

Chapter 37 – In the Lion’s Den

Adam stopped dead, stunned: He did not know how to react. Staring disbelievingly at the figure behind the desk, the only words he could splutter were: “WHAT THE FUCK!”

“Surprised, Jew boy?” Rashid greeted him with the same banter he and Adam had once used to good naturedly tease each other: “Picked up any *shiksas* in London?” Again, that ironic smile.

Was this a trick? Was somebody screwing with his head? No. This was definitely Rashid. Slightly older, greying around the temples, a little heavier around the gills. Looking for all the world like a prosperous banker in his conservative, Saville Row-tailored grey suit and Oxford blue tie. The lilting Indian accent was his. That same voice that had sparked the primal reflex just a few moments ago when he heard “Come in” through the closed door. This was the same Rashid, the kid reporter he had mentored, guided, trained and who had been one of his best contacts, a close, trusted friend and an ally in the journalistic crusade against the dark forces of apartheid.

His immediate impulse was to throw his arms around him, to give him a hearty, brotherly hug, slap him on the back, go and have a stonking hot curry together. But he knew why he was here and who – and what – Rashid had become.

His body was clammy and he could feel sweat forming under his arms. His stomach was in a tight knot as he rapidly tracked back on his sessions with Avigdor and Vered. “They knew! They fucking knew! The bloody shits...they knew and they didn’t say a word. Just sent me into the lion’s den...for what? To test me, my loyalties? To see if I would expose Rashid? And what’s worse is that Rashid knew I was coming. He knew it was me all along. He had

time to prepare, time to research me; time to plan how to deal with me...oh Christ. This is dangerous. Very, very dangerous.”

Again he mumbled, shaking his head as if trying to clear a fog: “Rashid?! What the fuck...?”

“We have a lot of catching up to do Adam, but I think, at very least, I owe you an explanation,” Rashid started speaking. “By the way, how is life on Cyprus?”

But Adam hardly heard him. His rage at what he perceived as Rashid’s personal betrayal was rising in his gullet like vomit. But he took a deep breath, swallowed back the bile, and disciplined himself. Act, Adam, you’re on stage, use the adrenalin...act.

He responded, getting over his initial shock and shaking his head to clear the fog: “What? Yes, you do owe me an explanation. You, a banker? How the hell...?”

Rashid offered him a cup of Arabic coffee in an ornate “demi-tasse”, and guided him to a beautifully brocaded sofa, while he took a seat in a similarly upholstered antique upright arm chair.

“I said: how’s life in Cyprus?” Had Rashid bought the Cyprus cover story? By the tone in which he asked the question, it seemed as if he had. There was no hint of sarcasm or irony in his voice. Adam expected that with all his apparent resources, he would have easily found out that he was living in Israel. So maybe he was playing Adam along, or just didn’t care, which seemed unlikely, given that he was instrumental in orchestrating terrorist activity there...or had a deeper motive. Adam continued with the “script”.

“Cyprus? Great...beach, sun, easy life, outdoor cafes, good food, pleasant people, no real pressure – apart from work which is always busy working against deadlines and idiot printers...but we get along. We work well with the Jordanians; Nice guys. They visit from time to time. Gives them an opportunity to experience a bit of cosmopolitan life – although I

wouldn't say that Limassol is exactly swinging. But at least they all speak English there. My Greek is improving slowly.”

Rashid continued with the small talk: “How is Francie? I'm so sorry I missed the wedding, but I'll get to that soon...”

Adam answered him: “She's fine. Enjoying life as a kept woman on a Mediterranean island. So, tell me; how did you end up as prosperous banker, living in luxury in London, one of my favourite cities in all the world, and I'm still a poor journalist at heart, eking out a living fighting with clients to pay their bills...but enjoying my life nonetheless.”

Rashid recounted what had happened since they last saw each other.

“After the Timil funeral and the story in the headlines, I went into hiding. I knew I was marked by the security forces, because of the tip-off about Timil's impending arrest and setting up the interview. The Bureau of State Security was thorough and they usually got their man. By the way, two of the guys who took you out to Timil were picked up shortly afterwards...very soon after they dropped you off in Krugersdorp. I think that's how the cops got to Timil so quickly.

“I decided not to stick around to experience the pleasure of their company in a darkened cell, or enjoy the view from the 10th floor of John Vorster Square. I left South Africa fairly soon after the Timil story broke. Late one night I crawled cross the border into Swaziland. They were pretty lax back then, so they didn't notice the hole in the border fence.

