

June 1983

The morning of the first day following my first night in the Central Riyadh Women's Prison, as a guest of the Governor, and I was awake, stiff from sleeping on the bare concrete floor. I heard water splashing and sandals flopping on wet tiles, a baby cried, and always the endless Arabic chatter. A bucket brigade had formed as a line of half-dressed women, pulled blue plastic pails out of a hole in the concrete slab, and splashed water into puddles on the floor where we had slept.

There were no brooms, no mops. Rags were being dragged through the water by naked feet, making mud of yesterday's dust and the detritus of the night. A woman was on her knees, scrubbing the floor with a disposable paper diaper, and I was in her way. I carried my sandals, gathered up my skirt and abaya, and scooted across the floor, leaving muddy footprints that were immediately washed away by another deluge of water. It was early in the day, near dawn, but the heat was rising and steam was escaping from the sunlight on the courtyard outside. I stood in the doorway of the now-open cell, not wanting to leave the dark shade. But again I was washed away by the busy women, this time into the steam and the heat and the sun.

Steam rose up under my skirt, condensing between my thighs and in the small of my back. Cats and cockroaches ran across the

courtyard; my eyes followed them up, around, under and then one cat went over the wall! There were bars over my head, across the top of the courtyard, and with a shock I realized that I was caged! Dusty brown birds lined up across the top bars, occasionally squeezing through and swooping down to capture morsels and crumbs. One bird squatted and bathed in the water, flying up and out as his pool evaporated. The courtyard wall held me; the rough stucco against my back my only reality as I pressed tight, twisting the strap of my purse around my wrist.

The light had a strange clarity, there was a smell to it of a muggy, rain-washed Tucson monsoon, but I was far from home. The hem of my skirt had dropped to the ground and the damp wicked up to my knees. I could not see - fog and steam and tears clouded my field of vision. I wrapped my glasses and purse into the bed of my sandals, and stood barefoot holding the awkward bundle against my white blouse, and wiped my face with the muddy hem of my skirt. The water evaporated and as the courtyard dried and I began to focus, the Arabic roar clotted into words I understood.

"Ingleezy Mohandisah, Ingleezy, Ingleezy, do you speak English?"

Was I hearing English or was I translating in my mind? I wanted to respond but the words couldn't take form. I was sticky with sweat, dirty, and I could feel mud between my toes, yet at the same time, in my mind, I was soaring up into the sky and watching

the top of my head and my figure dissolve into the scene below.

From where I stood I could see a girl in white panties, smooth and wet with a gold tooth in her smile, bending half submerged in the hole in the concrete courtyard ahead of me. I was to find out that this was our water supply cistern. As she reached up to take another plastic bucket to fill with water, sunlight reflected off her skin. The gold tooth and the water sparkling down her arms and off her body - the image was mesmerizing.

Buckets of water were still being handed down the line to flood the courtyard, with garbage and mud swept into a pile by the steel door at the end of the yard. The air was heavy, flies were beginning to squat on my arms, my face, buzzing around me, and again I heard words I thought I understood as I was pulled across the courtyard.

"Do you speak English? Are you the Ingleezy? Come here. Come here!"

I was pulled around the open cistern, the sparkling girl was laughing at my immobility, and then I was pushed towards a petite dark woman standing in the doorway of what would be my home for the rest of my prison stay. Though the open barred door of what could pass for a jail cell in an old cowboy movie, the woman asked me to leave my bundle and shoes at the doorway, and she

directed me to sit down on a low mattress at the far end of the room. The walls were draped with flowered sheets; the floor was covered with a thin, woven reed mat typical of the type found in the Gulf region. She sat down, cross-legged, and began to make tea on an electric hotplate.

"I am Suzie. I come from Lebanon and I can speak English."

"They told me many people speak English here..."

"No, I'm the only one," she said.

"But last night I spoke to that girl, she translated..."

"But she doesn't understand English, she would like you to believe that she does, but she doesn't speak more than enough to make you believe. Why are you here?" She said.

"They told me I would be a guest of the Governor, at a villa, until I could see my children. They wanted to deport me. My ex-husband was deporting me and I told them that I would rather stay in jail than to leave the Kingdom, so they said they would take me to a villa. I am supposed to see Prince Salman at ten o'clock, my lawyer told me to see him, and then I could see my children . . . .It was in the middle of the night, they took me away.. ."

Suzie was laughing. So tiny, so frail, her hand reached out to hold my arm still. "Drink some tea. No, you must drink this tea. I won't speak to you unless you drink. Do you need to use the toilet?"

I wanted to refuse everything as much as I wanted to refuse being there, in that room with bars for a door. This could only be an overnight holding cell, a small local jail to retain me because the police can't do their work until daytime when offices are open. I believed I needed only to hold on a few hours more, the Prince would see me at ten. If I held on long enough I wouldn't need to use the toilet here, I wouldn't need to drink, and there would be no need to explain to this woman why I couldn't be here.

Suzie placed the tea cup on the floor, in front of me.

"You are in the Central Women's Prison in Riyadh." She said.

"But I didn't see a judge, I wasn't arrested."

"You won't see a judge and because you are here you were arrested. You are in prison and, yes, you are a guest of the Governor."

I dropped to my hands and knees and crawled, my skirt tangled

between my legs and spilling the tea in the process, crawled back to the doorway to retrieve my glasses from inside my bundled shoes and purse. I can think better with my glasses. I stumbled and then pulled myself up to bolt out the door. A group of women, squatting on their haunches, blocked my path immediately outside the doorway. Three women and the sparkling girl were struggling to replace the concrete cistern cover. A baby was sitting in a puddle, naked. With my glasses on, I turned my attention back to Suzie.

As she refilled my teacup, she said, "It's the Saudis, they tell you what you want to hear. They are dogs. In Lebanon if your daughter marries a Saudi it brings shame on the family."

I had the petition for Prince Salman in my purse, with the photos of my children, and I believed the documents would explain everything to this woman and she, too, would realize that I could not possibly be here! I handed the papers to Suzie and waited in silence as she read the Arabic script.

"You are the one! I remember you from some years ago, you were famous! You kidnapped your children out of the Kingdom, you were in the papers."

"I didn't kidnap them.."

"How did you get back into the Kingdom?"

"The Embassy gave me a visa, they said I could live with my children, they said there would be no problems."

"They are dogs. They lied to you. They have lied to everyone in this place." And then she told me about prison.

But my mind was on my own plight, I didn't care for Suzie or why she would be in prison too. I felt no connection with the women who crowded just outside the cell door, offering bread and biscuits to me, in Arabic, through Suzie. I repeated my story and reassured her, as much as I tried to reassure myself, that at ten o'clock my lawyer would arrive to escort me to my appointment with Prince Salman. The petition documents confirmed my schedule; I was only a temporary guest of the Governor, soon to escape.

