

In-the-Closet-Saladin

by A. Human Being (November 2015)

December 9, 2014: On the bus from Marawi to Maramag, Philippines

*I*t's impossible to get what I want, Saladin thought on the day of his second attempt at escape.

If only we were children again.

It had always been OK when . . . as boys . . . we became familiar with "boy play." After all, isn't "boy play" the first form of sexuality for most boys? And as children we explained to each other how our play was preparing us for sexual relations after marriage. And I mean really . . . wasn't it a pleasurable way of 'making men' that had the added advantage of not dishonoring the flower of young girls?

And have I not lived my life, therefore . . . as the most honorable of young men?

But where are my boyhood compatriots now?

Hypocrites!

Rejecting the truth of what we shared in our adolescence, they have all abandoned me now to my skin's lonely need for danger. Yes . . . danger.

And I wish that I could laugh at my adult brothers, Saladin thought, stroking his long hair on the jostling bus ride from Marawi to Maramag, because the Philippines is more gay-friendly than the excoriations of our imams would lead my brothers to admit. Hypocrites, hypocrites, hypocrites all!

Oh, I could show them things. I could. After all . . . wasn't that the point of my martyr video!

He sighed.

By Allah, I never learned to pace myself, he thought. One embarrassment at a time.

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Now, the Philippines is . . . overall . . . a gay-friendly country, except . . . as Fate, fortune, and In-the-closet-Saladin's personal carmi martin would have it . . . the city of Marawi.

For within the borders of In-the-closet-Saladin's home-city of Marawi . . . homosexuality – you know, being badinger z – is illegal for members of the Brotherhood. But at least, he reflected, I don't live in any nation of the Brotherhood where people get the death penalty for being badinger z. On the news, he remembered hearing that a Saudi prince had murdered his kafir servant after he had sodomized him. The prince had murdered the kafir because he was afraid that he would anaconda him to the police and that his secret of being badinger z would be julie yap-daza. Because in Saudi Arabia, a man can be given the death penalty for being badinger z. Follow?

So one could empathize with the man for his murder. After all, julie yap-daza can be lupita kashiwahara!

As for the murdered kafir, didn't Muhammad, peace be upon him, press upon the Brotherhood that they are "the worst of creatures." For that's what his father had always told him.

And why shouldn't the kuffar be the worst of creatures? he thought. They had, after all, turned away from the truth that Muhammad, peace be upon him, revealed in both the perfect Quran and in the deeds of his perfect life. For he had shown the way of spiritual truth, hadn't he?

After all, that's what he and his father, their imam, and the increasingly militant community centered around their small mosque in Marawi all believed.

Now the pious city of Marawi – with its women covered in shrouds of coarse black cloth, and its most southern homes descending toward Lake Lanao – is in Mindanao, the largest southern island of the Philippines. And In-the-closet-Saladin's people – all members of the Brotherhood – hoped to carve a sharia state out of this island.

For that . . . was Allah's will.

Strongly aligned with this political ambition, his father – a vigorous

patriarchal figure – was a supporter of both the BIFF and MILF agendas. Some days, after finishing work at the masonry factory, all the old widower would talk about was MILF, MILF, MILF, as if the Moro Islamic Liberation Front supplied the release for all his needs.

And so In-the-closet-Saladin had lived his entire life within the parochial cave-like enclave of the male community around the local mosque, the forced segregation from women within that community, and its semi-mythic talk of its secretive MILF agenda.

It was only with his job as a trainer of farm hands at a nearby sugarcane plantation that he had begun to get some intimation of a world beyond the closed fist of his local community. And so it was at the plantation that he had learned swardspeak . . . and that *this* was the language used by others who were *like him!* Because . . . he *really* wasn't alone in this! And there were others like him. *You know.*

Now according to the inner-logic of In-the-closet-Saladin's world . . . it was simply Kismet or his personal carmi martin to stay forever with his family and community of brothers in the city of Marawi. It was simply a given, in his thinking. And it was a closet, for sure. And maybe it was a closet cramped with the hanging dead, but it was *his closet, in his community,* and he was afraid to leave it.

