin. "It's a bit close to the temple anyway.....They might take an interest in it."

Strange behaviour from the police and things that killed in the dark. The story was taking a weird turn, but it had been pretty weird to start with. Part of Jerry was excited by the potential of the story to make money. Another part of him was scared he might not live to write the story. They were in their car and reversing away from the temple.....

"How many cops are there, Kevin." Asked Celia.

"We're not totally sure, about eight or nine, originally." Said Kevin. "One was probably killed by the thing in the darkness. I killed another one of them, though he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. I hadn't got their times to do things quite right.....And there he was, looking at me. As his hand moved towards his gun, I shot him. They've left him.....Which is beyond simply weird. His body is still there....The other cops haven't even covered him up."

"I take it this isn't normal behaviour for Libyan cops ? Sorry, I have to ask." Said Jerry.

"Well, they're not Harry Bosch, but shooting at us.....No, they're not normally like this."

The second Jeep was in a dip in the ground, close to a mile from the Temple. A pretty good place to hide actually, the Jeep was almost impossible to see, until you were almost on top of it. Why hadn't the students simply loaded up with water, tins and driven back to Tripoli ? Henrike seemed to be in charge and hanging around seemed to have been his idea. The way Naomi looked at Henrike, told Jerry they were a couple and likely being intimate on a regular basis. As for Kevin ? Jerry still wasn't sure how Kevin fitted into the picture.

"The finds in the temple are incredible." Said Henrike. "The reason we remained there was because some of the finds are truly priceless. Once the gun happy cops arrived, it seemed even more important to monitor the site."

"Louise will know we're in trouble." Said Kevin. "We're tapping a state of play into the Matrix, every day."

"You have a way of talking to Tripoli ?" Asked Celia.

"Not so much talking, as tapping in words on a keyboard." Said Naomi. "We can only send messages to our university, but yes.....We can communicate with Tripoli."

Celia was going to look at Naomi's right knee, but to Jerry, it was going to need surgery in a major hospital. Whatever Naomi had collided with, or fallen over. It had shattered her knee. Given a year and left to its own devices, her knee would probably fuse together, as it healed. At the moment, Naomi couldn't walk much at all.

"So you see.....After the others left, it seemed sensible to stay where we are." Said Henrike.

"And.....Someone needs to make sure the cops don't dig up Travis Givens." Said Kevin.

Jerry suddenly felt happy, as he imagined not having to use his overdraft facility for a while. Before Travis had been buried, he needed to have died. Something needed to have killed Travis Givens. That could turn a truly awesome story into a pension fund.

“You’re saying Travis was killed ?” Asked Celia.

“Yes, killed by something inside the temple.” Said Kevin.

Jerry had a small voice recorder in his pocket. He brought it out and turned it on. Kevin had finally made it clear who he was in the group. He was deep throat, the man who’d end up telling them everything.

“Now Kevin.....Tell me everything you know about the death of Travis Givens ?” Asked Jerry.

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As she seemed to no longer be of interest to the police, Florence Glynn was back in the office, doing her job. Being Betsy Nagle’s PA wasn’t always that busy and hectic, but there were fairly frantic days. Betsy was trying to agree a movie deal arranged for Nick. It’d need to be signed when he returned home, but as Betsy kept saying.

“We can at least get the ink dry on the contract.”

Nick was due to make a fortune and Betsy would get her percentage. Times were good; Betsy was even bringing in coffee and nibbles every morning, from the nearby coffee place. It was nice to work for a smiling boss, rather than a moody one. Betsy had mentioned her version of the origin of the word Gig. It seemed a way of saying God is good, when musicians had a Gig. As in, God is good, we can afford to eat. Florence looked at the general email account, while nibbling at a pastry Betsy had brought in.

“Jeezzzz.....Why didn’t someone call ?” Muttered Florence.

Crap, did Adie know ? Florence actually slapped her own wrist. Of course Adalind Givens knew, she was out there in Libya as part of the team. It was a very non-committal email from an admin person at the university in Tripoli. Lots of disclaimers about unverified information. No wonder Louise hadn’t wanted it sent from her account.

‘We’re waiting for the police to confirm the information sent by our students. At the moment, it seems fairly certain that Travis Givens has been killed. The cause of death still has to be verified, but it may have been an accident while surveying the ruins.’

It was no more an accident, than an attack by wild dogs. Florence ignored the temptation to yell across the office to Betsy. First she was going to read the entire email. Not a long job, as over half of it was legal notices and even more disclaimers.