But by then it was past ten o'clock and I became silent. I sat slumped against a thin foam mattress, stiff and unmoving. There were no chairs in this prison and only this one mattress in the three cells I had seen since last night. I pretended to sleep. It was so still, so hot. A slight breeze tugged at the sheet hung as a curtain over the open, barred window.

There were no glass windows and no screens in the prison, no air

conditioning, no air circulation.

Suzie sat quietly; hand-stitching something in bright printed cotton fabric, apparently understanding that I didn't want to talk. It was past ten and I had been forgotten, I was lost. Suzie had managed to keep the curious women away from me, but occasionally someone would enter the cell and exchange words in Arabic. I didn't even attempt to translate. I felt on the verge of screaming and throwing myself against the bars, climbing up over the wall, pulling at my clothes. With effort, I took each breath through my nose, blew out through my mouth, attempting to control my hysteria, the suffocating heat and stillness.

Squeezing my eyes to keep them all out, I remembered Mustafa and I hated him and I hated the Saudis. My children were not as dear to me as my freedom! And with that realization I succumbed to my grief, I had reached the limit of loss, I had lost my children and I was losing myself.

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I was dislodged from my stupor by the sound of too much commotion and the roar of Arabic chatter. Shouts for the Ingleezy Mohandisah, sounds of the huge metal gate at the end of the yard opening, women were rushing into the cell. Suzie looked amazed

and ecstatic and jumped up to me, her hands squeezing my shoulders.

"They want you at the gate! You are free!" she said.

She helped me with the scarf and abaya; I wrapped the strap of my purse tight around my wrist and slipped into my red Dr. Scholl sandals at the door. Suzie reached up and kissed me on both cheeks.

"You must be very important that you are able to get out so quickly. Please remember me when you get out. Maybe your Embassy can get me out, my Embassy is too busy now with the Israelis, they have no time for me. . . You must be very important. Please remember me."

All of this, spoken so quickly, as she escorted me to the first barred gate. It seemed that everyone was watching and shouting as I left. Such a commotion. I felt revenged by the energy of the crowd.

Beyond the bars I flew to the main gate. Twelve big steps, my skirts rustled. A male Saudi guard held the huge metal door while another kept his machine gun at ready, crossed before his chest. I was free! I held the image of my exit in my brain, the noise, the women, truly there could be no place like that, those images

could not possibly exist. Another Saudi officer in a much too baggy police uniform carrying yet a second machine gun that couldn't possibly be real escorted me to the office I had been in the night before.

As I entered the room, I made eye contact with Stephanie Smith, the Vice-Counsel of the United States Consulate in Riyadh. As I walked towards her and took in and comprehended the expression on her face, at that moment my heart was cut out as easily as a thief's wrist is chopped. In Saudi Arabia the punishment for stealing anything - a loaf of bread, anything - is to have your right hand cut off at the wrist. The punishment, other than the loss of the hand, is that one can no longer eat in the company of polite people. It is not acceptable in Muslim countries to eat with your left hand because that is the hand for toilet tasks, and to eat with the toilet hand is bad table manners. The expression on Stephanie's face confirmed my realization that Saudi Arabia had chosen to punish me by cutting out my heart. I could no longer mix in the polite society of whole people; I had lost my heart, my mind, and my freedom.

"You're not here to let me out, are you." This was not a question, her face had already revealed my fate.

Sitting next to Stephanie on the black plastic couch in the Guard Station was a redheaded young man dressed in western clothes. I

assumed he was her transportation, perhaps a translator. With a long intake of breath, Stephanie replied: "We had so much trouble, just trying to get permission to see you..."

"You aren't able to get me out of here." I said.

"We had to wait so long at the Palace. We never had to wait like this before."

"You aren't taking me away, are you?" I was alone, in that crowded space, in that room I was more alone than I had ever imagined possible.

"I'm sorry Kristine, we can't do anything." Stephanie stood, as though to step forward to touch me, but her hand fell down to her side.

"But why am I here?"

"We don't know, the file is secret. We have never had so much trouble trying to get information before."

"I was supposed to take a petition to Salman at ten o'clock..."

"But he is the one who arrested you!" This was injected by the redhead, whom I understood to be a translator by the Arabic lilt

to his words.

Stephanie again reached towards me, "Do you have the petition with you?"

As I was digging the petition out of the papers and documents in my purse, I asked Stephanie about my lawyer. Realizing the document was in Arabic as she unfolded the page, she handed the paper to the translator as she said, "It's not like the States, lawyers don't represent people in prison here. We spoke with Abdullah Al-Amoudi this morning and he doesn't want to get involved. He thought you had good relations with the Saudis but now that you are in prison he is afraid it will reflect badly on him to be associated with your case. We spent the whole morning trying to find out where you were and what happened."

"How did you find out?" I asked.

"Your father called me at 2:00 AM, and then your office manager - Sirender? -, he gave us your lawyer's number. After Al-Amoudi understood what was happening he referred us to Ron Toews. Ron told me he spoke to you last night, that he had come here, but that they had already put you in your cell and he couldn't see you. He's concerned about you getting enough ..."

"No, I'm not staying here ..."

"...food. He said that he understands they don't feed you here. Ron explained the intent of the petition to us. We can deliver the petition for you but we have to hurry, it's almost prayer time. Does the petition look okay, Fayad?" Stephanie turned towards her translator as she spoke.

"I'll have to add something about her being in prison, but other than that it looks all right. We have to get going if we're to get it delivered today." Fayad began to move toward the door, now crowded with at least three police officers within my line of sight.

"No, I'm not staying here another night..."

"Do you need anything? Should we tell anyone that you are here? Who do you want us to report to? It's important that you sign this permission form and tell us who you want us to report to."

Stephanie handed me a permission to release personal information standard US government form and explained that legally they could not deliver the petition for me without my signature on the form. On the line where I was to indicate who was allowed to receive information about myself, I wrote, "anyone and everybody".

In the few moments during which the discussion had transpired,

the Saudi guards brought in a tea tray with several glasses and a steaming pot. It was not everyday they had the honor of receiving as guests the lead consul of the United States Consulate and her translator!

Stephanie and Fayad were ready to dash out the door, but because of the tea they were forced to sit and drink. To do otherwise would have been an insult. This was explained to us by Fayad in small, soft tones as he gulped the scalding hot sweet brew. Then they were gone.

I was returned to my cell. No one spoke to me or even took notice. I was not so special anymore; I was a prisoner just like them.

That night Zaina, a cell mate, gave me fresh panties and a long cotton caftan. Suzie gave me soap and a towel, and we slept, eight of us, rump to shoulder, on the damp concrete floor of the cell.