“So that's why he didn't come to the wedding,” Adam reasoned. “...and all those messages, were in fact not from him, but from people covering for him...no wonder they didn't sound like Rashid at all – just not his style. He was already out of the country.”

“I was already tending towards more, shall we say fundamental approach to Islam. I found that even with my home background and what I learned at school, I was still far away from

the true teachings of the Prophet, Peace be Upon Him. But I'd kept it pretty quiet. You didn't even guess, did you Adam. I think it was Timil's funeral that finally pushed me just that extra inch that I needed.

"That was the last time we saw each other, if you recall..."

Adam was enthralled by Rashid's story: "You mean you were radicalized, back then?"

"Not quite radicalized, but moving rapidly in that direction. I made it to Lebanon – I actually had some friends in the Johannesburg Lebanese community – the Moslem part of it, not the Christians ...no you never knew about them, and I certainly would not have introduced you to them. The Jews and the Lebs were never on particularly good terms, neither in Johannesburg nor the Middle East" He chuckled slightly at the irony.

"I got to Beirut. It was a bit of journey, but I won't bore you with the details. Understand, that although I had decided to move closer to the core of Islam, I was not yet completely immersed in it. That happened later. The country was in a state of chaos, but there were plenty of opportunities if you were prepared to get your hands – and your morals – dirty.

"I got a job on the Evening Star, an English-language newspaper. I didn't particularly care that it was owned by both Christians and Moslems, it was a job. I had some money, and I was also freelancing for some foreign papers.

"I kept my religious feelings pretty much to myself. I was studying at a Madrassa in the evenings, and yes, I prayed five times a day, towards Mecca, but it didn't seem to bother anybody in the newsroom; there were a number of other fairly devout Moslems on the staff.

"And then Sabra and Shatila happened – September 1982. You remember those, Adam, surely..." a slightly sarcastically menacing tone had crept into Rashid's voice.

"That was when I became more radicalized. I went into the camps with my camera, a day after the Phalangists had done their dirty work – aided and abetted by Israel – I saw the

carnage, the dead men, women and children. You think the Nazis were bad, Adam, you never saw anything like this. I still have nightmares about it. I took pictures which were never published. I have them sealed in a box in my study at home.”

Rashid justified how his hatred for the west, and for Israel, was kicked up a couple of notches by that experience.

“It was the main topic of discussion and news articles for weeks, months afterwards. We talked about in the Madrassa, and then I was contacted by a very influential Iman who had contacts with Hezbollah. He offered me pretty good cash for writing articles for some of the more radical newspapers. I couldn’t speak Arabic too well then, certainly not street Arabic, although my liturgical, classical Arabic used in prayer was improving.”

Then Rashid stopped, almost in mid-sentence. “Why am I telling you all this Adam? These are things I’ve never discussed with anybody outside of my study groups or my closest associates. And now you come along, after more than 20 years and I start spilling my guts to you...you see the effect you still have on me, my old friend.”

Adam was on the alert for any change in Rashid’s demeanour, any inkling that he might be aware of Adam’s underlying motivation. He believed it was close, and decided to steer matters away, and towards the actual – albeit ostensible – interview.

“OK Rashid, let’s get to the ‘*tachlis*’ – you remember that word, I’m sure – of this meeting: I’m writing a feature about the rise and success of Islamic business in Europe, and you as a banker just happen to be the hook. By the way, it is a great story you know:

‘Anti-apartheid journalist escapes South Africa in the dead of night, half a step ahead of the security police, goes to a war-torn Muslim country, experiences the horror of the Lebanese war first-hand, delves deeper into Islam, finds fascination and a niche in its financial system, switches professions to become a leading Islamic banker in London. Wealthy, living in

luxury, everything he could never have dreamed of back in Johannesburg's run-down Indian township. It's the stuff of novels, Rashid. I'm sure you appreciate the ironies and drama involved."

Rashid demurred: "I've tried to keep a low profile Adam. In my line of business and with my connections, which some in the west would not appreciate, it's better that I remain below the parapet, so to speak. But for you – as long as I get to review what you write – I'm prepared to go a certain length of the way down the line."

Adam cleared his throat. He was getting into the role now, arcing back to his days as an investigative reporter and was actually beginning to enjoy this semi-role play and the techniques of deceptive naivety it involved. After all the piece would actually be published, as part of the cover.

"So now you are becoming more religiously involved, adhering closer to the tenets of Islam...but I'm a little puzzled that you became a banker. That doesn't exactly epitomize a devout Moslem...interest, making money out of loans..."

