



The Messengers

Book 10

THE REAL ME...



Dua Imam e Zamana

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ
اللَّهُمَّ كُنْ لَوْلِيِّكَ الْحُجَّةِ بْنِ الْحَسَنِ
صَلَوَاتِكَ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آبَائِهِ
فِي هَذِهِ السَّاعَةِ وَفِي كُلِّ سَاعَةٍ
وَلِيًّا وَحَافِظًا وَقَائِدًا وَنَاصِرًا وَدَلِيلًا وَدِينًا
حَتَّى تُسْكِنَهُ أَرْضَكَ طَوْعًا وَتُمَتِّعَهُ فِيهَا طَوِيلًا.

In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful
O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of
Muhammad
O Allah, be, for Your representative, the Hujjat
(proof), son of AlHasan,
Your blessings be on him and his forefathers,
in this hour and in every hour,
a guardian, a protector, a leader, a helper, a proof,
and an eye,
until You make him live on the earth, in obedience (to
You), and cause him to live in it for a long time.

Chapter 1 – How Could He?

The hot summer day was well received by the citizens of Peaceville. After a rather dismal and wet start to the holidays, everyone breathed a sigh of relief to see the great ball of fire, once more, burning brightly in the clear blue sky. Warmth bounded through the bustling streets and busy parks, delivering warm embraces to all the smiling children, happily venting out their pent-up energy.

A dazzling rainbow stood high above the head of every individual; shining brightly at all the astounding looks it received from the little souls that stood in awe beneath it. Whistling a merry tune as it rushed by was a rambunctious breeze, slashing down the heat when it became a little too warm. It was a perfect summer day.

Walking from the residential neighborhood to the park, one could feel the excitement and joy in the air. Yet, despite the joyous atmosphere, there was something wrong.

Amongst the serene buildings in the quiet neighbourhood, there was a particularly uncanny one. It was a quaint establishment, not very large but more than sufficient for its two humble occupants. There was a stone enclosing wall with a black metal gate from which a smooth cobblestone path led to the front door. Both sides of the path were bordered with blossoming tulip; their colorful heads nodding a welcome to any passer-by. Any other day, one would cross the house and feel a radiant feeling of homeliness that trickled through every pipe and seeped through every blade of grass. But today was different.

If one were to observe, for just a while, they could clearly see a disconnection of one room from the rest of the house. This room's windows were sealed tight, preventing any external laughter or joy from entering. The curtains prevented light from penetrating the depressed atmosphere.

The room was clearly lived in, but not maintained. Clothes and other belongings lay strewn over the floor. The bed was not made. The lights were off. The only source of illumination was a primitive wax candle which was slowly deteriorating. Beside it, looking in the mirror, was a figure.



The door creaked open. The figure took no notice. From the door peeped a woman's head. She wore a concerned expression. How long had she seen her bright young son in this state? She wanted to reach out. She wanted to hold him in her arms, the way she did when he was little; and dry his tears. She wanted to tell him that it would be alright. But this time, on the other side, was the handsome young man she almost considered a son. The man who she had witnessed grow before her eyes. The man whom she had also supported when he was little. Hannah stared in disbelief at Mukhtar. But her disbelief was nothing compared to his.

Mukhtar hadn't slept in days. How much thought was he going to give to this matter? But this wasn't just any matter. His role model; the one who had inspired him all his life. Someone who had been his guardian, his mentor, his strongest support and more than anything else, his family; like an elder brother. His behaviour was beyond hurtful. Mukhtar's haggard face stared at his own image. The same thought continuously echoing throughout the chasms of his mind.

How could he?

Chapter 2 – A Secret Meeting

An empty moor stretched as far as the eye could see. Waves of brown land cascaded carelessly over one another without coordination or synchrony, resulting in a haphazard hodgepodge of uneven land abandoned by flora and fauna alike. Patches of dry cracked land lay untouched by nature's caressing hand. The distinct, musty stench of dry dirt and undisturbed dust was thick and congesting.



Jodah tapped her fingers on the steering wheel as she maneuvered her expensive car down the worn path. The only sound she could hear was the gentle purr of the engine. She kept her eyes on the road in front of her, focused and unwavering by her lackluster surroundings. Such unappealing atmospheres were more familiar to her than she cared to admit.

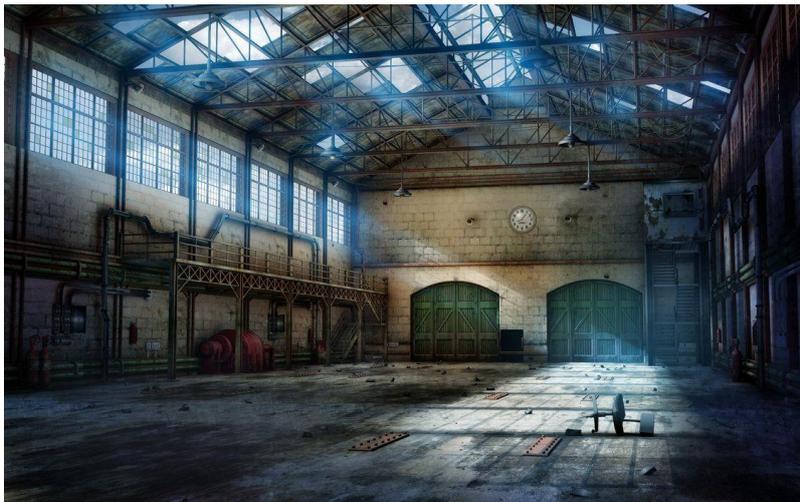
She had some important matters to attend to. Energy and time were precious resources and in Joda's opinion, they weren't to be wasted on scowling at the landscape. In her mind, she was calculating.

There was no room for error. A foolish word, a hasty action or an untactful alliance could very well be her end. Whilst the added luxuries of her position were enjoyable, distraction was as venomous as foolishness; neither of which would produce a favorable result for her. Every move had to be evaluated, every opportunity considered, and every risk had to be weighed against the outcome.

After a considerable amount of time she came across the only sign of life for miles around; the grey industrial warehouse.

As morbid as the forlorn surrounding, it was a towering establishment which had clearly seen better times. The once smooth concrete walls were chipped, the edges worn and discolored by the rampant forces of nature. There were nasty looking spiders blanketing crevices with sheets of webs. As she drove closer, she could see the aged structure, broken by time like a king with no kingdom. Cheap corrugated steel roofs and boarded windows only added to the aloof and neglected look of the building.

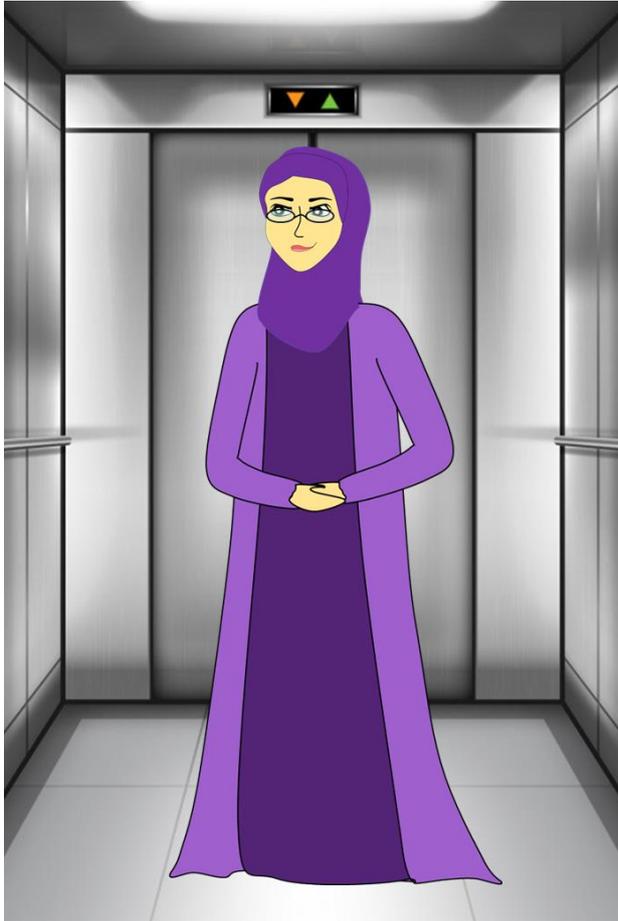
She drove up to the remains of a loading bay and turned the car through the large door. Remaining seated in the car, her eyes glimpsed over the surroundings. The interior of the building was as corroded and worn as the exterior. Wiry metal staircases and barriers had turned orange with rust and flecks of metal had peeled away from the steel skin. Large cables dangled precariously from the roof, the remnants of a removed assembly line.



Normally it would be a very unpleasant place to enter, especially for someone like her who was so used to luxury and comfort. What made it acceptable for her was the fact that the exterior was a disguise.

To the regular passerby (not that there were many in the first place) the building had not housed a living soul for many years. But few knew about the small wedge in the panels of the wall of the room. It was tucked away in the back and the unknowing eye would pass over it as another rupture in the steps. Joda, however, made her way over and ran her fingers along the edge before giving it a gentle push. There was a momentary pause before the panel swung back revealing a sleek modern elevator. The bright smooth interior contrasted sharply with the worn, run-down cover.

Without a moment's hesitation, Jodah entered, the doors shutting behind her. There were no floor buttons, in fact there were no buttons at all. Instead, there was a smooth black panel where the floors would have been. Jodah placed her hand on it and felt the warmth of the scanner sweep up and down her palm. "Welcome Jodah Nafs" a computerized voice called out. Jodah smirked to herself as she waited for her destination.



As soon as the elevator's door opened, she heard the dull thuds of footsteps and on instinct her hand slipped inside her jacket pocket to her revolver. A few seconds later, two men dressed in black emerged from a hallway, its entrance concealed by a tall mirror which created a deceptive image of the statue placed right in front of it.

The men were tall and buff, easily towering above her small frame. They wore tight black T-shirts, stretched across their chests which were as wide as tree trunks. On top of it, they wore grey blazers which unsuccessfully concealed their rough persona. Each had a hand on

his belt, a thick holster holding a bludgeon and a pistol. Their bulky arms were tense and poised as they approached her. *'Guards'*, she thought to herself and removed her hand from her pocket.

She didn't say a word to either of them nor did they say anything to her. One of them extended a large hand towards her expectantly, and she placed her car keys in the center of his palm.

There were only three people in the room. Two were guards, one of them being the one who received her and the third was an old, thin, wiry, bespectacled man. She went up to the box and calmly removed her revolver from her pocket placing it in the box. The man placed the box on the conveyor belt and held up a fingerprint scanner in an almost robotic manner. She eyed the scanner for a second before placing her thumb on it.