‘Those travelling with Travis Givens appear to be alive and well, though their current location is unknown. We’ve heard there have been a few minor wounds, but when they left the temple site, none of them had serious injuries. As soon as we have further details, we will contact you.’

Someone called Jenny had put her name on the email and Florence wondered if there had been some arm twisting involved. It didn’t read like an email from a respected organisation. Instead of yelling, Florence printed the email and took it into Betsy’s office.

“Sorry to be the bringer of bad news.....It seems Travis Givens has died in Libya.”

There was no wailing, or pulling of hair, but then again.....Travis wasn’t one of Betsy’s clients. They had been helping him with a few non-book related items, but he was represented by a major literary agent in Kensington. Betsy read the email and then put it under a glass paperweight at the left of her desk.

“Dreadful.....Awful news, Florence.” Said Betsy. “At least we know the others are alright, even if we don’t know where they are. I have a feeling Nick and Drew will return in one piece. Some people seem to have survivors, stamped across their foreheads.”

“Do you want me to inform anyone about Travis ?”

“Do we.....Do we ?” Muttered Betsy. “Send a copy of the email, but don’t comment on it. Just say we’ve received it today, but aren’t sure it’s accurate. We can play the non-committal game too. Send it to the literary agents Travis used. Sovi Björlund should get a copy too and.....We don’t want it all over the world, like cheap confetti at a wedding, but..... Carl Wood from Holland Klein & Martin needs a copy, just in case there’s any blowback from this. Travis was well known and sooner or later, things will turn ugly.”

Florence was almost out of Betsy’s office, when she decided to ask the question. Despite knowing her family, Betsy could get quite angry with her, but she always gave a truthful answer to questions.

“Truthfully, Betsy.....What do you think happened out there ?”

“What we always thought might happen of course.” Said Betsy. “They entered the temple and started digging about. Something got angry at them fiddling around and attacked them. Only Travis was killed, but it could just as easily have been all of them. Nick is trouble, Florence.....But he might have a bestselling book now and a movie deal.”

A movie.....Florence wondered what they’d call it. The honest name for it should be ‘never summon something you can’t get rid of.’ Nick was bound to call it something that hinted at heroism though, his heroism.

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Tobruk looked like a port that had seen better day, much better days. Similarly the container vessel looked to have been chosen to blend in. Nonsense of course, though the Melak Sunrise had definitely seen far better days. Tatty to the point where Drew wondered if it had passed, whatever inspections old ships had to have. Paint peeling off in various places and a general impression of grubbiness. Assuming it was owned by a company called Melak, they didn’t seem to take pride in owning the aging container vessel. Drew turned and looked at everyone. There didn’t seem to be one happy face.

“I know.....I know.” Said Nick. “It will get us to Antalya though and will probably still be delivering people and containers, fifty years from now.”

“Old and reliable.....It could be worse, I suppose.” Said Drew.

“Crap.....What a relic.” Said James.

Just one man near the walkway and he had no intention of helping to carry their cases and trunks. Beni too, had made sure he wasn’t there.

“Sorry, lots of prior engagements.” He’d told them.

They struggled a bit, but Drew was determined to enjoy her last hour or so in Tobruk. She might never visit the city again and didn’t want her memory to be of a place she hated. There’d be proper beds and reasonable food on the Melak Sunrise, Beni had promised. Eventually they were stood on the ship, next to everything they possessed in Libya, a surprisingly heavy pile of stuff. The two AK47 knockoffs had been left in the truck for Beni to either keep, or throw away.

“Hello !” Shouted James. “Is there someone to show us our rooms ?”

The man who’d avoided helping returned and he still seem allergic to physical work. He did walk in front of them though, while directing them down two sets of stairs and along several corridors. He spoke a local version of Arabic, but ‘these are your rooms,’ didn’t require high level translating. Drew chose a door at random and.....Was actually pleased.

“Wow, this is better than I was expecting.” Said Drew.

Adie stepped into the room with her, probably out of curiosity. No TV or entertainment system, but the bed looked nice and that was the important thing. There was bottled water on a table, but no fridge. Instant coffee and tea bags, but there was creamer instead of milk. Everything wasn't quite what you'd ideally want, but it would do.

“It looks comfortable and at first glance.....It looks clean.” Said Drew.

There was a porthole instead of a proper window, which Drew loved.

“I've always wanted to travel on a ship with portholes in my room.” Said Drew.

“Can I be in here with you ?” Asked Adie.