Rashid stopped him with a raised hand and a laugh: "Ah, it shows how much – or how little – you understand about Moslem banking practices. We abhor interest. It is forbidden by Sharia law. It's a complex system, as old as the religion itself, primarily derived from the Quran, so I'll try to explain it briefly. The basic principle is based on risk-sharing. Islamic banks can make money out of transactions, profit, and admin fees. Essentially we purchase an asset that a client desires, then sell it to him at an agreed marked-up price to pay off in pre-arranged instalments. If you want to buy a car for £10,000, the bank offers it to you at £12,000. That's it. Not at 5 percent per year compound interest...just a set fee. It's fixed, not reliant on fluctuations and interest rates. A more correct term for Islamic banking is 'Sharia compliant finance'. Does that answer it for you? In rather simplistic terms?"

Adam nodded, while scribbling notes in his characteristic shorthand, virtually illegible to anybody else.

“It probably seems incongruous to you; that I, now a fully-fledged Moslem, would opt for the good life in London. But there is nothing in my understanding of the faith to prohibit me from enjoying my life. I like a bit of luxury. I never had it in my youth. My parents were poor, I lived in tin shack in a township – you know where; you’ve been there enough times – with open drains in the streets, if you could call them that; one flickering electric light on the street corner, paraffin lamps in our home.

“I was never much good with women, and of course it was difficult to find girls from my community who were willing. You know the restrictions and threats they faced. Don’t publish this, but when I last saw you, I was still a virgin, if you can believe it.” A self-deprecating laugh... “Don’t you dare write that!”

Adam smiled: “Yes, I thought you seemed a bit frustrated; but I put that down to stress over the Timil interview.”

Adam pressed on with the interview: “So now you’re a wealthy banker, a devout Muslim, living in luxury in London, enough women to fill a harem; fancy cars: what do you drive, a Jag? Surely not a Rolls, that wouldn’t be your style.”

Rashid smiled: “No, Adam, I have a very well appointed BMW 735i – good German engineering, precision, speed...even protection.” The slight stress on “German” resonated with Adam. “I do have a few enemies you know.”

“Tell me your plans for the bank, your concept of the future of Middle Eastern banking and development in Europe. Where are you investing, why, can you give me some ball park figures...millions, billions, trillions, oil money? C’mon Rashid. I have a story to write.”

Adam had been with Rashid for just over an hour now. He had learned a good deal about his old friend, caught a glimpse of his life style and motivations, but felt he was still just scooting around the edges.

Yes,” Rashid responded, “and I want to see it before it goes to print. You understand. I’ve told you a lot more than I would any other reporter. And I don’t expect to see any of it in the article. You understand that Adam, don’t you.” There was a sudden sharp edge to Rashid’s voice. There it was. Adam felt instinctively that Rashid was becoming more aware – or had been all along – of Adam’s true motives. Had Rashid also been play-acting all this time?

After all, Rashid had known that it was Adam Marks, his old colleague who was coming to interview him, even if Adam had been genuinely, totally unaware of “Ibn Khoury’s” true identity until the moment he entered his office. He could have done any amount of investigation.

The phone rang. Rashid got up from his chair and went to his desk. A few terse words in Arabic. Was this a pre-arranged signal to end the interview? Or some new information that Rashid had been given; information about Adam? Rashid stood at his desk for a beat, then turned to face Adam. The atmosphere in the room had turned dark, confirming Adam’s gut feeling that things had suddenly changed.

“OK, Adam, that’s it. Let’s stop the bullshit now. We’ve both come too far since we were friends in Johannesburg, and even the staunchest friendships would be put to the test through our experiences. I know very well that you don’t live in Cyprus. Nice cover by the way. Very convincing. I know Limassol quite well, actually. I’ve been there a number of times. Oh, nothing wrong with your story about where you live and your life there...except that it’s a lie. I know very well that you live near Tel Aviv. I know that you went to Israel when your business collapsed. That makes you the enemy Adam. I hate Israel, I hate Israelis; in fact I

even began to hate Jews in general, have done for a while if the truth be known. That's why I rejoice every time I hear of Jews being killed. That's why I rejoice every time there's a terrorist attack in Israel."

Adam was astounded at the venom, the hatred, boiling to the surface. He didn't expect Rashid to love Israel, especially after his experiences reporting on Shatilla and Sabra, but this caustic tirade seemed way beyond rational.

He decided that there was no longer any point in continuing with the interview charade.