Suzie woke me on my second morning in prison by covering me up with a sheet saying, "There are enemies all around and they like white skins."

I didn't understand and I didn't care, I pulled the sheet up over my head and curled my arms around my knees, watching the feet of

the others as they left the cell to join the bucket brigade in the courtyard. Sitting cross-legged at my shoulders, Suzie began to explain in English. The Kibir, or 'Large' Lady, as Suzie had named her, was a lesbian and was one of the freed slaves from when King Faisal abolished slavery in 1962. The Saudis had kept black slaves, typically from the Sudan, and many desert Bedouin tribes were a mixture of free and slave blood. As Suzie was explaining this to me, I recalled that the Kibir Lady had not revealed her face from under her veil at all, and I sat up, curious about the story.

The Kibir lady wore a real Bedu, black face veil with holes cut out for her eyes, not the urban veil style of thin black silk, but the thick, creased material that, in profile, gave her a beak-like profile. She was the only woman I had noticed in prison that remained completely veiled, and she also slept in her abaya.

She was very large, tall, and must have weighed at least 300 pounds.

As the Kibir Lady returned from the toilet, she accidentally, or maybe on purpose, adjusted her undergarments while bending over in front of me, her back side to my face, me sitting on the floor. Except for the face veil, she was nearly naked. Well, I thought, that was not necessary.

Suzie said that once when she was changing her clothes, the Kibir

Lady was watching her and Suzie claimed that she had started shaking and drooling at Suzie's pale skin. I don't know about the drooling part because of the Bedu veil, but I could believe the shaking. Apparently, over time, people in the prison learned to stay away from the Kibir Lady and to not expose their bodies.

I had uncovered my legs from the knees downward because of the heat, and had stretched out across the floor, leaning back on my arms with the sheet wrapped around my waist. The Kibir Lady turned toward me and stepped forward, straddling my legs. Bending over me with a can of sewing machine oil, she began slapping her neck, breasts, torso, and crotch, with her oil soaked palm. It wasn't until later that I was told about the sewing machine oil. Back in the years when sewing was allowed in the prison and perfume wasn't, someone had smuggled in a very heavily scented, perfumed oil disguised as sewing machine oil, and the oil was available for all to share. From the looks and smell of it, it still contained a large percentage of machine oil.

Zaina was sweeping the floor with a short dust whisk while the washing brigade began to march across the yard in repetition of yesterday's routine. Extricating myself from the personal space of the Kibir Lady, I stood to move towards the door of our cell and watched the young sparkling girl. I heard her name, 'Aisha', as she was being lowered into the cistern. I stood in the

doorway; my eyes squinted into the sun. It was Zaina's rule that no one wear shoes in our cell, so I was barefoot. The steam began to rise again from the courtyard, the roar of Arabic chatter was constant, and the cleaning was repeated in the same rush and roar as the day before. My second morning and I had already begun to be numb to my fate.

Regular meals were not provided by the Saudi prison system, so everyone was busy preparing their own breakfast from food either donated or provided by family. Water was boiling for tea. I do not remember seeing a hot plate in the other cell from my first night, but here in our cell we had nearly all the amenities, including a television set. I refused the bread and black olives Suzie offered me, but I did drink the tea.

As we leaned against the doorway watching the scene outside, sipping our tea, Suzie said, "When I first came here I would not eat for a week, all I did was throw-up and cry. No one cared. I am the only Christian here, except for the Koreans, but who wants to talk to Koreans? They don't know Arabic or English."

I asked her what crime brought her here.

"Ha! It was a set-up, it was jealousy. Those dogs, the Saudis, don't like to see anyone, especially a woman, be in charge of anything. They put me here for forgery; I've been here six

months. I don't know how much longer. Peter goes every week to the Ministry, to our Embassy, but the sentence has not been made." Retrieving her satchel from beneath the TV set, Suzie handed me a photo. In the picture sat a young man, her husband Peter, with a small boy sitting on his lap. On the step beside Peter sat a plump baby girl, her curly brown hair just long enough to curl over her ears. The boy wore short pants, knee socks and a white shirt, the girl a ruffled pastel dress.

"We tell the children I am traveling; I am ashamed that I am in this stinking hell of a prison. I don't want my children to know what has become of their mother. Peter visits me every Tuesday, that is the men's visiting day, he could bring my children but I won't allow him. I will not allow my children to see me like this." She was pulling her hair as she spoke, two fists of hair. She continued, "I hate this place, I hate the roar, these damn women, these dogs!"

We were interrupted and shocked silent as the call came up again, "Ingleezy! Ingleezy!" a repeat of yesterday's scene. Suzie again adjusting my hijab and abaya, and pleading with me to remember her. I was soon at the gate, I was out.

It was Adnan, the Trow Middle East company office manager, my "groady to the max" Adnan.

Adnan was obviously nervous here, and he kept shifting his eyes and smiling at each police officer. He adjusted his red and white checked gutra by holding the top down with his palm and scooting the entire ensemble forward on his skull. He pulled his prayer beads from the pocket of his white floor length thobe, and began to rotate the beads through his fingers, 33 beads, three times around, each time with a name of God. God the compassionate, God the merciful, God the Palestinian freedom fighter. He giggled, not knowing exactly what to say, but he had come to ask what I needed. He didn't know how long I would remain in prison, Inshallah, Inshallah, it would not be long. If life were just a bowl of cherries what were we both doing in the pits?

I was returned to my cell.

"But they don't allow male visitors except on Tuesday, you must be very special that they allowed him to see you, and he is not a Mahram!" A Mahram is a woman's legal escort, either her father, her brother, husband or son. Suzie was amazed I was allowed a visit by a non-Mahram, she was perplexed at the attention given me. She was not able to see her husband until a week after her arrest, and then only in the guard room. My visitors had been given unbelievable freedom with me. My status had risen amongst the women because of these privileges.

Later that morning, I learned it was to be the day of Kibir

Lady's release! We were to have a party in our cell, more than just ourselves sitting cross-legged on the floor, packed in, knee to knee. The traditional Bedouin smoke pot was lit and the burning incense lay dense in the bottom half of the room. Kibir Lady had made Arabic coffee and offered it to all the other ladies and friends and lovers, and me, but I refused.

Suzie had told me that Kibir Lady was a "madam." She was reported to have kept a house for the exclusive use of the Royal Family in Riyadh. This may be hard to believe, but the fact of her early release proved she did have some high connections. For her going away party she wore a red and black dress with a deep 'V' neck accented by black binding and black buttons, exposing an ample cleavage. The veil covered her face, nothing covered her breasts. Her bare feet were dry and cracked at the heel with toes going every which way. A pattern of Henna stain was on her hands and feet, as always with the Bedu.