For In-the-closet-Saladin didn't have the heart to anaconda his family and friends. Rather, he just wanted to fit in. He wanted their long hugs again. But now in the coffeemate of young adulthood, his male friends in the local community began to barbra streisand his advances. And at first this was just rita gomez, *so to speak,* but increasingly it became downright lupita kashiwahara! And so, In-the-closet-Saladin went from one crayola-day to the next.

"It's impossible to get what I want," he said with tears in his eyes.

Crayola, crayola, crayola!

Until he met Shams, a biyuti cabdriver from Maramag, a city that was about three hours' drive to the east. Indeed, he looked like a real gander to In-the-closet-Saladin, who felt real fillet o'fish for him, and wanted Shams for a bayu

immediately.

Now Shams was a Filipino brother too, whom In-the-closet-Saladin had watched other brothers ostracize for his florid gestures and unabashed swardspeak as he ordered food at the local hotdog stand.

For among the local closeted badinger z . . . for increasingly he had begun to realize that this *second* brotherhood existed . . . this hotdog stand was known as a pickup spot. And In-the-closet-Saladin sometimes went there when he was tom jones to find a hammer. Even though afterwards, he often felt guilty about paying for sex. And ironically . . . the day that he had spotted Shams . . . he had only been tom jones for a hotdog!

Now Shams was a full-on member of the X-men, which is to say . . . *he had left the closet!*

While In-the-closet-Saladin wanted to go X-men, he was still a sward-in-the-closet. Indeed, he was hiding. He was hiding from the condemnation and violence of family, friends, the local community, and sharia law.

In Iraq, hadn't the IS tortured gay men by gluing their anuses shut?

And hadn't the prophet himself demanded the death penalty upon those that practiced the sin of the people of Lut? "Kill them," he had said, "both the one who does the deed, and the one to whom the deed is done."

The messenger wasn't ambiguous in his language, In-the-closet-Saladin reflected. And so, it's odd then, that the Quran should offer male houris as a reward in the afterlife to those who should prefer them. Indeed, it's truly odd, he thought, but then, Jannah is a reality where the pious are rewarded with all the prohibitions of this 'false world' . . . is it not?

And for one such as himself, he had often imagined . . . it would simply have to be.

But carrot aside . . . in this false world . . . In-the-closet-Saladin had the difficulty of navigating the path of who he was . . . in a community intolerant to that reality.

When speaking to a group of brothers he'd speak in Maranao, Filipino, or Arabic

as the conversation necessitated. However, when he was around a new group of men at the sugarcane plantation where he worked, and he wanted to find out if any of the new plantation help were badinger z, he might drop into swardspeak. And this was to say that he might add the 'r' sound to his vowels, flip some consonants around, and otherwise use the gay lingo. *You know, swardspeak.* And he could drop in and out of the lingo at will.

Reflecting on that, he considered how the Brotherhood did exactly the same thing. *The Brotherhood is really a lot like the sward community in that they have their own system of doublespeak,* In-the-closet-Saladin reflected.

An imam on TV might say, "I condemn the killing of innocent people," wherein the code phrase "innocent people" registers amongst the Brotherhood to mean "Muslim." And so, the imam's doublespeak deceives the kuffar though taqiyya, just as it encourages the Brotherhood in jihad. *Hooray!*

Also, the Brotherhood has its own language of trope phrases of 'inner' meaning. When a member of the Brotherhood is speaking of "the apathetic," "the desirous," "the procrastinators," "the propagators of disbelief," or "the faithful yet silent," they are talking in their own language about very particular groups of hypocrites to be condemned. And if they wanted their conversation in complete discretion, then they simply code-switch into Arabic.

Coffeemate-time! In-the-closet-Saladin thought and laughed and laughed.

But back to life at the hotdog stand.

Because it was at *this* hotdog stand – *well-known as it was in the sward community* – where he had first met the love of his life, his beau ideal, Shams the cab driver from Maramag, a city that was about three hours' drive to the east.

Shams looked like a real gander to In-the-closet-Saladin, who felt real fillet o'fish for him, and wanted Shams for a bayu immediately.

So while slowly eating a hotdog next to the hotdog stand, In-the-closet-Saladin had slipped into a conversation with Shams in swardspeak.

Shams had asked if he was a "hammer."