As they waited for confirmation, the man's jaw clenched, his eyes darting back and forth from the screen to the scanner to Jodah.

It only took a moment before the scanner turned green. She turned and passed through the body scanner and then stood waiting for her gun.

The guard waited for Jodah to collect her gun before leading her down another hallway. He descended down a winding set of metal stairs before stopping in front of a door. Rapping sharply on the metal, he gave Jodah a nod before returning up the stairs. Jodah's eyes followed him as he went up, while she waited. It was only a few seconds before the automatic door opened for her to enter. The area she entered was more like a reception. A small framed lady in her thirties glanced from the back of her glasses.

"Greetings Ms. Nafs. The boss wished for you to watch his meeting with the investors. Once it is complete, he wishes for me to escort both of you to the hall for another meeting."

"Both?", she repeated.

As if on cue, she heard a slight cough behind her. Jodah turned to face the entrance. A man stood there. She recognized his face and stopped herself from scowling. '*Salaar!*', she thought.

This man could potentially be called Jodah's competition in the organisation. He was a very skilled man but sly as a fox all the same. From day one, she never liked him. The lean lady escorted her to the communication room next to the main conference room.



"Ah, Jodah," he smirked. "I've heard you're in a tight spot lately."

"Every important designation faces challenges, but how would you know?" It was a clear hit on the fact of him being junior to her in the organisation. Jodah kept her calm.

“It’s circling around. People are afraid that due to your consistent failures in Peaceville, you won’t be here much longer,” he sneered.

Just as Jodah was about to respond, the computer guy intervened.

“The investors have arrived. Come and watch, please. The boss wished for you to witness the meeting.”

With a final glare, Jodah turned to take a seat in front of the monitor. The meeting was taking place in a relatively large room. It was furnished simply but elegantly, a long wooden glass table with several padded chairs around it in the center. The walls were covered with expensive wallpaper in cream



colour concealing not only the thickness of soundproof walls, but also small cameras fitted in the walls to be used at the owner’s discretion. In the centre of the ceiling, hung an expensive but simply designed chandelier.

At the head of the table, was a large man in a posh suit. His wrist was burdened with a shining gold watch and his fat finger laden with a jewel encrusted ring. His head was tipped downwards, and his chair lay just beyond the reach of the light. From his mouth, extended a long pipe of tobacco. Affluence and authority rolled from him in waves to everyone else in the room. It was clear to everyone that he was the man in charge.

On his left, was an empty chair followed by the next occupied by five gentlemen. By the expensive suits and leather briefcases it was clear that these men had more than a dime to their name. All of them wore calm and composed looks.

“Well then....” the boss remarked as the last investor settled down. “Let’s begin. Today I have scheduled this meeting to address your concerns with regards to our deal. I want you to know that I am absolutely confident of our new strategy which will allow us to control the city. In terms of it will-”

“Is it that necessary?” a high-pitched voice interrupted. The man stopped his finances rant and leaned his large body to get a better look at the person who had spoken. It was one of the investors.

He wasn't very tall, a good deal below six feet and had a lean build. His head was almost bald with a faint grey coloration where his hair should have been. The thin, grey, squarish frame of his glasses encompassed his small brown eyes descending into a sharp nose. He had a smarter-than-thou air surrounding him even though his voice wavered slightly as he spoke.

“What did you say?” asked the boss.

The man asked more firmly. “Is it necessary?”

Jodah stopped herself from grimacing at his tactlessness. He had walked straight into the trap. The boss smiled. It wasn't a pleasant smile; certainly not the kind that made people's eyes shine and made others want to smile back. It was unpleasant, evil and cold. He looked up towards the investor.

“You doubt me, Masoor?” he questioned innocently.

Masoor sniffed conceitedly. “Hardly. I'm merely questioning your methods. Our numbers show it may no longer be in our best interest to go after Peaceville. Yet you seem intent on the conclusion that treading that path is in our best interest. I can't help but wonder if it has become more of a personal goal, considering your failures in the past.”

Jodah watched the boss's face warily. In the background, she could hear murmurs from the other investors. Rather than retorting, the boss leaned forward and just smirked. He then looked up, his eyes glinting in the light and his figure poised like a snake about to attack its prey. Jodah suppressed a shudder and out of the corner of her eye she saw Salaar tense and assumed he was doing the same.

The boss licked his fat lips and ran his fingers along his clean-shaved chin in a contemplating motion. For those few seconds no one spoke. He looked at Masoor directly in the eye.

“I can assure you, Masoor,” He replied, each word said softly and carefully but laced with venom, striking like a poisonous dart, “My priority has always been, is, and always will be the welfare of Aggressville and its citizens. Men like you come to people like me to ensure all situations play in our favour. To do that I handle all possible challenges that threaten our

future, especially our prosperity, whether they come from beyond our borders or within them.” He gave Masoor a pointed look.

Masoor nodded stiffly appearing partially shaken by the indirect threat. Clearly, he had no idea who he was dealing with. The boss, however, smirked and continued.

“Undermining the long lists of successes that we have achieved compared to a little challenge that we are facing in Peaceville, is blatant misconception. As for the second part of your question, I don’t believe in mixing personal emotions with business. My business strategies are based on two rules. Number one – success and only success. Number two – Do whatever it takes to achieve goal number one. Peaceville has my special interest for two reasons. Firstly, I see immense business opportunities for us if we can infiltrate that community. The second and more important reason is that Peaceville promotes a structure of society that does not suit our interest. If we let these kinds of communities flourish, it’s a direct conflict of interest for us as it can inspire others in the region which is an absolutely unacceptable outcome.”

Everyone murmured at the same time in agreement, “By all means...”.

With that the boss brought the subject back to finances and profit - the only language these investors spoke. Finally, when the meeting came to an end the investors got up one by one and shook hands with the boss.

Once all the investors left, the ‘computer guy’ turned to Jodah and Salaar and nodded.

“You guys are good to go. He wants you down there.”

Jodah and Salaar exited the room and headed towards the meeting room. On the way, Salaar whispered,

“Remember, one slip-up and....”

He snapped his fingers as if to complete his meaning. Jodah ignored him and kept walking. She would have her laugh when her plan worked.

Upon arrival at the meeting hall, Salaar faked courtesy and whispered,

“Ladies first.”

Jodah ignored him and entered inside the hall. She proceeded to sit on a chair that was three chairs away from the boss. Salaar sat around the same distance on the other side. They waited for the boss to speak.

“You are probably wondering why I called you here,” began the boss. “I wanted to show you the difficulties we are experiencing at the moment with regards to our deal. The investors have begun thinking about withdrawing. With consistent failures, it has become more difficult to convince them to stay in, which is why we must strike soon and get results. Otherwise, we will lose billions. So, I want results. Now Jodah, would you please present your plan.”



Jodah looked at him and nodded. Standing up, she looked around and began.

“Peaceville presents itself as impenetrable. It has a strong social and religious culture that has proven to be troublesome but certainly not impossible to overcome. Our plans in the past were

designed to weaken this culture, and they all failed. Despite the less-than impressive track record regarding this particular project, I can guarantee that the flaw isn’t in our plans.”

Jodah noticed the boss’s eyebrow arch slightly.

“And what makes you so sure?” His voice echoed the disagreement in his mind.

“Sir, my team of analysts and I have discovered a pattern. Every plot has a successful initiation, however, at the moment that it is approaching the pinnacle of success, it is crippled. Consistency in results has led me to believe that there is an organised opposing force at work.”

Jodah took a deep breath, noticing the boss’s hard expression.

“Sir, no crowd has the social and moral strength to be fully immune to everything that has been done to date, even Peacevillians. They are not angels; they are as human as anyone here and hence just as prone to error.

They are being assisted by a vigilante force, a guard of sorts. It is this ostensibly invisible guardian force that has been sabotaging our plans to date.”

The boss leaned back in his chair, the metallic bolts groaning slightly under his massive form. “And how does this.... deduction, assist us?”

Jodah took a swift breath and replied.

“If we can take care of this guard sir, the city is as good as ours.”

The boss’s face remained devoid of any emotion, but he was clearly in deep thought. “Let’s assume this so-called guardian force exists. How do you intend to take care of it?”

Jodah spoke her next few words carefully. “The first step is to identify them. We must establish if its one person managing a system or a team working together, although I am personally inclined towards the latter. Once that is achieved, we will be in a better position to handle them.”

The boss continued to stare, unconvinced. Jodah could feel a bead of perspiration trickle down her cheek, but she had to keep going.

From her jacket she withdrew a large file and handed it to him. The boss opened it. Within this file were several photos. As the boss continued to skim through the photos, Jodah began explaining.

“The first three photos are of agents I have hired. These agents will have a simple task. They will act as our eyes and ears. The idea is to instigate situations. Situations to draw this force into the open. Based on whatever reports and intel they gather; we may be able to narrow down our list of names. We tried to spread them out as far as possible. One of them will impersonate a teacher, another will impersonate a waiter. The last one will assume the position of secretary of Mr. Abidi, since the former secretary has retired.”

“Who is the fourth photo of?” the boss interrupted. It was hard for Jodah to determine if he was impatient or developing interest.

“The fourth photo is of a citizen of Peaceville named Samir Raza. Samir is an opulent business tycoon with immeasurable love and passion for his community. He is known for humbleness and strong support of the Peaceville community. One of the reasons we picked Samir is due to his astonishing resemblance to our conman. His name is Mawar.

Mawar himself has vital skills. He is a talented performer and qualified in computers and business. Due to his stark resemblance to Samir, we have decided to use him to replace Samir for a few days to find the truth. With all these measures in place, we will surely uncover those who are working against us”.



The boss looked up, his nostrils flaring as he exhaled. A steady stream of smoke wafted into the air.

“I know it may sound bizarre and I am fully aware of the fact that there are many risks, but if our arrow hits the target, it will undoubtedly be a bullseye.” Jodah insisted.

“Hmmm, although I have never heard a more absurd plan, it is your passion and commitment that compels me to grant you permission to proceed but know this. Should your plan fail, you will be demoted to a lower rank in the organisation. To be specific, you will be working for Salaar.”

An awkward silence suddenly descended as Salaar spoke in the meeting for the first time. He had no reason to before, but now he responded immediately.

“It would be an honour sir,” he said with a slight smirk to Jodah.

Jodah stared in disbelief. But she forced a smile and said,

“I understand, sir.”

“Good” he replied.

Jodah turned to the boss as the files were pushed towards her. Swiftly she picked them from the table and headed out.