Her story, as told by Suzie, was that apparently one fine evening a prince, who remained unnamed, wanted to buy Kibir Lady's daughter. Everything and everyone was for sale except the daughter. Kibir Lady refused. He pressured; she shot him. Kibir Lady went to prison where she masturbated every night and terrorized pale skinned ladies. One of Kibir Lady's friends was "The Real Man." She (he?) was from Sudan, tall, black and kinky haired with misplaced biceps instead of breasts. The Real Man

slept in the prostitute / unwed mother section of the prison (the section where I had been assigned on my first night) and I was not told much of her story. The Real Man lived in a coarse cotton shift that she rolled up over her elbows, and she tucked the skirt in her panties to hitch the hem up over her knees. As she sat across from me during our celebrations, I saw the corded, running scars down the inside of both legs; it was told to me that she had tried to commit suicide by scalding herself when she first arrived in the prison. It was said that the Real Man was damn good in bed and could make you think you were with a real man. I wouldn't know.

In the midst of our celebration reveille, Mama Saud, the oldest resident of our cell, was steaming mad. She didn't like the Real Man and that sort of people in her presence, and she let roar with demands that everyone leave 'her' cell. Suzie mumbled to me in English, "You had better hold your tongue, Mama Saud, or a Kibir Lady will roll over you as you sleep."

Suzie explained to me that Mondays were the day that people are usually released from prison, and one generally was told a few days in advance of the anticipated release.

For Kibir Lady's release party there was singing, drum beating (the bottom of a kettle worked well for this) and a general rowdy time. As a local resident to the cell, I was lucky to be in the

center of the activity; many others were trying to squeeze into the packed room. But finally, it was time for Kibir Lady to go. Finally, and after only two months in prison. Because of her connections, I was told, Kibir Lady had broken the release record, and no one had been set free so soon.

"Finished," Mama Saud was tossing the Arabic word out all over the room, slapping the back of her hand in the air as though swatting at flies, "Finished." She was glad to be rid of the Kibir Lady.

But wait, the Kibir Lady was coming back to our cell. She had gone to the gate, there had been more shouting, and then she had come back. Suzie got the story for me; apparently the Kibir Lady's brother came to collect her but he could show no proof of her identity.

"Then how do they know they've jailed the right large lady?" Suzie laughed at my question.

"No one knows, but they do know that you can't be set free without identity," she replied.

"What happens if there is no identity or no one to come to collect you?" I asked.

According to Suzie, if there was no one to claim you, you were released from this prison and sent to a jail for people with no one. An adult orphanage for unescorted women with no Mahram. Suzie further explained that the Kibir Lady's brother must go to the village where she was born and get a written statement from an "old man" that he knew of her and her family - this would provide the necessary identity. The Kibir Lady could not leave until this was done. The identity confirmation could take time, and Suzie worried that the Kibir Lady would not be released until the next Monday, a full week away. Mama Saud was distraught.

Suzie told me that the prison was divided in sections by severity of the crime committed, and on the first night I had been assigned to the unwed mother and prostitute section. Suzie was able to get special permission for me to join her in the murderers and thieves section, comprised of two rooms and approximately 20 women and children, because of her English language skills. I found the murderers and thieves to be a much nicer community of people than the prostitutes and mothers.

The Koran dictates that a mother cannot be separated from her children until they are weaned. After weaning, which as reported in the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) should occur at the age of 2 years, the child can be removed from the mother if the mother is shown to be a whore or morally unfit. Otherwise, by law, the child remains with the mother until the age of seven. This

explained the prevalence of younger breastfed children in the prostitute section and the older children in our cells.

The Asians, mostly Korean and Philippino maids and nannies discarded by their masters for running away, thievery or prostitution, were kept in a third section. During my stay in the prison I could not estimate their numbers as they kept to themselves, back in a dark section of cells rarely visited by non-Asians.

Suzie told me the story of the baby girl I had seen on my first night. As she spoke, I could see the girl sitting in the sun in the courtyard with her mother, the overhead bars casting stripes across her crisp white dress. Her mother had kept her so clean in the squalor, she looked like a princess. The mother was Syrian; she had been married to a wealthy Saudi man and had many children. She was young. Her husband had died and she remained living with her in-laws as she was prohibited from taking her Saudi-born children back to her family in Syria without her husband's family permission.

After her husband's death, the Syrian woman became pregnant and would not give the name of the father of her child. She had sinned. It was reasoned that since she had become pregnant in Saudi Arabia, the child must have been fathered by a Saudi, so the illegitimate child became a ward of the state. By law, the

woman was sent to prison until the birth of her baby and then she and the child were returned to prison two days after the birth. Once the child no longer was breastfed, the mother would be deported to her people in Syria, and the child to an orphanage where she would grow up, shunned in a culture where the family name is more important than the individual. The mother would never be allowed to see her other children again because the mother was considered a whore. It was a joke among the women that the Syrian would breast feed her girl until the child was 14 years old.

I thought about requesting that my children join me, here, in the Central Riyadh Women's Prison. We would be together, the laws of the Kingdom working for, instead of against, me. How ironic. But Mustafa would probably begin some sort of investigation into my morals; he had vowed I would never see my children again and I was convinced he would go so far as to have the mother of his children labeled a whore.

Dusty brown birds had returned to their perch, sitting on top of our cage, shitting on the beautiful baby girl below. Her mother picked her up and sat the child in the water fountain and washed her, removing the white dress. The fountain was our drinking water and was served by the cistern beneath the courtyard. The fountain was also a popular foot washing station and laundry facility for the Asians. Suzie told me that water was trucked in

almost daily and we had been told we used too much. She also told me that in the past they had gone without water for many days.

There were three toilets for the prison and we, the murderers and thieves, were lucky in that only 20 of us shared the Arabic-style facilities. The washroom consisted of a narrow tiled room with a squat hole at the far end. To do your duty, you placed one foot at each side of the hole and squatted over the open pit.

Adjacent to this "toilet" was the floor drain, a faucet, and above was a shower head. A small capacity, electric water heater hung from the ceiling. If you wished to shower you ran the risk of overflowing the drain as well as the toilet, and on several occasions I was told that Zaina was horrified to discover floating feces escaping from beneath the closed washroom door, draining into our cell. In the heat, a cool shower was welcome, but Suzie told me in the winter it was too cold and no one bathes. Toilet paper was not commonly used in the Middle East and you were expected to wash with water, using only your left hand, after you relieved yourself.

If you wished to keep your towel and clothes dry while in the toilet, you had to hang things from the electric wires draped from the water heater to the electrical outlet. The weight of so many items hung in this way had frayed the wires and the outlet was constantly sparking. Because of the threat of the Kibir Lady's roaming eyes, Suzie and Zaina had become gymnasts,

dressing in that tiny, wet room, jumping the sparks and lifting their feet to avoid floating matter. Here I wore my Dr. Scholl's sandals, my only foot gear in prison.