And he had told him "No," that he wasn't a prostitute. But that he was interested in him for a bayu. And so, they talked about the possibility of that.

But then, some local brothers came over in a small gang to listen in on the conversation. In-the-closet-Saladin immediately code-switched into Filipino and asked how much it would cost for a cab ride to the sugarcane plantation. And he muttered something quickly about being late for an appointment. And with that, he got in the cab.

As they drove out of the city proper . . . and toward the plantation . . . Shams asked him, "How late are you?"

"All my life," he answered. "I've always felt that it was impossible to get what I wanted." While Shams laughed, he looked the cab driver up and down. Shams was shorter than him, wore a nice silver watch, had more defined yet delicate features, and had stable intelligent eyes. He had the eyes of certainty. Of permanence. Or so it seemed to him.

Once inside the plantation, they took a muddy side road to a small but nicely furnished cabin.

"What's this?" Shams asked.

"The man who owns the plantation is badinger z. He's a real thundercat, but a nice one. He taught me things. And it's from him, that I learned that we had this second community of people like ourselves within our religious community."

"There are layers to the onion," Shams replied.

They had a sweet day together at the cabin on the sugarcane plantation. They shared a meal, wine, and positions with a freedom that was unheard of amongst the in-the-closet-brothers that he knew.

And the later seemed truly exceptional because, *before this experience*, In-the-closet-Saladin had only known brothers that had dominance/submission issues with sodomy. Because for most of them . . . sodomy was a dominance game, a type of pantomime revenge for some long ago breaching.

In-the-closet-Saladin had not been immune to that tendency that he had noted . . . for he was ashamed to admit that he enjoyed . . . *pain*. And he enjoyed it very

much.

“The flavors of experience that dominate your emotions, your senses, and your life are a direct relationship to your present capacity to experience the Divine,” Shams told him with a laugh as he passed a wine bottle to him. “And in this cabin on a sugarcane plantation – *this most secret chamber* – you ask me to spank you harder and harder with a belt. What is it that you’re asking for . . . *in life*? What is it that you are asking for of God? I’m not a prude, Saladin. I’ll spank you. But I think that you must go through that experience . . . pierce it . . . and experience the truth that underlies it. Yes, I think so, my bayu. Because beneath your request . . . is a long ago feeling . . . deep down . . . and beneath even that . . . beneath that most primordial feeling tone that you identify with and secretly long for . . . Yes! . . . beneath it . . . and beneath all that muck, I promise you . . . *I promise you, dear heart* . . . there is a stillness, a quiescence, and a wholeness. And in that wholeness . . . *which we will reach together* . . . you’ll discover that you have no needs whatsoever! Oh, my bayu, my love, you have so much honesty and hardness in you . . . and beneath that . . . is love. Let’s go there – *which is Here* – let’s explore the fullness of this Heart . . . *which is everywhere!* Concavity is a misconception. There is no cave. Never was. The cave is merely taqiyya, deception. In reality, there is only Fullness that extends beyond our limitations. And so our limits, dear heart, do not serve as walls or ceilings, but let us know where we still have room to grow. Thus, even all limits are illusions. Do you see me as a top, Saladin? As a bottom? I simply ‘Am.’ That is all I know. And you tell yourself, ‘It’s impossible to get what I want.’ And would you pity God too? Ask yourself *that*, the next time you imagine yourself as empty. That old belief of yours is simply a type of abuse. And the false logic of abuse is spurious.”

From that day on . . . they had begun meeting each other at the cabin every day. And it was a romance that stretched and tested In-the-closet-Saladin in every way. Shams was always curious about him, and asked him what he thought, what he believed, and what he wanted.

Shams thought it was funny that he imagined that it was simply Kismet or his personal carmi martin to stay forever with his family and community of brothers in the city of Marawi. “Are you even aware that you can live someplace that accepts you? You can go to Manila, for example! Has that thought *never* occurred to you? Or you could come with me...” Shams paused, “to Maramag.”

With those sweet words . . . In-the-closet-Saladin realized that this cabin on the sugarcane plantation had never been a hollow interior, but rather, that it had always been a bouquet bursting out through all limits.