She snatched the keys out of the awaiting guard’s hand and made her way over to her car. Salaar’s smirking face was imprinted clearly in her mind. She gripped the steering wheel so tight that her knuckles turned white. She rolled down the windows to let some air into the car.

“Well, well, well, what do we have here...” A taunting voice called out.

Jodah turned and saw Salaar leaning casually against the rolled down window. She looked around and saw that they were alone. Even the guards had disappeared. Her gaze returned to Salaar; his mouth was still turned upward in that annoying smirk.

He brushed fake flecks off his branded shirt. "Your confidence was truly amazing."

Jodah held his intense gaze, unwavering by the evil glint in his hazel irises.

He looked her over, like he was evaluating her.

"You have potential. Raw and untrained but it is there. It will be a pleasure to have you come and work for me."

He gave her a wide smile eerily similar to the one that the boss gave to Masoor. If she felt angry or intimidated, she didn't show it.

"I would only work for you if I fail my assignment. You talk like that has already happened."

His eyebrows rose in an amused expression.

"Given your course of action, it's reasonable to assume that might be the case."

She shook her head. "Careful Salaar. Arrogance is a fickle companion."

He snorted in amusement. "As is short sightedness. But only one is guaranteed to result in failure."

"We shall see."

"You will fail Jodah, mark my words. And when you do, I'll be there watching and waiting to show you how it is really done."

He gave her a venomous smile. Lifting himself off the car frame he gave her a small salute before turning around and proceeding to his own vehicle.

She turned the key in the ignition. The engine roared to life. Jodah floored the accelerator and left without glimpsing back.

The car bumped harshly on the way back to Aggressville. As she drove, her mind clouded with thoughts. This was her last chance. She couldn't work for Salaar. She'd rather restart her career from scratch. Would she even be permitted to live after another failure? Jodah knew she couldn't allow

herself to be distracted. She must be successful this time. She quickly pulled out her expensive mobile phone and dialed Mawar's number.

"Hello", answered a bold voice.

"We are a go.", Jodah whispered. "Plan is in effect."

Chapter 3 – Dangerous Plan

Amongst all the rooms in the warehouse, this one was probably the strangest. It was fairly large and tiled. Fancy decorations and ornaments were arranged like army soldiers upon the polished shelves. In these shelves were neatly piled papers and documents. An expensive Persian rug was spread throughout the floor. Overshadowing this rug was a wooden desk. Multiple papers were spread over its surface. One would wonder whose office was this? The golden plated sign which read 'Jodah' could answer that.

Jodah looked at her watch. Mawar was due to arrive any minute. When he did, she was going to debrief him on the specifics of his mission. While she waited, her mind kept darting back to her past. The efforts and successes which had led her to this position. She recalled her top performance in academics throughout her life. The number of high paying jobs she had been offered. Jodah struggled to remember why she had chosen this of all jobs. Oh yes! It had been because of a small encounter with a shady business tycoon. While he went by the name Saffaq, which matched his profile, Jodah had the strangest feeling that it wasn't his real name. She struggled to remember what he had said to her that fateful day.

"You are very talented Jodah. Your mind is unmatched. You could easily work for anyone. But I personally feel that I can help you reach your full potential. You could learn the skills which no ordinary job could ever give you. Also, I am absolutely positive that I could offer you more money than anyone else."

Jodah's ego had needed no further bait. She had accepted without hesitation which eventually resulted in her being in this situation. She began to wonder what would have happened if she had refused the offer. At that moment, her thoughts were snapped by a small buzzer. It was the intercom. Jodah reached out for the small device and answered,

"Yes"

"Ma'am, Mr. Mawar has arrived," came a squeaky voice.

"Alright. Send him in."

Within the next few silent minutes to follow, she heard a knock.

"Come in", she beckoned.

The door opened to reveal Samir! Or so it seemed. The man wore a black three-piece suit. No traces of the hair dye he had used the previous day could be seen. His facial features were virtually identical to Samir's. The only discrepancy was the vicious smile which the man held.



“Very impressive!”, Jodah said with a sly smile. “You almost had me convinced.”

“It’s a gift”, Mawar smirked in a voice almost identical to Samir’s.

“Hopefully you can make it work,” Jodah replied. “But now to business.”

“I understand nothing else”, Mawar interrupted.

Jodah ignored the comment and began.

“Samir Raza has plans to visit Malaville for some charity event. His trip is only one week long, but I have made arrangements for his return trip to be delayed by two more weeks. That is where you come in all of this. Your job will be to pose as Samir for those two extra weeks while he is away. You will impersonate him and stir up some trouble. Aside from that you will keep all eyes and ears open. Know that we have other agents stationed in the city. Once the two weeks are over, you will report your findings and abscond from Peaceville.”

“But what if the real Samir attempts to contact his friends or relatives?”
Mawar questioned.

“We have already considered that possibility. To prevent such a problem, you will have to plant this on Samir’s mobile phone.”

Jodah placed a miniature grey device on the table. It was barely the size of a mosquito.

“It’s called the SCSJ,” Jodah continued. “That stands for Specialized Computer System Jammer. The first of its kind. Any message to be sent or received by Samir will be redirected to you. Any calls will be redirected to you. You can listen in on any calls made by Samir. Generally, signal is an issue in Malaville, so you won’t have to worry too much about calling.”

Mawar nodded. With a mysterious grin he asked,

“When do I get started?”

Chapter 4 – Phase 1

It was dawn. The sun crept into the sky, ushering the moon into hiding. The once silent streets were filled with noise as the citizens of Peaceville awoke for their diurnal routines. Adults were getting ready for work while children were doing their best to be ready for school.

Hannah was very busy. She had already given Sonu and Zain breakfast, gotten them to do their morning chores and packed their schoolbags. She was now cleaning up breakfast, when her phone vibrated. It was a message from Samir.

“Is everything alright?”

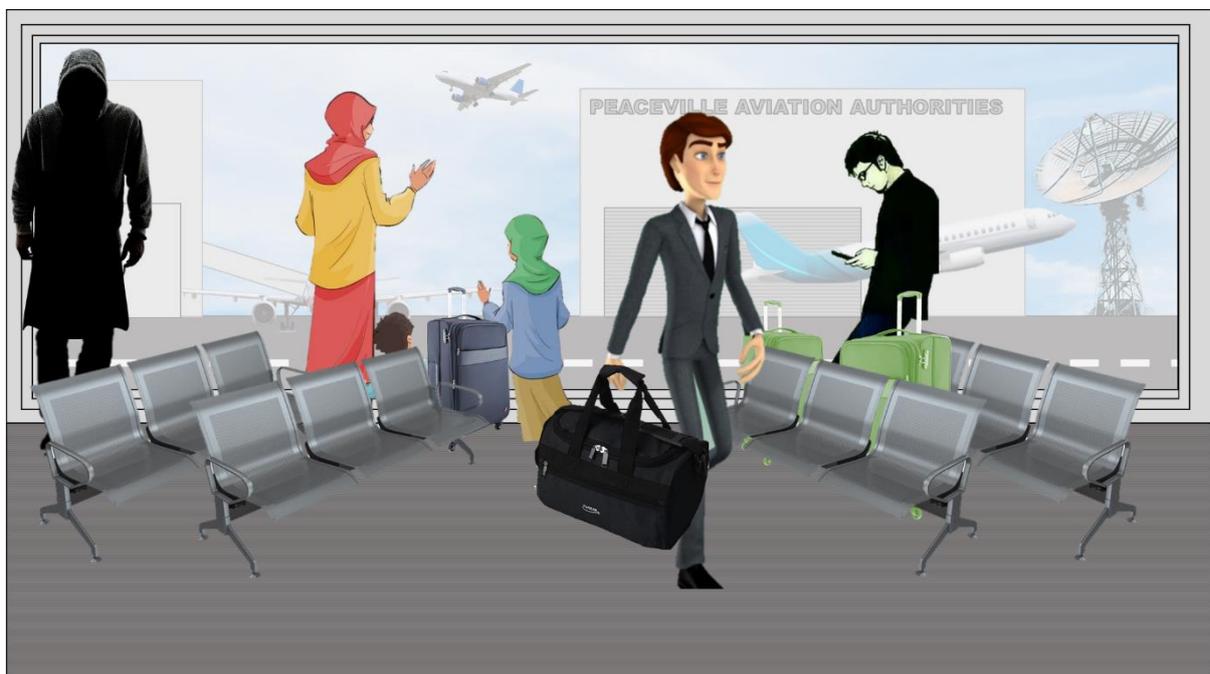
Hannah couldn't help but smile. She had already received this same message several times in the last few hours. With a laugh she wrote,

“Everything's going perfect, alhamdulillah.”

Samir glanced at the phone and felt a sigh of relief. He didn't know why he was worrying so much. One week was probably the longest duration he had ever been away from his kids. Samir laughed. After practically raising him, Hannah was well practiced. What Samir didn't realize was that he was being watched.

A woman dressed in black was standing nearby a fast food restaurant. Her eyes darted through the crowd as she scanned for Samir. When Jodah spotted him she quickly whispered,

“I have eyes on the target. Move in.”



At that moment Samir felt himself being pushed over by a sudden force. He crashed on the floor and felt his phone slip from his hand. After a first few seconds of shock, Samir got up and began to pick up his belongings. After retrieving everything, it didn't take him long time to realize that his phone was missing. Suddenly he felt a tap on his shoulder. He whirled around to be standing face to face with a man dressed in a three-piece suit. In this man's hand was Samir's phone.

"I think you dropped this", the man said in a refined French accent.

"Thanks" replied Samir.

Soon, Samir realized it was time to board his flight. Quickly he made his way to the plane, unaware that the French accented man was still spying on him. He watched Samir board the plane and waited for it to take off. After that he turned around and made his way to the exit. Immediately a car pulled over and the French accented man stepped inside. Slowly he removed his fake moustache, beard, hair wig and wiped away his make-up. Mawar then pulled out a walkie talkie and whispered,

"Phase 1 - 'plant the bug' is now complete."

Chapter 5 – Malaville

It took a while, but eventually Samir was able to successfully emerge from the huge crowds and reach his seat. It was decently sized, with enough space to accommodate one small piece of baggage in front. Slowly, Samir adjusted himself into his seat. After that, he watched as everyone settled in. Once the flight attendants had verified that everyone was seated, the pilot made an announcement.

“Asalumualaikum ladies and gentlemen. My name is Hassan Mustafa and I will be your captain on this flight, Inshallah. The weather conditions are looking good, Alhamdulillah. With God’s help, we will hopefully be there in about four hours, Inshallah. Now we will commence our prayer for the journey and then proceed to takeoff.”

Everyone raised their hands together as the recording of the prayer for the journey was played. At the end, everyone recited a loud Salawat.