He launched into his own attack, adrenalin racing through his system, his blood rising and his anger taking over: "...and YOU pay for them! Don't deny it. I know all about you, 'Ibn Khoury'.

"You bastard. You murderer. YOU paid that scumbag who blew up my family. YOU paid for the explosives, YOU paid money to his family for him to martyr himself; YOU killed Francie's mother and sister...YOU!"

"Adam: I had no idea that Francie's family were involved, until just the other day. How could I have known they would be there?"

Adam retorted: "What, and you would have tried to stop it? But it was OK to kill other people? Other innocent men, women and children? You fucking lying, opportunistic, piece of shit. And all these years, the only memory I had of you was your pure idealism, standing up for what's right, taking the moral high ground. Christ, we stood shoulder to shoulder on the barricades Rashid. Fighting with our words, our thoughts...our ideals. I could never have conceived that you would become an instrument of murder, of hatred. What the fuck happened to you? You're no better than those nationalist, Afrikaner, apartheid-loving fuckers who tortured and killed blacks for sport...you've become one of them!"

Rashid retorted: “And you Jews, you Israelis...”with real contempt in his voice. “What you did in Lebanon; what you do in Gaza, in the West Bank, killing Palestinians every day, murdering children with your jets and rockets...denying a people their dignity, their lives, their land! You Israelis have become Nazis, Adam, you’ve taken on the mantle of the oppressors, of colonizers. You compare me to an apartheid-loving Afrikaner freak? You are no better...worse actually. Do you think Israel didn’t support the apartheid government back then? Didn’t sell them arms, weapons which they used for their oppression? And don’t tell me that all those people who died in the bombing were innocent civilians. They ALL served in the Israeli army of occupation at one time or other, or would have in the future; one of them was even in uniform. They were all legitimate targets.”

Adam was growing more and more infuriated.

“So, this is what you thought all along. When we were colleagues, friends in Johannesburg? You were looking at me as ‘the Jew’. You hated me even then. Everything was a pretence. Everything. Our friendship, our camaraderie, sharing ideas, ideals, all our discussions on how we saw the potential new South Africa...you were a lying, conniving cunt even back then.”

“No Adam: back in those days I actually liked you. I felt some affinity, some respect for the Jewish anti-apartheid fighters, for Goldreich, Wolpe, Ruth First, Joe Slovo, Helen Suzman ...all of them fighting the good fight. But I later realized I was wrong. I was introduced to writings by some pretty convincing people. You Jews stick together: you always have, the ancient cabals still operate, Adam. All you’re interested in is wealth and power and grabbing territory to expand your filthy race. Jewish bankers were behind the Nazis. The so-called ‘Holocaust’ was just a ploy to get your hands on Palestine and expel a people from their rightful homeland.”

The old tropes, the old clichés, the twisted arguments, the anti-Semitism, the virulent Jew-hatred came spewing out of Rashid's mouth in a toxic torrent.

“ENOUGH!” Adam roared at him: “Enough! I said it before, I’ll say it again: You are nothing but an opportunistic murderer. You live in luxury, with your women and I guess your wine, because you were never a very devout Muslim, even back then... You are the one doing all this for your creature comforts, your life of pleasure and expensive toys which Saddam bestows on you for your services. But I’m warning you Rashid. You may or may not have found this out, but I have been contacted... you know by whom. I’ve been contacted and I’ve know they are coming for you. They know where you are, what you do, how you do it. They knew about my assignment to interview you; and if I’m not mistaken they followed me here. And this is the last favour I will do for you in memory of our supposed, now trashed earlier friendship. You’d better disappear Rashid. Quickly. Because I think you would hate to see this beautiful office destroyed in a blast caused by a gas leak and an electrical fault, or your magnificent BMW wrecked because the steering failed. Maybe one of your Russian whores will stick a knife up your arse, or cut off your balls while you’re busy bonking her. And if they don’t get you, I will. In some way, in some manner or form or by some method. You enable suicide bombers Rashid, but I see you as nothing more than a coward, shit-scared of losing your own life. So get out. Get out of London...now.”

Adam headed for the door, he turned and then said softly: “I loved you Rashid. Like the brother I never had. I thought we could make a difference in South Africa. Remember the struggle Rashid...”

As Adam walked out of the bank's front door into the bright sunlight of a London spring afternoon, he began to understand Avigdor's plan. The enigmatic glances between him and Vered; why they had not disclosed who Ibn Khoury really was. It gave Adam all the

bitterness, authenticity and power he needed to get Rashid to react as they wanted. To get him out London.