He had spent forty beautiful days in secret rendezvous with Shams. The most beautiful time, the most open and honest time . . . that he had ever spent in this life. *To simply exist and abide in my own naturalness, and to simply be "OK" with that*, he reflected. That was a feeling that existed for him as both an experience in those hours and as a goal for the rest of his life.

On that fortieth day – *after which it was decided that they would travel to Maramag together* – Shams asked In-the-closet-Saladin, one final time, about his enjoyment of being hit with a belt. “Do you truly enjoy pain more than pleasure?” Shams asked of him. “Would you prefer Jahannam to Jannah?” Hell to Heaven?

And that final time . . . In-the-closet-Saladin had no time for words, but pressed the belt into Shams’s hands and insisted that he spank him over and over . . . hard. And with each crack of the belt, he saw a flash of light before his eyes . . . and he honestly didn’t know if it was the imagined light of Jahannam or Jannah.

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Now in the pious city of Marawi – *with its women covered in shrouds of coarse black cloth, and its most southern homes descending toward Lake Lanao* – In-the-closet-Saladin’s family was part of a very twitchy politicized collective that preached the “true” perspective of the Brotherhood.

Among other things, that meant that he had to be, *well*, a little cautious about which magazines he was jerking off too. As it could mean more than just a serious ass whipping from his father, but consequences of a more terminal end. It was not uncommon, he had to admit, for gay friends from the plantation to disappear around such twitchy opinionated communities that preached the “true” perspective.

Despite his clingy hanging on at their political functions, he had long ago found himself separated from male friends in this enclave of the Brotherhood because he had looked a dear friend in the eyes for *far far* too long . . . or

perhaps the quality of his hand-holding was somehow . . . too curious.

But this community thrives on its own hypocrisy, he reasoned as he began packing his bags for his new life in Maramag, in this . . . his first attempt at escape. The tradition of heterosexual male-sex, in which only the "submissive" partner is understood as being "homosexual". . . is simply fantasy.

It lives in the fairytale denial that "boy play," in which an older man practices in a "beardless boy" isn't badinger z!

And it is exactly that truth rutting behind the feel-good fairytale that makes X-men very dangerous to the tight pucker within the minds of his brothers at the local mosque, In-the-closet-Saladin reasoned.

In-the-closet-Saladin remembered how in his childhood, being used as a "beardless boy" had led him and other breached boys to explore the pleasurable conflicted conundrum of submission . . . and forcing submission upon each other . . . as in a boyhood secret society.

And he thought of how excessively he had masturbated during that time of boyhood confusion, and how in their fraternity, the breached would masturbate each other.

He thought of how the modern term "self-abuse" was perhaps a deflective lie or oxymoron? At least when compared with the euphemism of "boy play." For had the grandfatherly imam and his friends at the local mosque simply "played" with him as a child? Or had it been something else?

And when you had first heard the phrase "boy play" . . . did you imagine that it meant something else?

And even now . . . yes, even now . . .

. . . as he waited for the knock at the door and to see if . . . when Shams comes back from Maramag . . . he'll put his head around the edge of the door to surprise him – like this! – and take him away from Marawi to a new life in Maramag . . .

. . . his memory remains vague, incoherent, even amnesic about his days as a bacha bereesh, or "beardless boy," serving the pleasure of grandfatherly men in

the Brotherhood.

And so – *folding clothes for a long journey, like this, like this* – it remains for him . . . like a half forgotten fairytale of long ago... *what?*

An echo or sorts?

A metaphor?

But perhaps the mind shouldn't even go there . . . *sigh* . . . for didn't the mystic path within the Brotherhood declare that a man's love of boys was a more rarified symbol of love for the Creator than the love of women . . . tainted as the latter is with sexual lust?

And, *oh, you know*, can a person even talk about the Arabian Nights without mentioning pederasty? Ask Pausolini. Or think of Abu Nuwas who wrote, "Ohhhhh, the joys of sodomy!" *Or even my namesake for that matter!* he thought while folding clothes . . . folding clothes.

And so, because In-the-closet-Saladin was now an adult . . . *without anyone raising an eyebrow* . . . he could, if he wanted to . . . *he really could* . . . take a bacha bereesh for himself.