Samir continued to recite Salawat silently in his heart as the plane was taxied to the runway. The loud roar of the airplane could be heard and everyone prepared for the take off.



The plane began to accelerate across the runway. Faster and faster it went. It began to slightly drift on and off the ground. Samir closed his eyes, bracing himself for the popping noise in his ears.

Mukhtar had warned Samir to pack chewing gum, claiming that it helped prevent it. Yet, despite the warning, Samir had forgotten to do so. Samir laughed as he saw a youth casually chewing some gum beside him. Finally, after a few seconds the plane took to the air. Samir settled into his seat and fell fast asleep.

One moment he was in the soft airplane seats and the next, he was soaring through the sky as an eagle. He could feel the icy breeze wash over the top of his shoulders to the tips of his feathers. The calm blue sea stretched as far as his vision could take him, the sky dipping into the waters at the bordering horizon.

At that moment Samir woke up. The youth beside him was awake and unbuckled, in fact everyone was.

He smiled and said. "The plane has landed. I thought I should wake you up."

Samir thanked the youth and swiftly collected his baggage from the overhead compartment. From there, they were welcomed by airport staff who escorted them to the security desks. Samir waited patiently in line for his turn. His thoughts were broken when the security guard called out,

"Next please."

Samir trudged forward.

"Asalumu'alaikum"

"Walaikumsalam", the attendant replied. "What is your name?"

"Samir Raza".

"What is the purpose of your visit?"

"I am here for a charity event to raise funds for a chain of Islamic schools."

"May I see your passport please?"

Samir handed his passport. The immigration officer began scanning through the details briefly. After that, he nodded with satisfaction and returned the passport.

"Alright, you're good, Sir. Welcome to Malaville."

Samir thanked the officer and continued on. Once he had reached the exit, he booked the taxi which would escort him to the hotel. Finally, after a lengthy drive, Samir arrived at the hotel and checked in.

His room was decently sized. From the door he could see a mini reception area with two couches, a small glass coffee table between them. A large window occupied the wall beside them. Samir could see the bleeding colours of the sunset dance across the length of the sky. Once he entered the room; on his left, was a small kitchenette and a door, which Samir

assumed was the bathroom, and a large king-sized bed, bordered by a small closet.

“Well”, Samir said. “Alhamdulillah I’m here.”

He pulled out his phone and typed a message.

“Alhamdulillah, I have reached the hotel.”

Mawar quickly typed back,

“That’s good to hear, Alhamdulillah.”

Samir smiled as he read the message and sat down. Tomorrow, he was to meet with the head of the charity group, Jawad. For now, however, he was free to relax. He plodded toward the coffee machine and whipped up a steaming cup. Silently, he turned on the television and settled on the bed, slowly taking sips. When the time of prayer came, he performed his prayers and fell asleep.

The next morning Samir was very busy. He had to work back to back for the next few days. The event was going to begin, and they had a lot of work.

After five days of continuous work, the event began. Many people had gathered. It made Samir realise how important this event was. These people had come with the hope to make a change in Malaville, and Samir didn’t want to disappoint them. He whispered a silent prayer in his heart as Jawad began his speech.

“Asalumuallaikum everyone. My name is Jawad and I will be your host for the event Inshallah.”



Jawad then began to delve into the itinerary of the event. After that, Samir gave a speech on the importance of Islamic schools. Next, the plan for the school was explained, financial details and budgets alongside. Finally, refreshments were served. As Samir nipped over to the food table, he felt a hand on his shoulder.

He turned around to be standing face-to face with a youth. This youth was

about the same height as Samir, with brisk light brown hair and sky-blue eyes.

“Salams Sir”, said the youth confidently. “My name is Hasan.”

“Walaikumsalam Hasan”, Samir replied.

“I would like to speak with you after the event sir. Is that okay?”

Samir hesitated but seeing how nervous Hasan was, he replied in the affirmative. The event continued. Once the event was over, Samir made a private donation to the project. As he was having a casual chat with Jawad, he noticed Hasan, this time with several other youth, standing in the corner of the hall. Samir turned to Jawad.

“I promised the youth in the corner that I would talk to him. Would you mind if I did so right now?”

“Not at all”, replied Jawad.

Samir casually strolled over to the group. Before he even said a word, Hasan began speaking.

“Salams again, sir.”

“Walaikumsalam Hasan”, Samir replied. “What did you wish to talk to me about?”

“Sir, I am part of an organisation called IYM. It stands for Islamic Youth Malaville. We have been working for the development of youth of Malaville. In two weeks, we will be hosting an event on Youth Entrepreneurship. Today, the way you spoke really inspired me. Also, brother Jawad said that you were an entrepreneur yourself. Your presence would be very fruitful for our cause as it would be inspiring for our youth to hear somebody of your caliber. I spoke with our chairwoman, Mrs. Rama who is also very excited about the idea. She is on a ziarat trip right now otherwise she would have been here to extend the invitation herself. On behalf of our organisation, I request you to please accept our invitation to be a speaker at our event.”

Samir was slightly hesitant as his travel plans did not allow him to accommodate this event. However, he did not want to turn them down immediately as it would have sounded rude. Besides, it did look like a good cause that these youth were working on. He tried to find a way out.

He responded with caution, “I feel very humbled to be invited to your event. However, I have a flight back home tomorrow.”

“...but Sir. We would be very obliged if you could alter your travel plans. We are ready to pay for whatever it costs you to do that. I mean your flight and accommodation, etc.”

Samir thought for a second. He had revised his commitments for the next few weeks in the hotel room before coming to this event and was very pleased to realize that he could free up the next two to three weeks. He thought in his heart, “Oh God. How do you put your creation to test...”? But he reached a decision.

“Very well,” Samir replied. “I will try to make some changes to my schedule and will attend your event, inshallah.”

Hasan shook Samir’s hand gratefully as he was expressing his gratitude in words as well. Samir smiled to himself, “Well, it is what it is...”

As soon as he reached the hotel room, Samir started reading the information leaflets that Hasan had given him regarding his organisation and its upcoming event.

The name of their organisation was IYM which was a youth branch of the local community center. The chairwoman was a lady who was also the founder and was running the organisation from its time of inception.



He liked his topic of speech: “Passion and Pragmatism - how to combine the two.” His mind started brainstorming on the topic.

Hasan’s friend Babrak was texting on the phone while he was going home with Hasan on the train; Hasan almost half asleep.

"The businessman has taken the bait."

After reading the text, Jodah quickly typed a message to Mawar.

"Phase 2 is complete. Initiate phase 3."

Chapter 6 – Infiltration

“Where is he? Where is he?” Sonu asked. She impatiently bounced on her heels and craned her neck, trying to peer through the crowd.

“Sonu! I just told you two minutes ago that his flight has landed and we’re just waiting for him to get his luggage.” Zain exclaimed exasperated with her constant questioning.

“Now now, no bickering.” Hannah warned them. She placed a hand on the little girl’s shoulder but Sonu continued to fidget. She hopped from one foot to the other whining impatiently.

Shajeeh noticed her constant shifting and smiled. Both Sonu and Zain had missed Samir immensely. Zain may not have been as explicit as Sonu but his tell-tale grumpy look every morning said more than enough.

“Look, there he is!” Shajeeh announced, pointing to the middle of the flood of people who had arrived from Malaville.

“Where?! Where?!” Sonu shouted, jumping up and down like a hyperactive kangaroo. With a hearty laugh, Shajeeh swept her up on his shoulders. Sonu giggled and swivelled fervently until she squealed and yelled “Daddy!”

From the centre of the crowd, Samir emerged. One arm towed a small grey hand-carry and on the other, he had draped his favourite grey blazer. Upon seeing Sonu and Zain, his eyes widened and he swiftly moved towards them. Sonu was bursting with energy as she ran towards her father and gave him the biggest hug her little arms could manage.

“Whoa”, Samir laughed. “Are you going to let me walk?”

Before Sonu could reply, Zain joined in on the hug. Shajeeh and Hannah laughed as they saw the scene. Samir looked at them. With a smile he asked,

“Do you two plan on helping me out or not?”

“Nah, I think I’ll let you handle this one yourself,” Shajeeh laughed. “They’ve been missing you non-stop ever since you left.”

“I can see that!”, replied Samir in a jovial manner.

The group began to depart towards Samir’s limousine. They sat inside and began to leave.

“So, how was your trip?,” Hannah asked.

“Busy,” Samir replied.

He then began to narrate his whole trip, purposely omitting certain details like the flight.

“Sounds like you’re exhausted,” Shajeeh guessed.

“Yep,” replied Samir. “But enough about me. I really want to know what you guys did while I was away.”

Zain began to talk about how he had just received the highest marks in the whole class in his science project with Ali Raza. Samir congratulated him for doing so. After that Sonu went on to explain how she had been selected for the main part in her class play. Samir also congratulated her.

As they reached home, the group exited the vehicle and were about to enter when Shajeeh revealed that he had to leave for a commitment. Samir said farewell to Shajeeh and entered his home. Inside, he spent the remainder of the day with Sonu and Zain. Finally, dinner time came and after a hearty meal, Samir said goodnight to his children. He then turned and departed to his own room.

Once he was inside, he locked the door and headed straight to the bathroom. There, he carefully removed the contact lenses which changed the colour of his eyes. Mawar then looked in the mirror, at his reflection, which except for the green eyes, was identical to Samir.

“You really have it all, don’t you Samir,” he whispered.



Chapter 7 – Mawar’s Mischief

Mawar awoke early the next morning. Swiftly, he headed into the bathroom and delicately wore his coloured contacts.

“There” He whispered. “Now, it’s complete”.

At that moment there was a knock.

“Samir Baba, are you awake?”

Mawar paused for a second and replied calmly,

“Yes Hannah.”

The door opened and Hannah stepped inside.

“Did you do your Salat e Layl?”, she asked.

Mawar paused again and replied,

“Yes I did”.

“Okay”.

As Hannah turned to leave she couldn’t help but feel slightly odd. Samir would always say Alhamdulillah, but he didn’t this time.

“Well, maybe he’s just tired,” she thought to herself.

Mawar quickly got dressed and headed downstairs. He had rehearsed this routine so many times that he knew it like the back of his hand.

Shortly after, Sonu and Zain came downstairs.

“Salams children”, Mawar greeted.

“Walaikumsalam”, they replied. And then without any warning, burst into laughter.

“What did I say?”, Samir asked.

Between laughs Sonu and Zain replied,

“You never call us children……. It sounds so different.”

Mawar began to laugh as well, hoping it wasn’t an obvious mistake. He could have sworn he had seen Hannah lift an ever so slight eyebrow to his remark.