“Why ? You'll have your own room.”

“I'd feel safer sharing.....Come on Drew; it'll be like sleep overs as kids. The bed is large and we can scrunch up a bit.....Please say yes.” Pleaded Adie.

It wasn't ideal, as Drew always had trouble sleeping in a strange bed. Add on Adie fussing about and it could easily become a nightmare. On the other hand, Adie probably hadn't slept on her own in years and her husband had just died. She had said she'd feel safer sharing a room.

“Fine.....We'll find some junk food and have a pyjama party.” Said Drew.

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Henrike wasn't sure what he thought of Jerry and Celia. It had taken a while for Jerry to admit he was a journalist and they definitely hadn't been sent by Louise. On the other hand, two extra people were useful, especially as Naomi needed a lot of help to walk. Just so long as Jerry didn't try to take over. Henrike was determined to resist that.

“Do you hear that ?” Asked Naomi. “Sounds like a helicopter.”

They were still claiming the back of the Jeep to sleep in and despite her damaged knee; Naomi was more than happy to have sex most nights. Very careful sex of course, but often surprisingly energetic. He could hear the noise now, though it sounded a long way off.

“You're right.....Sounds like a helicopter.” He said. “Might be a rescue party sent by Louise.”

“I hope so.....I want to get away from this dreadful place.” Said Naomi. “I want to go home and never come back.”

They dressed, with Henrike helping her when she needed it. They were getting good at dressing and undressing in the Jeep. One advantage of a hot climate, was not wearing much clothing anyway. Louise had once addressed a meeting by blaming a minor epidemic of urinary infections on loose morals and skimpy clothing in a hot climate. Everyone had chuckled about that typical Louise comment. They were students.....They'd probably happily copulate in a tent at the North Pole.

“I should go and see where they land.” He said. “Are you going to be alright ?”

“Yes.....Go, Henrike.....Make sure they know we're here.”

Still dark outside, it had to be hours away from dawn. Henrike could see a shape in the darkness, a Kevin shaped silhouette against the sky. Kevin hadn't slept much anyway and after the police shooting at them, he didn't seem to sleep at all. For some reason, Henrike found himself whispering....

“You heard it too then ? Sounds like a helicopter.” Said Henrike.

“More than one helicopter I think.” Said Kevin. “They probably sent the army this time.”

Their Jeep was hidden by the hollow in the ground. Henrike walked up to the flat sandy soil of the desert and looked roughly west, to where the sound seemed to be coming from. Kevin had followed him and he was spinning around, while looking at the sky. A clear night, the sky was full of stars.

“Definitely two helicopters.” Said Kevin.

Jerry and Celia must have been slow getting dressed, or they hadn't heard the noise as quickly as Naomi. By the time they were stood next to Henrike, the sound of two powerful helicopters was unmistakable.

"Coming from the west.....Do you have any binoculars?" Asked Jerry.

"No.....We did, but they're in the other Jeep." Said Kevin.

The other Jeep had seemed to annoy the cops in some way. It's said that an assault rifle on full automatic fire, can cut a car in half. The cops had tried to prove that with their Jeep. Luckily, their vehicle had been the only casualty.

"There.....Two of them, flying with no lights." Said Kevin.

The army arriving didn't fill Henrike with happiness, not in Libya. There had been several minor wars, Gadhafi, more minor wars and finally, an all-out civil war. It wasn't a place where the locals instantly trusted anyone in an army uniform. Two large helicopters running without lights, was a huge red flag.

"Thank fuck the army is here at last." Said Celia.

"We should be careful.....They might not be friendly." Said Kevin.

"What do you mean?" Asked Jerry.

"Listen to him, Kevin is our expert on the local politics." Said Henrike. "If Kevin says be careful.....We're going to be careful."

Kevin was also know in the university as Lawrence of Arabia and had a reputation for being a bit flaky. Though, Jerry and Celia didn't need to know that. It was right though, Kevin did know local politics better than most.

"Two large helicopters." Said Kevin. "I'd guess at least a dozen soldiers are going to land at the temple. They might be here for the valuable gold finds.....As I said, we need to be careful."

"He's right." Said Celia.

The two helicopters did a circle of the area near the temple, before coming into land. The sound of automatic weapons began soon after they'd landed. The army were fighting the cops, which was strange. On the other hand, the helicopters had looked a bit good for the Libyan army.

"I'd suggest getting into the cars and running away." Said Henrike. "But.....I'm now curious about what the hell is going on."

"Me too." Said Jerry.

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