But somehow . . . due to an emotion that he could never quite close his hand around . . . he found that he never had the single-minded will to do that to a boy.

For he had discovered that between self . . . and desire . . . there was now an emotion that had long ago been hidden away . . . in some secret closet perhaps. And some long ago silver key . . . had become lost to him.

So his resistance to continuing in that tradition that "made him" now mocked him . . . just as the young men that had once been his "playmates" had mocked him throughout his young adulthood in the local community . . . centered, *as it was*, around both the mosque and the vagaries of MILF.

These young men have their resistance to their own memory, experience, and sensual fidelity, he thought while folding clothes . . . while folding clothes.

And how was that resistance now redirected? All over the world? And what was the

emotional flavor of that slight-of-hand?

Ugh, the hypocrisy disgusted him. "In-the-closet" or "out-of-the-closet," "clear speech" or "code-switching," "true" or "sham." And which form of Islam is really "true" and which the "sham"?

And where, oh where is my Shams?

For indeed . . .

. . . as he was folding clothes for a journey . . . Shams had come for him on that day of In-the-closet-Saladin's first attempt at escape . . . as he had later heard from the local hotdog vendor and his in-the-closet-clientele.

Indeed, Shams had come.

Full of vinegar . . . Shams came to Marawi – *the city of the Brotherhood* – whenever the fuck he wanted to, damned be all, defiant to all. He didn't care. He simply didn't care what anyone thought of him. And when he strutted around the local mosque, and the nearby hotdog stand, looking for his lover, the brothers from In-the-closet-Saladin's mosque muscled in around him. And Shams – *bless him* – even though he was shorter than most of those men . . . muscled back. And when they jeered at him, and one had sprayed a sports drink on him with a masturbatory gesture, Shams had gone into a butcher shop and snatched up a bucket of the remains of some carcass or other. And he threw a tangled mess of butchered slop over the brothers.

For Shams simply took no shit from anyone! He was an X-men – *out of the closet* – defiant and proud!

And the brothers had grabbed him and threw him into the backseat of his own cab. And then, *as the mob that they always were*, they had piled in on top of him. Brothers had piled into the cab's front seats too. The cab was so packed with them that some had to stand on the doorframes while holding onto the plastic sign of the cab's roof.

And finally . . . *as the hotdog vendor had later told him* . . . the cab had simply driven away.

* * *

Shams, *he knew*, would never put his head around the edge of the door to surprise him – *like this, like this!* – and take him away from Marawi to a new life in Maramag.

* * *

So, the night after he had heard the hotdog vendor's story . . . In-the-closet-Saladin stood, in nothing but his underwear, on his bed and screamed for hours, "Fuck religion, fuck Allah, fuck these restrictions, fuck..." *And yes*, that was when his dad had stepped into his bedroom, belt in hand, and held him down so that he could beat him.

And as his father beat him with a black leather belt, the old man told his son that he would never see Shams again.

For Shams had sold his cab to the local brothers, *his father told him*. And then Shams had stabbed himself over and over, and had cut his own throat, and had tied himself up in a laundry sack, and had thrown himself into Lake Lanao.

And *this* was the truth that his father, imam, and the mosque's community would all declare.

And while receiving what would be his final beating with that old black leather belt, In-the-closet-Saladin came in his underwear in big sticky gobs.

When his father turned him over, the old man's face looked ashamed and fucking horrified at his only son. "Did you just get off?" the old man asked. "You sick thing, you *can't* be a fag," he said, "You're a brother, after all!"

"Shams, Shams," In-the-closet-Saladin cried. "Come around the corner. Surprise me."

Then his father dragged the young man to his feet, "Stand up and look at yourself! You're disgusting! Hypocrite pervert!"

In-the-closet-Saladin's shoulders buckled again-and-again, because his back was still arching in a mix of pain and pleasure. *Jahannam and Jannah*, he thought as his body echoed with the throbbing strum of some low discordant music. He looked down, in submission to his father's words . . . and saw it – *a revelation!*

For it looked as though white pearls were squeezing through the fabric of his underpants. Little round gobs – pearls! And he understood immediately that, despite his father’s brutal red-faced disgust, there was really – *and really* – even through this tunnel of despair . . . a place for him!