Mawar then began to eat his breakfast. He couldn't help but think how odd was it to be sitting in somebody else's table, in somebody else's house.

After breakfast, Mawar headed straight to Samir's work place. He was greeted by all of the employees. They seemed to be very delighted with his arrival.

"Wow," he thought. "How much does Samir pay these guys?"

What Mawar didn't realise was that these employees weren't loyal to Samir for his wealth, but for his compassion and humility.

Mawar headed towards Samir's office. He also happened to know the layout of this building by heart. He had memorised every detail, knew every employee of Samir, and most importantly, Samir's daily routine.

He entered inside the office and took a seat. The office was decently sized. There was a moderately large desk, upon which stationary and other such items had been neatly arranged. There was also a state-of-the-art computer, as well as two extra seats. Mawar couldn't help but feel slightly envious of Samir.

As if on cue, there was a knock on the door.

"Come in!", Mawar called out.

The door opened and a young man stepped inside. Mawar knew his face. It was Sadiq. Mawar recalled that Sadiq was a young man in his late twenties who worked at a junior position in Samir's business.

"Salams Sir," he greeted as he entered. Mawar replied.

"Sir, I wanted to talk to you about something important. Do you have a few minutes to spare please?"

"What is it about?" Mawar queried.

"Sir, it's a personal problem." Mawar was already getting bored.

"Hmmm...okay Sadiq, but a few minutes is all you can have."

Sadiq was unable to notice the diminished interest in his tone as he was used to his boss being compassionate and caring towards his employees.

He continued, "Sir, my father is very unwell and I need to tend to certain chores regarding his treatment."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that but life is all about ups and downs. There is a lot of work pending in the office as I was away. I need my staff here and

honestly speaking, I am not paying my staff to go on holidays whenever they feel like it.”

“But I -”

“That’ll be all for now. I guess your few minutes are over.”

“Ye- yes sir,” Sadiq replied stunned.

“Good. Make sure you submit the report on ‘Al-Qazi’ case tonight”.

Sadiq turned to leave, stunned at this response. Why would his boss speak so rudely? Never had such an incident ever happened. He wondered if his boss would come running down the hallway to apologise, but he never did. Sadiq whispered a prayer,

“O Allah! Grant me strength in these hard times and help me emerge as a faithful and content believer and make things easy for my father”.

While Sadiq continued down the hallway, Mawar sat in the office pondering. He thought he had handled Sadiq quite well. Any boss would’ve handled it like that. Mawar then decided to move on to work. As the day went on, Mawar began to feel drained so he called the secretary for a steaming cup of coffee.

A few moments later, the secretary called her boss.

“Sir”.

“What is the matter?”, Mawar asked. “Also, where is my coffee?”.

The secretary replied “I’m making your coffee the way you like it. But, I called to let you know that Mr. Mukhtar is here to see you.”

Mawar knew how close Samir and Mukhtar were.

“Send him up. Oh and please bring my coffee soon. I’m feeling a little under the weather since my trip and could do with an energy boost.”

“Alright sir.”

The secretary then phoned the reception to let Mukhtar in and after that, proceeded on to make his coffee.

Mukhtar strolled upstairs to meet Samir. “Hmmm, Mukhtar come on in. I hope you are doing well.” Mawar was playing his cards right.

At this moment, another employee, Saeed came in. He was supposed to find a file from the cabinet. Mawar nodded in approval for him to continue.

“Mukhtar, when did you get the new haircut?”, Saeed asked.

“Oh recently”, Mukhtar replied. “About two weeks ago”.

“What made you do that?”

“Honestly, I just felt like it”, laughed Mukhtar which made Saeed laugh as well.

Mawar and Mukhtar chatted for some time after which Mukhtar left. As he exited the office, the secretary went in with the coffee cup. It was just a few moments, when Mukhtar stopped where he was. He heard a loud roar.

“Boss, I’m so sorry. I can - “ followed a weak voice.

“What’s the matter with you? First you take forever to - “

Mukhtar opened the door.

“Make my coffee and now you drop it!”

Mukhtar stared in surprise. Samir was yelling at his secretary. Beside the petrified secretary, on Samir’s table; was a mug which was tipped sideways. It’s contents were spreading all over the table and dripping from the sides. There was some coffee on Samir’s shirt as well.

“What happened?”, Mukhtar asked.

“I accidently slipped and dropped -”

“Get out of here! I want you -” Mawar yelled at the secretary.

“Wait”, Mukhtar interrupted. “I think it was just a mistake.” There was an uncomfortable pause for a second.

“Why are you interfering? This careless lady deserves a piece of my mind.”

“Calm down please. Why are you being so angry?” Mukhtar was clearly confused.



“Mukhtaaar! You are nobody to tell me to calm down!” he raised his hand as if asking Mukhtar to shut up.

Mukhtar stared in utter confusion. He tried to keep calm, but the whole staff eavesdropping on the conversation wasn't helping. The secretary and the other employee were right there, shocked and puzzled. Everyone knew that Samir was like family to Mukhtar and no one had ever seen him behaving like this before.

All of a sudden, Mukhtar felt a lump in his throat. On the verge of tears, he decided to leave without saying another word.

Mukhtar was unable to speak to anyone for the rest of the day as he was extremely disturbed. He would not answer Hamza's missed call, or respond to Shajeeh's invitation to his home, or respond to Huda's call for the next meeting.

At that moment there was a vibration from Mukhtar's phone. He turned to see that it was a message from Shajeeh.

“Just to remind everyone, meeting at 5p.m. tomorrow”.

It did not matter for Mukhtar. He wasn't going to meet Samir. At least not now. And while Mukhtar placed his phone down on the bed, Mawar was staring intently at the message.

“What meeting?”, he thought.

He grabbed the intercom to call his secretary.

“Yes sir,” came her petrified voice.

“I wanted to ask if there is any meeting scheduled for tomorrow at 5 p.m.”, Mawar asked.

There was about a minute of silence before the secretary responded,

“No sir, you have no meetings for tomorrow. In fact your next meeting is with the shareholders, three days from now.”

“Alright”.

Mawar placed down the receiver. What meeting was this? Could this be something important? It was from Shajeeh! Mawar didn't know what was going on but decided he would find out.

Chapter 8 – The meeting

The next day Mawar decided to leave early. He planned to reach Shajeeh before he left his house. He had no idea of where the location of this so-called meeting was. So if he could reach Shajeeh, hopefully, they could go together. Mawar looked at his watch.

“The meeting is in two hours”, he thought to himself. “I should probably get going”.

Mawar headed out. He left a note for Hannah. As he reached Shajeeh’s home, he did a mental homework of possible situations that could happen regarding the meeting. He rang the bell. The door opened and Shajeeh was standing there.

“Oh!” he exclaimed. “Salams”.

“Salams Shajeeh”, Mawar replied. Shajeeh was pleasantly surprised. Mawar continued, “I was in the area and decided to grab a bite at your place.” Shajeeh directed him to enter. “Sure buddy. And then, we can go for the meeting together.”

“Inshallah!” Mawar was clearly delighted. But then what Shajeeh said next threw him off guard. “Even Mukhtar is coming. Probably in 15 minutes”. We can all head out together.

“Uh Oh!” Mawar thought of what to do. He had to change the plan. “Oh! I just remembered. I left an important file somewhere and must get it back before the office closes.”

“But, I thought you were hungry?” Shajeeh replied, confused.

Mawar maintained his composure on the outside, although internally he was getting very anxious. “You bet I am”. He forced a smile. “But I can’t afford to misplace the file. So, I must go. Just by the way, what would be the best route for the meeting location at this hour?” he asked casually.

“I think Highway 101 will be the best shot. Straight forward, 10th exit and 2nd right, our favourite building. “

Mawar concluded the conversation with a deep sigh. “You can definitely consider a career in navigation. You know the voice in GPS. You sounded just like that.” They both managed a chuckle and Mawar left. As he drove out his thoughts turned to Mukhtar. Why was Mukhtar coming here?

There was no obvious connection between them. Both were specialised in different fields of academics. A significant age gap ensured that they weren't peers. They had never been to the same school or worked in the same company. There was only one connection, Samir. Both were close associates of Samir, so they probably knew each other. Also, the incidents of yesterday may have contributed to this. Of course! Mukhtar was confiding into Shajeeh! This was all about yesterday. Shajeeh was much older. He also knew Samir really well. That meant Mawar would have to be really careful. For now, he would have to worry about the meeting.

He started driving towards the destination. After reaching there, he was able to see the tall and elegant gray building which read 'Lady Fatima Enterprises'. As he was going towards the elevator, he saw Shajeeh.

'Luck was on his side' he thought.

"Did you find the file?" Shajeeh asked casually as they entered the elevator.

"What file?" the words slipped. He quickly covered up. "Oh yes, I reached there just in time". He inwardly scolded himself, "Careful Mawar, careful!"

As they both entered the room, Mawar started noticing the details.

It was a large office boardroom, a long table stretching down the centre with office chairs on either side. Opposite the door were wide windows that gazed over the large buildings of the surrounding city. On one corner of the table was an assortment of snacks from sandwiches to sweets. Beside the table, there were two girls in scarfs talking animatedly amongst themselves and occasionally calling out to a middle-aged woman on the other side of the room. The woman was having a much more serious discussion with someone on the phone. There was another man too, although he was younger than Shajeeh and Samir, who was browsing the assortment of edibles on the table.

After the exchange of greetings, Shajeeh called for everybody's attention to himself.

"Alright guys, now that everyone is here, let's get started."

"But Mukhtar isn't here yet." said one of the girls.

"He might be late, Maira." Shajeeh replied.

"Maira", Mawar repeated in his mind silently. That was one of the girl's name.

“Mukhtar won’t be coming today”, the middle-aged woman explained.

“Why Huda Api?”, the other girl asked.

“Huda”, Mawar noted silently. That was the middle – aged woman’s name.

“An unavoidable commitment came up at the last minute, Zahra”, Huda replied.

“Zahra” Mawar silently memorised. That left the young man who was busy munching on a sandwich.

“I wasn’t aware he was busy”, the young man said.

“It was an unexpected commitment, Hamza,” responded Shajeeh.

That was it. Mawar knew everyone’s names.

Shajeeh continued.

“Now let’s get started.”

The team obviously had no clue of the danger they were about to delve into. Only God could help them now. All of them took a seat around the table. Mawar took a seat between Shajeeh and Hamza, neither noticing the slightly wary glimpse he had sent their way. Before anything was said, Shajeeh gestured to Hamza and he recited something in Arabic. Mawar’s brow creased only slightly, to not draw too much attention. Hamza recited it well, the sound almost soothing. ‘A sura from Quran to start with. This must be something important.’ Mawar’s heart left a beat as his mind was constantly processing his thoughts.