There was a school at the prison for the children. Suzie told me class was taught by Egyptian social workers who also doubled as prison nurses. Suzie introduced me to one who had been insisting that Suzie practice English with her, but Suzie had lost patience. The social worker now believed I could help her in her English studies, and she decided to become my constant companion. Suzie explained to me, translating for the Egyptian, that if she learned English, or if she could at least convince the Saudis she could speak English, she would be eligible for a higher paying position than a prison social worker. According to Mama Saud, I was the first real Ingleezy in this prison since Mama Saud had arrived 14 years ago.

Later that afternoon, I found myself called again to the iron gate; by then my comings and goings had become routine and no one took notice, other than my Egyptian social worker who followed me outside this time. My visitor was Adnan again, this time with bottled water, a foam mattress, some pillows, a heavy winter blanket, and two sets of clean clothes. Serinder's wife, Lilly, had packed cucumber and cream cheese sandwiches (the crusts cut off), some fruit, and two paperback books. The guards insisted everything must be searched and I watched, amazed, as the

Egyptian social worker quickly slipped the two books under her abaya.

As the guard roamed through my personal belongings, he picked out my hand mirror, admired himself in its frame, and shoved the mirror in his back pocket. In English, I demanded that Adnan retrieve my mirror. Adnan became very apologetic and didn't want to let the guard know that we observed him taking the mirror. I was insistent, "He is a thief!" I shouted. Afraid the Saudi might understand my English, Adnan politely requested the mirror, which he then put in his own pocket, explaining that sharp things were not allowed in prison; we might use them to hurt ourselves.

"Adnan, there are children in this prison!" I spoke into my shoulder, knowing the guard and social worker could not understand, but I still wanted to keep our conversation private.

"No, No, Kristina, you must be mistaken, this place is only for detaining women with passport problems." Adnan spoke to me in his typical patronizing manner.

"Adnan! This is a prison. There are murderers here, I sleep next to a murderer!" How could he not believe me, how could he have such a capacity to understand and believe only what he wanted? Why would I want to make up such a story, how could he even think that I would make up such a thing? Adnan shook his

head and joked with the guard. What was he saying to him? I imagined he was telling the guards that this stupid woman thinks there are children in this prison.

"Have you called my family? Did you talk to my lawyer?" I asked.

"No problem, no problem, Kristina, Sirender has taken care of everything. Your Embassy is taking care of everything. Did you see, you crazy Americans, you have a woman in charge at the Embassy! She told me, "No problem!" I asked her if she will get me a visa to the States, she said "No problem!" Looks like you are an important person, Kristina, because I know you I can get a visa to the States. And Mister Toews, he said he came by here, did you see him? He said he brought you food."

"I never saw Ron and I didn't get any food."

Adnan wasn't listening to me, he was distracted by one of the male Saudi guards who was simultaneously speaking with Adnan and pointing at me, Adnan then turned to me.

"The guard says you are not allowed to have food that comes in cans so they can't give it to you, Toes had brought you cans of food...The guard, he thinks I am a Saudi, so he is talking to me nice. Don't tell them I'm not a Saudi, okay? If they think I'm not a Saudi, they won't let me in to see you, so don't tell them,

okay?"

The guard continued inspecting the items Lilly had packed for me as I mumbled to Adnan that the guards must have had a feast with my canned food. My deodorant and metal pen were confiscated, and Adnan again was compelled to explain to me that I must not have anything that I could use to hurt myself. I imagined death by deodorant.

As I repacked my belongings, the social worker was speaking in rapid Arabic to the guard and Adnan. She had squealed on me by telling them I had not eaten since my arrest. Adnan became wide eyed and aghast, as the social worker had led him to believe that I was trying to starve myself to death.

"Kristina, Kristina, you cannot do this. It is against the Koran, you will go to hell! You cannot do suicide, as a Muslim you cannot!"

One of the other armed guards retrieved an older guard with an insignia on his sleeve from the main office. The older man spoke with Adnan, shook his head and looked at me. The four of them then spoke together, Adnan popping in with English, "You cannot try to kill yourself by not eating. It is against the Koran, this suicide, you will grieve your children, you will not have a peaceful death. Promise me, Kristina, you will not do this.

Promise me you will eat."

I was astonished. I had not thought of starving myself, I had not eaten because I had been too upset to eat, and besides, there were flies on everything. I had eaten Lilly's cucumber sandwiches, but I thought best not to bring that up, realizing that people do go on starvation protests, maybe it would work for me. I tried to look noble.

"Adnan, I don't want to eat until I see my children."

"Kristina, I will not help you if you won't be a good Moslem. No one will help you. And if you starve yourself you are not a good Moslem." He was serious. I had no choice. I promised to eat.

It was a moral victory for Adnan. He was so pleased with himself, having saved me from death and hell. He was congratulated by the guard and I was escorted back into the courtyard by my social worker.

Suzie was excited about the books, only the Koran and alphabet lesson books were allowed in the prison. The social worker had taken such risk to smuggle them in for us that we felt we had an ally, a champion, contact with the world outside. Suzie warned me I might spend the rest of my time here teaching English, and because they were contraband, the books must be hidden. I spent

the rest of the afternoon tucked back in the cell on the mattress with Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited".

The mattress belonged to Mama Saud. She had been in prison, in the same cell, for 14 years. Her story, as translated by Suzie, was punctuated with sound effects and action provided by Mama Saud in the background. Mama Saud was about five feet tall and had henna red hair in two braids, not too long. One eye was infected by worms and the other was clear and brown. She looked to be in her late 50's but said she was 42. She was very thin with a pot-belly, wore seven gold bangles, a few gold chains, and a gold wedding band on her right hand, middle finger. She had henna on her hands and feet in the traditional Saudi manner, and was careful to renew the deep red stain as it wore off her soles and palms. She had no tattoos and made fun of the women who did, but she and Suzie would joke about giving each other tattoos.

Suzie told me that Mama Saud had been married to a fine Saudi man and had several sons - that meant she probably had daughters too, but you don't count them. Her husband had died and a neighbor began making advances - he wanted her as his second wife. Mama Saud refused. She previously had many troubles with the neighbor man, and she wanted nothing to do with him. Her own children were small, she had a boy around 2 years of age. According to Suzie, the neighbor had broken into her home and raped her, a brutal approach towards a proposal of marriage but something that he,

apparently, had expected her to accept. She fought him off and somehow, in the scuffle, he was killed. Mama Saud was sent to prison.