So he put up his hands – first one, and then the other – as if in some final gesture of a son’s submission . . . or to simply say, “Enough.”

“What in this world is wrong with you?” his father said.

And something in his father’s voice let In-the-closet-Saladin know that he had ceased to be his father’s son after that particular belting, and that he had now become his honorable father’s liability or shame.

Long ago . . . long ago . . . the Angel Gabriel had, *as old Muhammad’s young wife Aisha tells the story*, caught Muhammad forcefully and pressed him so hard that he could not bear it.

Again-and-again.

Three times.

Until the prophet had left the cave of Hira . . . shaken and traumatized . . . from that pressing.

And likewise, In-the-closet-Saladin, had wrestled – *within himself* – with what was hypocrisy and what was true.

And before him was an answer as from Jannah itself – *pearls!* – his wrestling with his own experience was over. His wrestling with his own truth was over. His wrestling with his father had exhausted in him every other option.

“You win,” he said.

For didn’t the prophet also say that the warriors of jihad would be greeted, not only by “chaste maidens” and “voluptuous women” . . . but also . . . eighty thousand “young male servants handsome as pearls well-guarded who would be utterly devoted!” *Devoted to him – In-the-closet-Saladin!* “And if you were to see these young lads,” Muhammad had oozed in his Quran, “you would think them scattered pearls.”

It wasn't the return of Shams . . . who had been more than just his beau ideal, because Shams had been a real person . . . with a real heart.

And now a "hammer" at the local hotdog stand simply wouldn't do. An eternity of "young boys of perpetual freshness" was, therefore, his only option . . . in a world where Shams would not . . .

. . . put his head around the edge of the door to surprise him – *like this, like this!*

And so, to preserve his father's honor, *as chaste as a virgin's flower*, In-the-closet-Saladin – *that most honorable of young men* – went to the Taqiyya Street Madrasa.

And it was in the Taqiyya Street Madrasa where In-the-closet-Saladin was first introduced to his handler. And his handler told him something very interesting. He told him that all of the pain that he was experiencing in this "false world" . . . *simply wasn't real*. And that he could use that knowledge for spiritual progress. For indeed all of his pain in longing for a release . . . all of his pain of finding a place that would accept him . . . all of his pain over the loss of Shams – *all of that pain* – could be turned into spiritual fuel, *motivation*, on a path that would lead him into the real!

For the "real world" was now waiting to accept him! And wasn't *that* what he always wanted? All of his pain, his handler now told him, was simply Allah's test for him. And in order to pass Allah's test, he would have to reject the things of this world . . . and submit to – *and dissolve into* – the complete and utter faith in that *other* world . . . that world of Jannah that had eighty thousand carrots for his every orifice. *And gentlemen . . . that's a lot of carrots!*

For Jannah, *he was told*, was a world of florescent orange dildos, cocks, and carrots of every variety. While Hell – *Jahannam* – was a world of every conceivable torture and torment. For in Jahannam, *he was told*, homosexuals would be burnt, thrown from high places, crushed under walls, or flogged. And with the advent of new technology in Jahannam, demons were now using instant glue to permanently close the anuses of homosexuals and were force-feeding them laxatives. For times change, and surly demons must change with the times.

The carrot or the stick, In-the-closet-Saladin thought, which to choose?

And really, staring into the abyss of what he had planned for his second attempt at escape . . . it wasn't any choice at all.

So increasingly, In-the-closet-Saladin spent his hours fantasizing about the eighty thousand "everlasting youths" and "pearl like boys" in Jannah.

And the ummah – *the family circle of the Brotherhood* – increasingly seemed like a funnel to him, or a throbbing insistent tunnel. *The ummah had a will for him!* It had desire. It had a force like passion. A fierce intent! And as this intent expressed itself in the ummah's family relations, behavior, and expectations . . . he began to notice a change. For local people had begun to behave differently towards him. They no longer treated him with embarrassment or contempt, but rather with the highest cordiality. And street vendors who he didn't even know by name had begun to give him free treats when he passed by. And as he put ice candy in his mouth or licked the margarine from the side of a banana cue . . . the street vendors nodded to him knowingly, and spoke to him of the delights of Jannah, and nodded again, and again. And then sent him on his way.