Once Hamza had finished, Shajeeh pulled out some blueprints. Mawar listened carefully as Shajeeh and Huda outlined their plan to sneak into one of the data security companies and make a copy of the database stored under Naas’s name. The girls and Hamza mostly sat silently and listened, occasionally making slight additions and modifications.

Naas? Mawar had heard the name not too long ago, in Aggressville. To him, she was just another business tycoon. Why would they want her information? He was pulled out of his train of thoughts.

“Samir? Samir? Earth to Samir?” He heard Shajeeh call out from beside him. His eyes snapped up to meet Shajeeh’s curious gaze. “Are you with us, brother?”

He looked around to see everyone looking at him. "Yeah, yeah sorry." He mumbled an apology and gestured to Shajeeh to continue. Shajeeh nodded.

"So, Samir will provide us a bird's eye view of the complex."

Mawar almost raised an eyebrow in surprise as everyone turned to him with knowing grins. Playing along with what was happening he responded with one of his own.

"They'll never know what hit them!" Maira exclaimed in an almost menacing tone. Everyone chuckled at her enthusiasm.

"Was that Inspector Haider? From the episode where he goes after the Lying Bandit?" Hamza made a reference to a TV show that was very popular with the youth these days.

"Yes! It's the greatest show in the whole world!" Zahra claimed.

The adults shook their heads in amusement at their younger team member's excitement.

"Now let's try to stay on topic." Huda interrupted. They nodded sheepishly and returned their attention to the plan. She turned to Samir once more.

"Using a smaller form, you'll be able to penetrate the outer wall by using the ventilation shafts as a means of transport. However you're going to need speed. Every 30 minutes the hot air is cycled out of the rooms with the mainframes. Those vents are going to be like an oven when that happens so you're going to have to be fast and small. What form do you think would be best?"

Mawar paused and thought, buying time as his mind scrambled for some kind of sensible solution.

He then looked around and asked, "Well what do you guys suggest?"

Hamza was the first to respond, "What about the eagle? It's fast, maneuverable and versatile. Not only that it can camouflage and it has a pretty good defense mechanism. It seems to match the specs pretty well."

Everyone thought for a moment.

"While it would be the most ideal, it might be too large for the vents" Zahra replied.

Huda nodded. "Zahra's right. We could go for a smaller one, but they're more rare and would be singled out pretty quickly, considering that they're not common in the area."

"What about the sparrow hawk?" asked Maira. "It's got nearly all the features of the eagle, only it'll be smaller. That way it'll fit in the vents and will be harder to detect. Not only that, it's well equipped for warm temperatures which will give us more time to navigate the ventilation system."

Mawar's mind was in a whirl.

'What on Earth are they talking about?'



Shajeeh nodded. For the rest of the meeting Mawar was silent, brooding amongst his many hypothesis, each as unlikely as the next. Samir had some weapon at his disposal, but what? Something that could fly and could avoid detection. Could it be a drone? But designing a

system like that would cost millions. However, Samir was a billionaire, the prospect isn't beyond his financial capability. Not to mention Shajeeh, his best friend is a computer scientist. Most importantly, could Mawar get access to this weapon?

Shajeeh then stood up, startling Mawar out of his long train of thought.

"I think that settles things. You all know your roles and what you have to do. May Allah(swt) bless you all for your efforts." As always, Shajeeh became a bit emotional.

"May we all serve the cause with our lives. As we speak there are forces beyond our walls who threaten to destroy everything we hold dear. Know that every move we make and every step we take could take us to success or condemn us to failure. We may be a small team but we have been committed to serve our Imam of the time (ajtf) and we shall do so to the best of our abilities, Inshallah."

Everyone muttered “Ameen” and began getting up to leave. Mawar began to do so as well, when he was stopped by Shajeeh.

“We need to talk,” Shajeeh whispered.

“Sure”, responded Mawar.

The two exited the room and headed downstairs.

As they strolled out, the sun began to set.

“Samir”, Shajeeh began. “You have been my best friend, in fact more like my brother since school. As a best friend I feel responsible to always support you when you do the right thing and always admonish you when you do the wrong thing.”

Mawar remained silent. Shajeeh continued,

“My dear friend, I have recently spoken to Mukhtar. He told me about what happened the other day.”

Mawar tried to justify, “He made me very upset that day.”

Shajeeh slightly smiled and said,

“My friend, Mukhtar has been hurt badly by what you said. You hold a very special status in his eyes. Maybe you should apologise to him.”

“What?”, Mawar replied slightly harsher than he hoped.

“There is nothing wrong with apologising,” replied Shajeeh with a smile.

“Unless you’re sick and tired of seeing a swan in the mirror.” Shajeeh was making a reference to how Samir saw himself as a swan in the mirror when he rectified his mistake in the past. He had no idea of how much this was confusing Mawar.

He smirked and Mawar laughed, completely baffled inside. What in the world was Shajeeh referring to?

He needed to end this conversation.

“Tell you what. Sometime tomorrow or so I’ll visit Mukhtar and apologise for my behaviour.”

“That’s the spirit!” smiled Shajeeh. “Now you’re a duck!”

Mawar was still perplexed. What was Shajeeh talking about?

Chapter 9 – Sinister Surprises...

It had been about one week since the meeting. Shajeeh had been very busy lately. A new deal was in progress with another company. Shajeeh was the team lead on the project and was working day in and out. Out of hours, he was working on the team project. He knew how critical it was that they obtain information on Naas. He definitely had more on his plate than he could handle.

Shajeeh looked at his watch. In two hours he would be done his work for the day. At that moment he got a phone call. It was his wife, Zainab.

“Salamunalaikum Shajeeh”, Zainab greeted.

“Walaikumsalam”, he replied. “What is the matter?”

“I just called to ask you where the cake is, I can’t see it in the fridge”.

“What cake?”, Shajeeh asked partially confused.

“For my sister, Khadijah”, Zainab paused. “She’s coming from Malaville tonight and her birthday is tomorrow. Didn’t you promise me you’d buy it?”

“O-Of course!”, Shajeeh stammered. “I certainly did promise. I will surely buy it today while coming back home. I intend to leave the office in ten minutes, Inshallah, so you shall have the cake shortly, Madam.” He felt a bit relaxed after having a chat with Zainab.

His ten minutes extended to another hour. Shajeeh rushed to his car and started driving towards the bakery. He arrived just two minutes before closing time and selected one of the already made cakes. From there he drove straight home. As he drew near the house he slowed down and saw his son, Ali Reza in the driveway.

“Is she inside?”, he silently whispered to his son. Both had a glint of a naughty smile in their eyes.

“Yes”, Ali Reza whispered back. “I don’t know what you said to her, but she has been waiting for the last one hour.”

“Take the cake inside first, my son. Maybe the flavour and décor of the cake will help.”

“Sounds like a plan, but what’s in it for me?” a mischievous smile playing on his lips.

“Fine,” Shajeeh replied begrudgingly. “I’ll get you that remote control race car you’ve been wanting for the last two weeks.”

“Done!”, replied Ali Reza.

With that, the child turned around and headed into the yard. Shajeeh waited for a few minutes and then decided to go in.

The next morning, they all headed out to the airport to pick Khadija. Even though it was pitch black, Ali Raza could still make out the large mechanical bodies moving around them. The spotlights on the airport building let it stand out against the darkness. Impatient buses honked their way around cars, whose drivers were engaged in tearful farewells or were eagerly awaiting returning friends and relatives. He watched in awe as large metal birds swooped through the velvet clouds before screeching their way down the large runway.

“There she is,” Zainab called out. “Khadijah, over here!”

Khadijah turned towards them. She was slightly short in height, with a traditional Malaville pink coloured dress. She also carried a decent purse, mustard in colour.

“Salamunalaikum!”, she joyfully greeted. “How are all of you doing?”

“Fine Alhamdulillah”, replied Zainab. “How are you?”

The conversation continued until they arrived at the car. Zainab and Shajeeh sat in front while Ali Reza and Khadija sat in the back.

“So how are things going in Malaville?”, Zainab asked as they drove home.

“Quite good actually. I just attended a workshop on Islamic youth entrepreneurship with my daughter. One of your Peaceville business tycoons was also there. It was an interesting event but it kept us occupied



until late last night, so I did not get proper sleep. But it doesn't matter. I'm so excited to be here with all of you."

"Peaceville business tycoon? Really?", Shajeeh asked. "What was his name?"

"S- Sa-", Khadijah struggled. "Safeer, no that wasn't it. Sadiq, no that wasn't it either. I have a picture of him on my phone."

Swiftly, Khadijah pulled out her phone and opened up the photos.

"There!", she handed the phone to Zainab.

Zainab took one look at the photo. For a second her eyes narrowed as she zoomed in, she responded almost instantly.

"That's brother Samir!".

Shajeeh almost crashed the car in surprise.

"That can't be right!", he declared.

"I'm certain it is!", Zainab replied equally confident.

Shajeeh pulled over the car and looked at the photo. His wife was right! That was Samir!

"B-But how is that possible?", he stammered.

"What?", Khadijah asked partially confused.

"Nothing," Shajeeh replied, although his tone slightly wavered. "We need to get home."

Soon enough they arrived and Shajeeh headed straight towards his bedroom.

"How is this possible?", he thought to himself. "Samir would have told me if he could be in two places at once. Let's assume he isn't. That means... one of these Samir's is an imposter! But which one?" He held his head with both hands trying to understand the magnitude of the problem.

At that moment Shajeeh recalled the recent incidents he'd encountered. Samir misbehaving with Mukhtar, his arrogant comments after the meeting. The meeting! If the Samir in Peaceville was a fake then that could mean only one thing. He knew about the team! He knew about the operation! He knew about their headquarters! But if that was the case why didn't the real Samir try to contact Shajeeh. He didn't look like he was being threatened. Even if he was, why would whoever it was threatening him let

him come on stage where he could risk being seen? The only logical explanation was that the real Samir was in Malaville and didn't know he was being duped and that somehow his communications had been tampered. Shajeeh's mind was working like a processor. If that was the case then he must have been tricked! But how? Shajeeh thought of Sonu and Zain. They were with some random stranger! He should go and rescue them! No! They are safe as long as the imposter thinks he's not exposed. Shajeeh had to contact Samir, but couldn't do it directly. Of course! Shajeeh quickly went on his phone and pulled out the official contact list of IMCO.

Silently he read,

"Brother Jawad, our Chairman and manager can be reached at...." and the number followed next. Shajeeh looked at the time. It was the afternoon in Malaville. He dialled the number quickly,

"Hello," answered Jawad.