It is Saudi law that when someone is injured by a death in their family, the injured party determines the punishment. At the time of the man's death, he had a 5 year old son. Suzie told me that it was decided by the Shari'a court that when the boy reached 20 years of age he would decide whether Mama Saud should be executed or allowed to pay blood money for the loss of the father. It is the law of the desert; an eye for an eye, a life for a life. Mama Saud went to prison with her children, as is the custom. When her children came of age, they were taken out of prison and educated. Suzie didn't know if they were educated in an orphanage or if someone from Mama Saud's family took them in.

Mama Saud's 15-year sentence was nearly over; she did not know if she would meet freedom or death. Suzie claimed that Mama Saud had been a bit flamboyant the last few months, in anticipation of her freedom, or perhaps in fear of pending execution. She had her sons bring her a German electric coffee grinder; her daughters had fancy pantaloons made for her, the expensive type with gold embroidery at the ankle and zippers up the calf with volumes of fabric starting at the knee and gathered at the hip. Because of her long-term residency, she had the privilege of being allowed extra personal belongings; her corner of the cell had 3 thin

mattresses, one on top of the other, with the flowered sheets and matching pillows and a sheet curtain hung over the wall. She changed the sheets every Tuesday and Suzie passed them to her husband Peter on visiting day and Peter washed them for Mama Saud.

When women were released from our prison, they gave Mama Saud money as a gift. She had a strong box under her pillows with thousands and thousands of Riyals, and she counted the money sitting cross-legged while she made coffee.

Mama Saud had the privilege to sit out in the courtyard for a half-hour after the barred door was to be closed and locked; the guard would not lock our door until Mama Saud came in from her sit. She always wore a black veil over her head and for the time that I was in prison, she wore a green cotton thobe, except on visiting day, when she would wear her gold-trimmed pantaloons.

Mama Saud was upset when she saw me sitting on her mattresses, reading all afternoon. She let me sit on them the first day because I was new, but that afternoon she asked Suzie to tell me to stay off her side of the cell.

Whenever I would speak with Mama Saud, via Suzie, she would touch her red henna fingers to her chin and toss her hands outward, as though she could physically form words I could understand and

throw them in the air to knock me into understanding. Her dialect was Central Arabian. I spoke, with difficulty, Persian Gulf Arabic. I learned to say to her understanding, "I have not seen Maisoon and Hani for 2 years", at which point she would start tossing more Arabic words to heaven.

Monday was Mama Saud's day to bathe. Her sons would visit her at least once a month, on Tuesdays, so the evening before Mama Saud would tend to herself, as well as to her belongings. She would begin by putting on her wire-rim glasses and inspecting her alphabet lesson for the week. Suzie explained that Mama Saud was trying to learn to read and every week she would show her sons her progress. Mama Saud would then remove her strong box from behind its hiding place in her pillows, and count her money. The sheets were then stripped and replaced, the mattress turned over and the cockroaches coerced out of her side of the room. After her shower, she would braid her hair, rub pomade on her braids and feet, and replace the same green cotton thobe over her skirts. She would then grind coffee in her electric grinder and make the thick, strong coffee of Arabia.

Monday night television was in English and we watched "Quincy, Medical Examiner." Suzie and I enjoyed the show, and as I had seen it before I described the action before it happened. We giggled and roared, sitting cross-legged on my mattress. Suzie warned me that the foam rubber would be much too hot and by the

end of the night I would abandon my bed. I didn't care, I couldn't sleep on the concrete floor, no matter how cool. I asked her if it would be all right for me to sleep on the prayer rug in the cell. Suzie said no.

After "Quincy", American wrestling began on the TV and Suzie and I lost interest. This was Mama Saud's favorite program and she followed the action enthusiastically, mirroring every punch. She was bouncing off the walls, cheering her red-white-and-blue masked hero. I wondered about the wisdom of America exporting such culture to the rest of the world. What must they think of us? I stretched out, oh so much more comfortable on my foam pad, careful about how close my feet were to the Kibir Lady. And I slept.

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Tuesday morning was already much too hot, so Suzie turned on the overhead ceiling fan. We were not allowed to use the fan when we wanted electric lights because all the electricity in the compound would short out, so at night we had to choose between light and breeze. That day, in the full sun, the fan was a blessing. I made a point of eating one of Lilly's cucumber sandwiches in front of as many witnesses as possible, so that no one could accuse me of being a bad Muslim, contemplating the choice between going to hell or remaining imprisoned.

The Kibir Lady was released earlier that day and a new prisoner had arrived, her name was Fatima. Suzie took pity on her and asked the guards that she be allowed to take the Kibir Lady's place in our cell. Suzie's concern was motivated by the size of the girl; Fatima appeared to be no older than Aisha and even more petite than Suzie, she would take up such a small space, leaving more room for us.

Fatima was a nine-year-old black from South Yemen. There were two stories about her, the one I came to believe is that she was sent to prison by her 39-year-old husband because she would not have sex with him. Husbands often send their wives to prison in Saudi Arabia to teach them a lesson, I was told. Several young girls in the prostitute section had told similar stories, so it did not seem too far-fetched.

The other story about Fatima was that she was brought here when her husband was arrested and sent to the men's prison because his visa had expired. Yemenis are not required to have visas in Saudi Arabia, however, so I don't know why or if he was put in prison. I was told that young Fatima was married to her husband as payment of a debt owed by her father. She had no modesty and would sit gazing into space, her dress undone, her chest and lack of breasts exposed. Suzie and I called her Our Daughter.

Fatima would follow Suzie around dropping orange pips and allowing the juice to run off her chin and unto her dress. She was truly a baby. She would sit at Suzie's feet, follow her into the bathroom, and rapidly became Suzie's black shadow. Our Daughter rarely spoke, she would lie on the floor on her back, drawing pictures in the air with her toes and sing silent songs. Due to Suzie's impatience, Zaina became mother to Our Daughter within the day. Fatima was bathed and dressed; her old clothes were thrown out with the trash.

Mama Saud was making coffee and mumbling to herself when the word went up, "Mama Saud, Mama Saud, Yalla." She had visitors! Her sons had come last week so she wasn't really expecting them. She giggled, jumped up and pulled an ugly brown and purple geometric print polyester thobe over her green thobe and skirts, combed her hair by running the comb over her braids, covered her hair with a black scarf, layered four thicknesses of veil over her face, put the black abaya from the crown of her head to her feet and floated off. I watched the hem of brown and purple ripple under the black cloak as she reached the outer door.