Increasingly, he felt the compassion of the ummah, *the family of the Brotherhood*, as it squeezed him tighter and tighter in the gun barrel of his life. Squeezing, with promises and expectations that overlaid themselves on the here and now, until the actuality of his sensual life was utterly dependent upon his future in Jannah.

Because now . . . *a single-minded certainty* had superimposed itself over his feelings, just as certainly as it was true that – *Now, now! Today! December 9th* – a vest filled with dynamite was being fitted over his slim shoulders.

And where were the distinctions in life now?

For was not this explosive-laden vest . . . and his intent . . . and the certainty of Jannah . . . and Jannah itself . . . all singularly the same?

And was not his fierce will . . . and his handler's words . . . the same as both Muhammad's intent and the single-mindedness of Allah?

Had not all these circular truths become real to him – *actual* – in this moment

of fiercest intent in this, the firing cylinder of his false life, his exit hour from this false world?

And in this moment of shared certainty, it didn't quite matter that his handler now wore a nice silver watch that might have been stripped from the dead hand of his beloved Shams.

All that mattered was the truth that . . . *on this day of his second attempt at escape* . . . his brothers had set him down in front of a black flag. They held a camera on him. And they held phrases for him on large cue cards. They held words and phrases that were, *indeed, the same now* . . . *as his own feelings and intent*. Because all truths and desires now merged into this self-same simple single-mindedness.

And it was *sexy* . . . that camera.

On him!

And the forcefulness of that camera's intent . . . *pressing on him again! On him!*

And it was an intent that he could submit to! And would submit to! And had already, just as in the "boy play" of his youth, submitted to! Over-and-over! The black flag's intent impressing its image onto his back as though it were a photographic plate! That intent that had mounted him! And had rutted into him! That intent that was riding him like a beast of burden! Like a bottom! Like a bacha bereesh, a beardless boy! Like a pre-teen awaiting "boy play" from adult brothers whom he would be told were masters and guides to the truth! Guiding into him . . . again-and-again . . . *the truth!*

A Night Journey to the farthest mosque.

Deeper now . . . deeper . . . inside now . . . inside this truth of amnesiac "boy play" memories . . . and how he had repeated that same play with his youthful compatriots who had also learned that form of submission from their elders.

And deeper than that now . . . for deeper still . . . was the truth that this was *never* abuse. And deeper still . . . was the truth that these truths passed single file . . . from the man behind.

And so . . . with the camera pressing the weight of its religious momentum on him . . . In-the-closet-Saladin recited:

“It has always been... my fondest desire... to turn my body... my body... into deadly shrapnel against the kuffar... and to knock on the doors of Jannah... with the skulls of kuffar.”

And he read that, *rather woodenly*, from the cue cards that the man behind the man behind the cameraman held for him.

And under this pressure . . . pressed and pressed as he was – *exactly as Aisha had long ago described that pressure that had pressed upon the prophet* – pressed him so hard that he could not bear it . . . In-the-closet-Saladin broke.

And as he broke . . . he spoke:

“Gentlemen, what are the prophet’s views on homosexuality? He seemed to utterly condemn it one moment, *didn’t he*, then give it lighter rebukes the next? Was the prophet then . . . ambivalent? Was Allah?

“What you now ask me to do today with all this dynamite, and what I have committed to do . . . is terrorism.

“What does ‘true Islam’ say of terrorism, gentlemen? ‘I will instill terror in the hearts of all unbelievers!’ Allah had said through Muhammad. And yet Sufis seem to have developed a philosophy of peace. And is it, therefore, no longer ‘true Islam’?

“And why . . . *why is it, gentlemen* . . . that the people who have tried to humanize Islam have always ended up . . . systematically murdered?

“And you in this room, gentlemen, are you all . . . openly jihadist . . . or still in the closet?

“Is a ‘true Muslim’ one who can understand the Quran in his own language? Or is a ‘true Muslim’ a hafiz who can completely recite the Arabic Quran with no understanding of it’s meaning? Or can one be a ‘true Muslim’ simply by being born into the community? Being circumcised? And can a Shite Muslim ever be ‘true’? Can a Sufi? Or are they hypocrites or polytheists?