"Salamunalaikum brother Jawad," Shajeeh greeted. "It's me Shajeeh. Samir's friend. I got your number from the program leaflet. I need to talk to you for two minutes please.

"Sure brother, what can I do for you?" Jawad responded politely.

"I am trying to reach Samir. It's urgent. I cannot talk to him on his phone and was hoping that you could help."

There was silence for two seconds.

"I hope all is okay," Jawad replied. "You're making me a bit worried. I met him this morning only." Shajeeh's worst fears were confirmed. Samir was still in Malaville.

"Brother Jawad please! It's an emergency. I will explain later but for now, please take this phone to him".

"Oh okay!", Jawad replied, partially stunned.

"Samir is just a few minutes drive away. I'll get there myself. When I do, I'll call you!".

Shajeeh headed downstairs for a glass of water. While he was downstairs he couldn't help but notice how quiet it was. At that moment he realised everyone was curious for answers. He couldn't risk anyone knowing and acting impulsively.

“We mixed it up. It wasn’t Samir. It was another business tycoon who *used* to live in Peaceville. His name is Saeed. He looks a lot like Samir.”

“Oh!”, Khadijah exclaimed. “That must be it. I’m not very good with names anyway!”

The conversation resumed. In the middle, Shajeeh’s phone began ringing and he sprinted upstairs faster than Ali Reza had ever done! Inside his room he answered the call.

“Salamunalaikum Shajeeh, is everything okay?” came Samir’s concerned voice. Shajeeh’s heart skipped a beat.

“Walaikumsalam,” he replied. “Yes Samir, everything is alright. I want you to listen to me very carefully. I need to know –”

“Are Sonu and Zain alright?”, interrupted Samir.

“They’re fine Alhamdulillah, now listen. Can you tell me something only you and I would know?”

“Why?”, Samir asked.

“Just do it!”, Shajeeh yelled slightly louder than he intended to.

“Okay,” came Samir’s hesitant and confused voice. Something only you and I would know... Oh yes! I was once almost devoured by a fox!”



“How?” Shajeeh asked.

“Why are we doing this Shajeeh? Tell me please!”

“Samir, I beg you to answer my question now!”, Shajeeh commanded

“I was a bird. A robin. And while I was sleeping in the forest it attacked me.”

Shajeeh felt a sigh of relief.

“Hello?” came Samir’s voice.

“Yes Samir. Listen carefully. We are in a very serious situation.”

“What is-”

“Someone here is pretending to be you,” interrupted Shajeeh. “An imposter. He knows about the team. He knows about our identities.”

Shajeeh let his words sink in.

“What! How? What do you mean?” A very expected response came from Samir. A few seconds later, he asked again more composed this time. Samir had spiritually trained himself not to lose his calm in situations of distress. He was a firm believer of Allah’s power over everything. It was one of the days when his spirituality was put to test. “How did this happen?”

“That’s irrelevant at the moment,” responded Shajeeh “What matters is how we’re going to catch that conman!”

Chapter 10 – Exposed Espionage

It had barely taken Samir one hour since his call with Shajeeh to book a flight for Peaceville. Samir had ended up arriving just before dawn of the next day at the airport. Hamza went to pick him up from the airport. Extra precautions had to be taken as the enemy was invisible.

Hamza had arrived at the airport half an hour after Samir had landed on purpose. He had been given specific instructions by Shajeeh to stroll over to the men's bathroom and stand outside. Samir had been instructed to come from inside the bathroom two minutes before the o'clock. Shajeeh had emphasised on the importance of all the conditions to ensure that anyone trailing Hamza would not spot Samir. As scheduled Samir left the bathroom two minutes before the o'clock. Hamza heard someone's footsteps and pulled out his phone. He was not to look at Samir. Slowly he turned and walked over to inside the bathroom when he bumped into an elderly man.

Almost instantly the elderly man whispered,

"Falcon".

Immediately Hamza replied,

"Hawk"

The elderly man smiled and said, "Thank you young man."

Hamza smiled. The elderly man headed towards the exit and left. About three minutes later Hamza left. After exiting the airport he headed over to the parking lot and knocked on the window. The door opened and Hamza sat inside. The elderly man was in the back seat. Hamza turned and asked the elderly man,

"What bothers me Samir Bhai, is how you pickpocketed my car keys so easily?"

The elderly man laughed and said,

"I'm afraid I watch too much of Inspector Haider cartoons with Zain."

Hamza started the car and swiftly drove off. It wasn't long before they arrived at Mukhtar's house. As soon as they arrived Hamza ran over to the house and knocked on the door. The door opened to reveal Hannah. She was the only one outside the team whom Shajeeh had trusted with the information.

“Is he here?”, she asked partially nervous.

“Yes”, replied Hamza.

Swiftly Hamza headed back and escorted Samir to the entrance. As instructed, Hannah asked her question,

“What was the naughtiest thing you ever did and how were you punished?”

Samir smiled and said,

“When I was fourteen I pushed Shajeeh inside our swimming pool while he was still wearing clothes. My punishment was that Shajeeh turned off the hot water to the swimming pool and set it to the coldest Setting. So when I dived in I got quite a shock.”

Samir stopped and randomly shuddered.

Hannah smiled as she invited him in. This was definitely confirmation that Shajeeh had planned for extra cautiousness.

Samir took a seat at her couch and Hamza sat down beside him. Hannah left to get Mukhtar.

Mukhtar and Hannah just entered the living room.

“Salamunalaikum Mukhtar,” Samir greeted.

There was a faint grumble from Mukhtar.

“Walaikumsalam”.

Samir started giving details of his trip extension in Malaville.

“I was approached by a young man about your age who invited me as a speaker. Here, I have photos.”

Samir handed his phone over to Mukhtar and Hamza who looked carefully.

Mukhtar couldn't help it. He swiftly moved forward and gave Samir a big hug. He was so relieved to know the



truth. Samir did not understand the gesture but hugged him anyway. He was filled in a bit later and that's when he understood Mukhtar's hug.

"So what's the plan?", Mukhtar asked.

"Well, everyone was supposed to be here by now," Hamza explained.

While discussing the plan, Samir realised he had mentioned his powers in front of Hannah. He turned to Hannah. He was surprised to see her calm. Before he could say anything, she laughed and said,

"I know what you're thinking Samir. Did you honestly think I didn't know? I have known since the first time you transformed into a bird. I've known that you love going every morning for a flight as a robin. A mother always knows dear."

This day was certainly filled with surprises. Samir was speechless. All this time. All these excuses. Samir couldn't help but feel like a six-year-old who'd been caught in the prank. At that moment there was a knock on the door. Hamza walked over.

"It's them!", Hamza exclaimed.

He opened the door. Shajeeh stood there with Maira, Zahra and Huda. Swiftly they stepped in. Once all of them were inside, Zahra turned to Samir and asked.

"Samir Bhai, tell me something only you and I would know!"

Samir was exasperated. How many more times? He opened his mouth but Hamza responded before he could.

"It's alright Zahra. He's been verified."

"Okay", Zahra smiled. At that moment she noticed Mukhtar.

"Salams Mukhtar", She greeted. "I've been-, I mean, we've all been worried about you."

She paused to notice that Maira was staring at her with a piercing grin.

Samir started the intended conversation, "So what's the plan to apprehend the imposter?"

"The plan," began Shajeeh. "We cannot give him too much time and so will apprehend him at the earliest opportunity, preferably in the next 24 hours. May Allah(swt) help us Inshallah"

The meeting began with a loud “Ameen!” and the team continued to discuss until an hour had gone by. Since the plan was established the girls headed home. Shajeeh and Hamza stayed a little longer. The four ‘boys’ kept chatting until an unhappy Hannah came to remind them that she has warmed the food twice. As Hamza and Shajeeh were about to leave, Hamza winked at Mukhtar and casually remarked,

“Mukhtar, be sure to take care of yourself. Zahra’s probably gonna be worried sick if you get hurt.”

Without warning, Mukhtar hurled a pillow straight at Hamza. Hamza ducked swiftly.

“Just kidding!” Hamza laughed.

A relatively lighter note relaxed their nerves a bit which was a relief as calm nerves and a steady mind were going to be invaluable assets for their upcoming mission.

Chapter 11 – Cornering the prey

Ever since the meeting had happened the team had been watching the 'vulture' – their nickname for the imposter. Samir became a bird. This allowed him to keep an eye without being noticed. Also, 'vulture' wouldn't expect Samir to be in Peaceville.

The next morning, as Samir was sitting as a robin on the window sill, he heard 'vulture' talking to someone on the phone.

"You are an insolent treacherous scoundrel Mawar," came a woman's voice from the phone.

"Mawar", Samir noted. That was his real name.

"I'm afraid so, Jodah," came Mawar's cunning reply. "And I'm going to say this one last time. I want five times the originally agreed amount."

"I know who you are Mawar," Jodah whispered. "I know where you live. What makes you think I won't just send someone to kill you."

"First off, you want the information I have," Mawar responded confidently. "And secondly, I've escaped from worse. I know everything about you as well. I could easily blow your whole operation. An anonymous tip is all it would take. Everything you have will be gone. Then you can join your old friend Rajab in prison."

"How dare-", Jodah began but Mawar cut her off.



"Do you seriously think you're the only one with extensive contacts?"

At that moment Mawar paused as he noticed the robin on the window, but ...didn't pay it any attention. The conversation continued for a few

more minutes and concluded with Joda's promise to get back. Samir flew as fast as he could. He felt as if his wings had gone heavier. He reached Hannah's house where the whole team was waiting.

"This is more serious than we could have ever imagined." he said as soon as he changed back to his human self.

"What happened?" Hamza asked.

"His name is Mawar. He is working for a woman named Jodah. She works for Rajab and Naas's boss. He has some sensitive information about us. He's trying to make a deal with Jodah. More money for exposing our team's identity."

"What?" Shajeeh exclaimed. "What do we do now? The situation is even more dire than we anticipated".

After a few seconds pause, Samir replied, "His greed has given us a window to act. We must go immediately. For everyone's safety, I think it will be a good idea to catch him in the office, tomorrow morning. I will watch him throughout the night from his window sill and Shajeeh will take Hamza and Mukhtar with him tomorrow to expose Mawar."

Mawar was lying in bed. For some reason, he was feeling uncomfortable. 'Something is odd'. His voice echoed in his own head. Why am I feeling this way? Is it because of Jodah's threats? No...that can't be it. I've faced worse. Then, what is it?