"How do her sons know her if she covers her face?" Suzie answered my question with a smile, then covered herself with hijab, full veil, and abaya as she went out to meet her husband. Suzie had told me earlier that women could visit with their 'Mahrams' under guard in a larger guard room that I had not seen. The procedure

was for the woman to sit in a chair while her visitor was escorted to her and allowed to sit in a separate chair beside her. Most women did not remove their veils, and Suzie would remove hers only when she was sure she would not cry. Visitors were allowed to pass food and gifts after each were inspected. Photographs of people are not allowed in strict Islam, so Suzie's photo of her family had been slipped to her without the guard's notice. After their visits, Mama Saud came back with fresh vegetables, Suzie brought back clean laundry.

Prison school was attended by the dark skinned Sudanese, Yemen, and Egyptian inmates, and Mama Saud. Our Daughter was the only child in class that day and only because Suzie insisted she attend. As class was about to begin, Suzie led me upstairs to the social worker's office and school room. The stairway leading upstairs was locked by a cage-like door for all but a few hours in the early afternoon. That day there were 14 adult students, three social workers, and two additional instructors asleep under a table. The instructors had made a tent with a large study table and a sheet, their feet stuck out and I could occasionally hear them whispering. One was very pregnant.

One of the social workers, (we called her "Miss Universe" because she was beautiful yet wore heavy make-up), was explaining North, South, East and West. I could understand that concept. The students were taking notes. We were taught that the sun rises in

the east. Miss Universe asked which direction do we pray and the students pointed west! It took me a moment, but I realized that we were so far east that Mecca, the direction of prayer, was to the west.

Fatima was drawing faces in her alphabet book and was reminded by an instructor that in Islam one must not depict a living form in drawings. The page of Fatima's penciled faces was torn from the book and tossed into the waste bin.

I sat in front of an air conditioner propped in the open window. This was the only operating air conditioner I had seen, other than in the main guard's office, and since glass was not allowed in prison, the window was not sealed. I was able to catch a faint, cool breeze. The only chairs to be found in prison, low student chairs where you had to wiggle your way in behind the desk, were in the classroom. As I took my seat, my skirts fluffed up around me.

Miss Universe wore a white polyester silk blouse, a long, excessively pleated beige polyester skirt with embroidered flowers, gold high heel shoes, and a headband with silk flowers and gold ribbons perched on her crown. She said my white cotton blouse was very 'western', a compliment. Later in the lesson she gave me her headband and I became another Miss Universe.

I was popular with the social workers because they wanted to learn English from me. Suzie explained to me that the Saudis preferred to hire Egyptians for teaching because they were considered the intellectuals of the Middle East. And the Egyptians wanted to learn English - Suzie was able to barter for many privileges from the social workers in exchange for brief lessons in English. I wondered if her lessons were similar to my work with Adnan, where he wanted only to be able to repeat common English colloquialisms without an accent. Groady to the max!

In the cool of the class room, Suzie told me her story. As a young nurse in Beirut she was in charge of the kidney dialysis facility of a large Christian hospital. Many Saudis would travel to Beirut on a regular basis for dialysis, diabetes being very common in the Kingdom and kidney failure the result of the untreated illness. One Saudi in particular, she called him the Sheik, was very old and very wealthy. He was no longer strong enough to make the trip so he brought Suzie and three dialysis machines to Riyadh and had a hospital built there. For seven years she was in charge of the kidney dialysis unit; the old Sheik not only paid her well, but provided her with all the equipment and supplies she needed to keep her section of the hospital running efficiently. Her position and power were envied by many, including the Saudi administrators and an Egyptian doctor. After the old Sheik's death, she had increasing difficulty with the Egyptian doctor, whom she felt wanted her out

of the job. Suzie was only a nurse and the doctor felt her unworthy of the status of her position of responsibility over the dialysis unit.

For five more years things became increasingly difficult for her, especially with the Saudi hospital administrator who would not tolerate the image of tiny, female Suzie working alongside men. Supplies and equipment became more difficult to get. Her crime, the event that had brought her to this prison was that she was accused of forging the signature of the doctor on a requisition invoice.

Suzie was not very clear as whether she did, or did not, forge the doctor's name, and as she approached that part of her story, Suzie began, again, pulling two fists full of hair from her head.

"Those dogs, it was a set-up, it was jealousy." She screamed. Jumping to her feet she began pacing the floor, back to the stairs, then back to me, her eyes white rimmed all around. Would this become me in a short time? Will I begin raving and pacing and bouncing off the walls? Suzie used up a lot of energy that way.

We were interrupted by shouting in the courtyard below us and I turned to the window to see two armed guards, men with machine guns, coming out of our cell below. Suzie was alarmed and

shouted as she left the room, "They are searching for something, they are searching our room."

My contraband, my books, were there with me, so I stayed quietly by the window, watching as everyone foamed into a tizzy of activity, hiding and protecting what little belongings they imagined the guards might want to take as they searched through each cell in the compound. Suzie climbed the stairs again, tired, "They didn't find my scissors, so I'll be able to keep sewing."

"How did you get them in here to begin with?"

"The Saudi's used to allow sewing here, they even had sewing machines and the Social workers would teach us to sew in this room. The social workers kept everything in this room, scissors and pins, and machines, the treadle kind that didn't need electricity, it was before my time here. They hid things from the guards when it was decided it was too dangerous to allow the women to have sharp things. I have the one pair of scissors, so I can sew, and I have some needles."

We were interrupted with more screaming, women were rushing up the stairway, calling for Suzie. Suzie leaned out the window to see the male guards continuing their search, moving towards the Korean section, and she decided to go downstairs and address the screams herself. In my short time there I had discovered that

Suzie was respected and called on to be an arbitrator between battling women.

I followed Suzie downstairs and asked, "What are they shouting about?" In my mind, the shouts and screams should have generated more interest from the Saudi guards.

"Oh, some stupid pig is upset about her shoes. Her shoes!"

Two short Egyptian women lunged at each other, pulled apart and then were shoved together again by loud laughing women. What sport! Suzie placated them and then told me over her shoulder as she led everyone away from the stairway, "They are upset because the guards wouldn't listen. Lulu says her shoes were worn by Fakhriah, so she wants to pull out her hair. These stupid pigs." And off she went into the noise below.

I went back to the empty classroom and I sat, alone, absorbed in my book. The air conditioner hummed into my ear and I felt peace for the first time since my arrest. If the social workers could smuggle a constant supply of books to me, prison might become bearable. I thought about asking permission to use the nurse's toilet; it was a real western, sit down and be comfortable toilet, no paper, but a real toilet. There was a shower and a sink in the same room. Now that would be heaven, to sit on a toilet and read my book. I rose and took a few steps towards the

nurses' office, but no one was there. I spun around, no one was upstairs and it was too quiet in the courtyard below. I rushed to the window and remembered to hide my book from view as I looked below.