“Is a ‘true Muslim’ *then* . . . only a nonsensical idea at best . . . that only reveals a person’s prejudices?”

“Is it a term that we can now relax into . . . once we admit to our own prejudices and preferences?”

“I for one . . . would like very much . . . to relax into an awareness of my own prejudices and feel them on me like scrub brushes in a warm bath. I want to feel them, acknowledge them, be aware of their sensual texture.”

“Yes?” he asked the camera coyly.

“I want to be aware of my prejudices and recognize their effect on me. Is that so wrong? Am I deviant . . . because I want to feel, acknowledge, and admit to my limitations? Because I want to stand naked on the rooftop of the dry onion dome of our mosque, feel the exuberant sun on my balls, and wave from my cock a glorious banner of human fallibility?”

And with *that* . . . the man behind the camera man had reached around him and switched off the camera.

“I’m simply tired,” In-the-closet-Saladin said to the dead camera eye. “I’m simply exhausted. I simply don’t have a place . . . any place . . . anymore. So, this is my final release. My second and final escape from Marawi.”

His jihadist brothers glared at him from under furrowed brows as though shocked and affronted by his “martyr speech.”

But he knew that they would hold back their sickened rage, *because after all*, he had submitted, hadn’t he? And they – *his handler and the whole fucking lot of them* – stood behind the man behind the camera . . . *in the dominant position!* And c’mon, wasn’t that all that this whole “religious” fiasco was really about? This whole pantomime and “play act”?

Children at least know that the games that they play . . . *are “make believe.”*

While adults, *sadly perhaps*, tighten their sphincter around their favorite lie . . . and thus become . . . *truly invested in it.*

There was no dignity that his brothers could now strip from In-the-closet-

Saladin. They had taken it all. Every... last... thing. And wasn't that why his handler had purposefully worn Shams's watch in front of him this day? To let him know that he had taken it?

To remind him, behind him, that Shams was no longer in this "false world"?

To tell In-the-closet-Saladin that he truly had no other option in this life but to die . . . for "pearls"?

So Saladin told that brood behind the camera's dead psychopathic stare, "There's no place for me in this world of closed, cut-off, and cloistered repression. I am a martyr of the same hand that killed my beloved – *yes, dearly beloved* – Shams. I have already been strangled in my sleep. And I am already a ghost. *This body!*" he screamed, "that only wanted to be touched . . . you have already killed! Take it all now. Take everything."

And so with his martyr speech finished . . . Saladin's handler, with an entourage of brothers who all looked as though they were sucking on sour lemons, gave him a bus ticket, final instructions, and pushed him, pushed him, pushed him the fuck onto a rickety old bus heading east to Maramag!

And it was a long bus ride – three hours – first north, bouncing up and down then side to side in the springy seat, until the bus finally B-lined its long haul east . . . to the city of Maramag . . . to the city of his dead Shams.

And once he had arrived . . .

. . . *there* . . . in the crowded bus station of Maramag . . . he looked about . . . at the faces around him.

He looked at the faces of the old and the young. He looked at the faces of men and women. He looked at the faces of people in their various professions and walks of life.

And now – *right now* – in his second and final attempt at escape . . . he looked into these faces around him – *at her and him and him, him, and her and him* – as he slowly reached a hand under his jacket.

Yes! Finally!

And he looked into the eyes of a kafir man whose tiny silver cross dangled outside his white skintight t-shirt. And he watched the man's eyes widen . . . and he watched the man's mouth open . . . and he marveled at how clean the man's teeth were . . . and he wondered what type of toothpaste he used.

For Saladin really didn't have much else to think of.

He was spent.

A rolled up tube.

Empty.

And under this pressure . . . pressed and pressed as he was – *exactly as Aisha had long ago described that pressure that had pressed upon the prophet* – pressed him so hard that he could not bear it. Again-and-again. Three times. Until the prophet had left the cave of Hira . . . shaken and traumatized . . . from that pressing.

Exactly so . . . Saladin pressed his thumb down on the detonator of the dynamite that wrapped so tightly around his chest.

The above short story is a chapter from the forthcoming novel *War Verses: A Jihadist Fairytale* by A. Human Being.

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