He tried to think hard. He finally realized where the feeling stemmed from. Hannah was behaving a bit strangely with him. Was she suspecting something? He rejected his suspicion almost instantly. No...she is probably feeling a bit annoyed because of the scuffle he had with her son. Poor woman!

He decided to sleep as his mission needed him to be fully alert at all times and proper sleep was important for that. The next morning, Mawar got dressed as usual. He noticed that Hannah was still a bit cold and withdrawn.

'Huh! Who cares?' he said to himself. As long as she makes the amazing omelette that she does every morning, she can be as awkward as she liked.

He reached the office and started appreciating the facilities he received being in Samir's place. After a little while, he decided to give attention to

the little feeling inside of him. Something was not right. He decided to check a few things. He called Hannah.

“Hannah, I am coming to pick Zain and Sonu to take them to the zoo as I promised them. Please get them ready-”

“No no, they can’t go.” Hannah interrupted with desperation. How could she let a stranger take the kids on his own?

Mawar was surprised at her reaction. “Hannah...”

“They have a lot of homework pending, so they cannot go anywhere. I have to go Samir Baba, I am cooking right now.” She abruptly hung up the phone as if it would explode in her hands if she didn’t. Mawar’s suspicion was confirmed. Something was certainly going on with Hannah and she was behaving very strange.

The secretary’s call interrupted his chain of thoughts.

“Sir, as your friends are coming, do you want me to order the lunch in the office or do you plan to take them out?”

Mawar almost shouted, “What friends! Who is coming?!”

“Mr. Shajeeh called to find out if you were in the office, so I assumed-”

Mawar sprung up from the chair as if he was sitting on a volcano. Why did Shajeeh call the office and not his personal phone? Mawar knew that his cover was busted. He had to leave fast or it would be all over.

The sparrow on the window continued to watch him intently. “Hurry Shajeeh! May God be on your side, Inshallah!” Samir thought. He saw Mawar shoot of his chair and almost run out of the office.

As Mawar was exiting, he saw two cars coming in the parking lot. One driver was Shajeeh and he didn’t get a chance to see the driver in the other car. He rushed towards his vehicle.

Shajeeh got out of his car but Mawar didn’t stop. He couldn’t take any chances. Shajeeh realised that Mawar was ignoring him intentionally. “Samir!” Shajeeh called out, but Mawar continued to his car and started the engine. “He’s making a break for it!” Shajeeh called out as he rushed back to his car.

Upon seeing Mawar dash out of the office, Samir transformed into a hawk. A hawk was a good choice in such a situation as it provided agility, height

and speed. Mawar floored the accelerator, swerving through all vehicles on the road. He glanced in his rear-view mirror and hissed angrily. Those other two drivers were still on his tail! They were adept and he was having a hard time losing them. He needed to get out of Peaceville as soon as possible.

Mawar went faster on the highway, the other two cars following close behind. At the last moment, he swerved the car on to the first exit. The two drivers drove straight past unable to react in time.

'Phew!' Mawar exclaimed. He had finally managed to shake them off. By the time they would circle back, he would be long gone! The steering wheel shook in his hands. At that moment, he saw a third car in his view. He could see a man aiming a gun towards his car. Mawar swerved violently to avoid being hit. The momentum caused his car to overturn. In the midst of the burning smoke, he could see someone approach him. "This is it..." he thought struggling to maintain consciousness as his lungs gasped for oxygen. All of a sudden, he heard faint voices and the person bolted. Mawar's mind failed to process all this. He felt a spiking pain shoot through his back while his consciousness slipped away.

Chapter 12 – A visit to the Hospital

It had been three days since the accident. Mawar had survived but was completely paralysed from neck below. He couldn't speak or respond but could feel and listen. Samir strolled over to the hospital reception.

"I'd like to meet Mr. Mawar Farukh. He's an old friend."

The receptionist nodded and gestured to a guard. The guard escorted Samir to the hospital room. Inside, he looked at the body which was completely draped in cloth.

"I'm sorry", the guard whispered. "The doctor said he can only move his eyes. But he can listen and understand."

"Could you give us a minute, please?", Samir asked politely.

The guard nodded and left. Samir walked over to the body and spoke,

"You tried to expose our team. Your actions could have led to the destruction of everything we love. You misbehaved with someone I consider a brother. And I want you to know that whatever you or your superiors ever throw at us, we will always emerge victorious. And do you want to know why?" He paused for a second. "It's because we try to side with the truth and thus Allah (swt) helps us."

At that moment there were footsteps and Samir instinctively slipped behind the divider. Who would come to see Mawar? The door screeched open and in came a woman with the guard.

"Oh dear! My husband! Could you please give us a minute?", she whimpered.

The guard nodded again and left. Samir recognised Jodah. He immediately transformed into a hummingbird. Mawar's eyes widened at the sight of Samir's transformation. It all finally made sense.

As soon as the door shut, the woman's expression changed to one of fury.

"Mawar!", she hissed. "You've ruined everything! The boss will have my head for this! You should have taken the money when you had the chance!"

With that, she removed a syringe from her purse.

“Unfortunately, you leave me no choice as you know too much. Don’t worry!”, she laughed venomously. “It’ll only hurt a little and you’ll be out of your misery forever. ”

Mawar moved his eyes left and right helplessly. His pulse began spiking as Jodah came closer. He clenched his eyes, bracing himself. This was it. He knew the end was here. At that moment there was a loud fire alarm and the guard opened the door. With expert precision, Jodah slipped the syringe back in the purse. She whispered,

“Another time Mawar!”



With that she was gone; unable to notice the humming bird in the corner which was carrying a small lighted cigarette in it’s beak and fluttering silently near the smoke alarms. The humming bird

winked at Mawar and left.

The next few days were very calm. While, Mawar was trapped by his own body the team was holding a meeting; congratulating each other on their success. Jodah’s visit to the hospital clearly indicated that Mawar did not give her anything. What made Mawar’s eyes trickle with tears on a daily basis, was the kindness that Samir showed by saving his life. He could have let him die. Mawar’s body was almost dead but his soul was going through an awakening. He was realizing that it was not just the team but the power of piety that this team was blessed with which made them invincible.

Their commitment to goodness was their strength. How many odds were fixed for them because they sincerely followed the path of truth?

‘O Allah! Give me one more chance. Just one more chance! O Allah! I beg! I plead!

Tears flowed freely as a heavy weight lifted from his heart.

Sneak Peek!



Book 11

Nature's Fury



Jodah scrambled rapidly around the large office. Carelessly yanking open the heavy wooden drawers of her desk, she grabbed documents and tools, throwing them haphazardly into the black backpack on her desk. Luckily, most of the arrangements had been made in advance. She had just zipped it close when a loud crashing sound ricocheted through the empty halls of the house.

Her head shot up; eyes trained on the door in front of her. She grabbed her bag with one hand and with the other, withdrew her pistol. A deadly silence prevailed in the house. Slowly lowering her bag onto the floor, she used her now free hand to press a small button under her desk. The floor beside her began to open.

Jodah bent down to pick up her bag when she heard a click. Without a second thought she ducked and nearly gasped at the impact on the wall that was right behind her. From her crouched position she saw the wall chip away as a bullet collided with the plaster. She rapidly stood up and shot at the door several times. Jodah returned to her crouched position not a moment too soon as the wall behind her was impaled by multiple bullets. She looked beside her and saw that the hole had finally opened. Jodah took a deep breath before tossing her bag into the hole and jumping in head first.

A few moments later, a small grenade was tossed into the room. A second later the room was splattered with shrapnel. The bookcase was splintered and burnt, many of the books reduced to ash. The desk quivered on its damaged legs; the wooden frame impaled by shrapnel. The curtains were on fire and the glass windows had shattered, spilling deadly shards into the rose bushes below.

Salaar strode boldly into the room, his gun at the ready. His team followed behind him as he carefully made his way around the damaged furniture. When he jumped behind the desk he saw a gaping hole in the floor and cursed in fury. Turning around, he nodded to his men and jumped in.

He found himself in a small tunnel big enough for a person. When he landed on the mat he tumbled away to avoid a bullet that punctured the air where his head had been only moments earlier. His men jumped in behind him and ducked away to avoid the entourage of bullets. Salaar had ducked behind a cement beam. He swivelled around and nearly squeezed the trigger when he heard footsteps echoing in the hall ahead.

“Come on!” He shouted to his men. They raced ahead of him and ran down the hall.

A few turns later the hall widened to a large cement parking lot. Salaar looked around. *‘Where are you Jodah?’* he thought.

His eyes widened when he heard the roar of an engine.

He turned around and jumped out of the way, his men following suit as a sports car ripped past them.

Salaar looked at the retreating car and turned to one of his men, “Get me a car!”

Jodah held the steering wheel in a death grip as she weaved around the gazebos and gardens. She had made her way down the forested road when she saw a flash in her mirror. A glimpse told her that she had nearly three cars chasing her.

She ducked as the bullets pelted the car, shattering the windshield and penetrating the metal frame. Jodah steered the car over a bridge and floored the accelerator.

Salaar watched the car drive straight into the hit zone. "Now!" he shouted. A man, poised with half of his body hanging out of the car squeezed the trigger of the rocket launcher. A low whistle shrieked through the night air. A moment later the car in front of them was tossed in the air before exploding into an inferno.

Salaar's jeep skidded to a halt as he watched the metal skeleton get devoured by the flame. Watching the flames dance in front of him, Salaar's lips were pulled into a maniacal grin.

He turned to his men, "Let's get out of here."

With a low purr fading into silence, the jeeps disappeared.

A minute had passed when a head burst through the smooth surface of the river. Gasping and coughing, a young lady paddled her way to the rocky shore.

With a low groan she stood up, one hand gripping her side as pain rocketed through her body. She took a minute to look around at the burning car and the destroyed bridge.

Jodah released a low chuckle, ignoring the protests from her most likely fractured ribs. Wiping the blood from her split lip with her wet sleeve she looked down the empty road. "Well played Salaar."

PUBLISHED SO FAR:

'The Messengers'

Book 1 - Superhero or superman?

Book 2 - Superhero at Play!

Book 3 - Are there more like me?

Book 4 - Little things...Big Impact!

Book 5 - Peek a boo! I know you!

Book 6 - Respite after Spite

Book 7 - Sugar-coated evil

Book 8 - Magnetic Muddle!

Book 9 - Concept Conundrum

Book 10 - The Real Me...



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For once, Samir was not flying through night skies, or dodging buildings and telephone wires. He went to work, came back, and spent time with his family, like any other citizen of Peaceville.

But rumours spread like wildfire that Samir has changed. He is no longer the man he used to be. His family, elders, workers and team mates can't understand why this change has taken place. All they know is that they wish it hadn't.

What's going on with the secret superhero?



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