More armed guards were in the courtyard and Aisha's mother was being held back while another woman was being handcuffed, her arms stiff behind her. It was strange to hear such silence, only the mother's wail above Aisha's soft whimpering. Suzie was bent over Aisha, Miss Universe was on her knees by Aisha's side. They wanted her to lie down, I could see that from the window, but the small girl stood. Other daughters and young boys stood by their mothers, the Koreans squatted near their cells; it was a theater of faces circled round Aisha. As the male guards led the handcuffed woman away and out the iron gate, Aisha's mother was released to her daughter's side. The mother scooped up her child, the sobs began in staccato bursts and mother and child retreated to the darkness of their cell. A respectful crowd of women clustered around the cell door, a few entered. Suzie looked up at me in the window, she shook her head and faded into the shadows below. I wondered what had happened.

The school room was being closed for the day, the social workers argued as they collected their belongings and motioned for me to leave. As the gate to the school room stairway was being locked, I stood in the balcony at the top of the stairs, looking over the

roof tops to the street across the block. I could see a Baskin Robins, 31 Flavors ice cream store - I turned and went down to the courtyard below. I was not accompanied by Suzie and I was not noticed. What a strange place this was, the noise and roar of Arabic women. I was becoming incorporated within this population, but without much understanding, I could not translate the words or actions of these people. Silence meant grief, and the screams and shouting were for everyday living. My perceptions were twisted and I imagined Suzie and myself the only beings in an alien land.

Suzie shouted when she was angry, she pulled at her hair and paced the floor, actions and behavior seemingly commonplace. We were always surrounded by the roar and chatter of hundreds of angry people, children crying, and guards shouting for us to come, or go, or to stand by our cells as the bars were locked. I was coming to understand that silence was, in this environment, a sign of greater grief and control. I had witnessed a day when the prison was held silent for a brief moment, but what had happened?

Suzie was making tea in our cell, at the same time Zaina was, as always, sweeping up after Our Daughter. I accepted the tea cup offered to me and waited for Suzie to talk.

"She wanted to protest the conditions of the prison so she did it while the guards were here. I caught them, in the washroom; she

had my scissors."

I waited as Suzie drank some tea. "Who was it?" I asked.

"That was Aisha's aunt. Aisha's mother's sister. They both are thieves, their whole family are probably thieves. When their sentence is passed, they will be a family without hands." Suzie saw humor in this, the image of Aisha's family all chopped off at the wrist. She continued: "Aisha's aunt came into our room after the guards searched it, probably looking for money, and she found my scissors. She grabbed Aisha and took her into the toilet and tried to slit her throat. Poor Aisha was so scared she didn't say a word, her eyes were so big, white showed all around. I found them, I walked into the washroom and I found them. She left a scrape on her throat, but no blood, thank God, no blood. And no scissors now, that pig."

"Where did the guards take the Aunt?" I was wondering if there was another jail, another place to go, maybe a solitary confinement.

Suzie shook her head, "No, these things happen almost everyday. She will be back this evening, and they will all be friends; they will not remember that it happened."

"But Aisha will remember, I saw the look on her face." I will

always see the expression on that poor child's face, I can still see it now. That mesmerizing, gleaming young girl, frozen in time.

"You mean psychology don't you, that's a western invention, the psychology of a child and how they react to things. Aisha will grow up to forget this thing, you'll see, tomorrow they will be friends. She will grow to expect these things." Suzie was pulling at her hair, I imaged her to be sick of the image of Aisha in her mind. She continued. "And I've lost my scissors because of it, pigs. Dogs, they are all dogs and pigs and a family with hands cut off at the wrist."

Our Daughter joined the circle; not much older than Aisha, I wondered what she had witnessed in her life. She hummed to herself and then admired the silk-flowered headband still in my hair. "Don't give it to her." Suzie insisted, "The social workers won't respect you if you give their gifts to this imbecile."

I knew Miss Universe and the other social workers were our only connection with the outside world, so I resisted the girl's advance and re-pinned the gaudy headband firmly in my hair. She leaned against me, trying to pull the flowers from my hair, and I gently pushed Fatima away. But as was common with the women in this prison, a push was not enough and Fatima was on me again,

her hands tugging at the headband. Like an infant, a child who doesn't understand that she cannot keep what she can grab, she became more aggressive. Suzie took her attention away by offering her an orange and Our Daughter rolled off into Mama Saud's corner.

Mama Saud had cooked the okra and beans her sons had delivered, but I could not eat what was offered to me. I tugged at some Arabic bread left over from breakfast and sat quietly as the evening settled the roar of women. The Syrian was doing laundry in the drinking fountain, the ubiquitous box of Tide perched on the rim. Tide is used in Arabia for all purposes; cleaning floors, clothes, dishes, children, and probably teeth. The Real Man was leaning against the bars near the gate house, speaking to the Bedu guard I had been interviewed by the evening I was first brought here. They must have been friends. I thought about her holding my money and wondered if I would ever get it back.

Wet wash was hung from the bars; a gnawed bone had been tossed in the rubble near the cell door. A baby boy reached for the bone and sat down to enjoy his find but had it taken away by his mother. I imagined she said, "No, No, dirty, don't pick things up off the floor."

Mama Saud made coffee and we grouped together, passed around the tiny cups and prepared to tell fortunes. Suzie told me the

Jordanian from Aisha's cell was a real fortune teller and she had joined our group this evening at Suzie's request. The fortune teller handed me the cup from which my fortune would be told. I drank the coffee until the sand gritted in my teeth, then the cup was placed upside down on its saucer and we waited for the thick grounds to drain. We giggled, such an odd assortment of women, sharing our evening dusk together.

"You shall leave this place in one day," I was assured. The Jordanian rotated the cup in her hand, squinting against the light, and her eyes pulled the future from the coffee stains in the bottom of the cup. "And you will receive good news from a fat man."

Suzie had been translating this for me and the English version seemed much shorter than the Arabic.

"How come when you talk you say the same thing in ten words that she says in 20?" I demanded.

"Oh, you know these women, they have so many words and they mean nothing. Now you must tell our fortunes." Suzie was having some fun with me, and she began boasting to the group that I was also a fine fortune teller.

I grabbed Zaina's cup and peered into the future. This was

difficult work, there were images in the cup but how does one interpret them? I saw something that looked like a satellite dish antenna and told Suzie. She laughed and told the women. Never having seen such a thing, she asked for more details. I described what I knew, the details taken from old science fiction stories, and I generated a real whopper of a tale. "Zaina's husband is looking for her," I declared, "and he is calling after her now, on a telephone line that bounces off a satellite." I was afraid to interpret much more than that, I didn't want to disappoint her. I also saw what looked like a profile of a turkey in the grinds so I said, "And we will have a big dinner tomorrow...." Finding nothing else to say, I ended with, "And we will get good news from a fat man." And that was the end of my career as a fortune teller. Everyone was laughing, and we were content after a long day.

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