

CHAPTER 1

The Queen's House, the Clock, and the Beatles Street



For Themis, one of the best things about working the first shift of the day during the summer was watching the sun coming up. With the “auto-pilot” switched on, Themis drove to the airport. The dawn brought back vivid memories of the blue sea at Leme: beach vendors selling iced tea and *biscoito de polvilho*, Rio’s traditional beach snack, the feeling of salt on her body after spending a sunny day at the beach, and, more than anything, that atmosphere, so very familiar, but so, so far from her current reality. Now, proudly wearing her immigration officer’s uniform as a mark of what she had achieved, Themis was on her way to her first day at work. The six long weeks of training were over, and the role-playing with actors during the training course would now be replaced with real-life situations and actual people.

‘Good morning. I’m going to be your supervisor and mentor for the next few weeks’, said Balder. ‘We need to get a move on. The first flight of this shift is about to land’.

Everything felt calm at that moment. Three officers were taking their seats at fixed points where they would be spending the next hour. The chief immigration officer for that shift had already assumed his position at the watch house, a type of control room from where everything and everyone were vis-





ible and decisions – sometimes extremely difficult ones – were made.

‘So, how long have you been working in this field? And what made you decide to come to the airport?’ asked Balder.

‘I started working for immigration four years ago, but I found the work boring. I mean, there’s no fun in working with just documents and forms, is there?’ said Themis. ‘After a while, it all becomes very automatic. I needed something a bit more challenging, and I think working here with clients will make all the difference. I imagine that any questions about the process can be cleared up by directly asking the passengers instead of having to send them letters asking for documents, which was how we were required to do it when we were deciding on visa applications sent to us electronically or by post’.

‘Absolutely right!’ said Balder. ‘I mean, what’s the point of refusing entry to a passenger from a distance? Oh, and for the record, we’re not dealing with clients here. We’re not providing them with any kind of service. We’re working for the British government! Look at the passengers waiting for their arrival checks. What do you see?’

‘Passengers coming back from holidays, coming to do business, visiting their families?’ replied Themis with a nervous smile.




‘Every single one of those people is a liar until they prove to us that they’re not!’ said Balder, a more serious expression on his face this time around. ‘You see that passenger there, at the back of the arrivals hall? Look, he’s filling in his landing card. Look at the way he behaves. That passenger there is going to be your first refusal. Exciting, isn’t it?’

‘What do you mean, Balder?’ snapped Themis. ‘The guy’s done nothing wrong. No, I’m not going to refuse anyone entry without a good reason. No way!’

‘He’s not done anything wrong... yet!’ sneered Balder. ‘Don’t worry, we don’t refuse anyone without a good reason. You’re going to learn that the devil’s in the detail. In this job, you’ll soon see that it’s the small things that make all the difference. Look at this guy, for example. He’s already thrown at least half a dozen landing cards into the bin. For “normal” people, that might not mean anything, but not us – not the immigration rats. He’s nervous. Wait here a moment; don’t move’.

All Themis could think about was the comfortable decisions she used to make, from a distance, without suffering. If she refused someone a visa application, they could always make another application or even appeal the decision. *What about now though?* The arrivals hall was full of people. Officers were at their positions, vigorously stamping passengers’





passports; some of them asking questions, others waiting for an interpreter's assistance to make communication with the passengers possible. Waiting in queues, those people were carrying their dreams, desires, and ambitions in their luggage – a hope for better times, away from their countries of birth, far from the place they had once called home.

‘Here he is’, said Balder with an air of satisfaction. He had brought the passenger he was talking about to Themis’ desk. ‘Speak to him in Portuguese. He can’t speak any English’.

‘What is the purpose of your journey?’ asked Themis, looking at Balder, not particularly in agreement with what he had just said.

‘*Não falo inglês*’, said the passenger, confirming that he did not, indeed, speak any English.

A faint smile played at the corner of Balder’s mouth, but he remained silent.

‘What’s the purpose of your journey, young man?’ Themis politely asked, this time in Portuguese, as she examined his passport.

‘Holiday’, he replied. ‘You speak Portuguese. Cool!’

Themis checked the passenger’s passport details on the borders and immigration control system and noted that he had an adverse immigration history. This could mean any number of things, but something stood out in this case. The young man



in front of her had had problems with a previous visa application.

‘Ask him if he’s ever had a visa refused in the past’, Balder impatiently said as she finished reading the alert message on the system. ‘I bet you a tenner he’ll deny it and swear on his grandmother’s life that he doesn’t know what you’re talking about!’

The message was telling her that this passenger had been refused a student visa less than a month ago. However, he was no longer travelling with the same passport he had used for the previous application, and as such, there was no record of this history in the travel document he was presenting her with now. It was customary practice for officers to write the number of the visa application on the last page of the applicant’s passport, and if his visa had been refused, this number would be underlined.

‘Balder, how did you...’, said Themis. She then turned to the passenger and carried on with the initial interview questions: ‘Have you ever faced any problem while applying for visas, either for the United Kingdom or any other country?’ she asked him.

‘No, never’, he replied, not even blinking.

‘Ask him if he knows anyone here’, said Balder. ‘And I don’t think I even need to tell you that I already know the answer!’

‘Do you know anyone here?’ Themis asked.





‘No, no’, the young man replied. ‘I’ve just come for a few days, on a holiday’.

‘So, why England?’ pressed Themis. ‘Why didn’t you choose some other country? One where you can speak the language, for example?’

‘Ah, because this place is cool, and it’s been my dream to visit here since I was a child’, he answered. ‘I always dreamed of seeing the clock and the Queen’s house and the street the Beatles crossed’.

‘Tell this fool to sit down’, said Balder. ‘In time, you’re going to see that people who aren’t telling the truth generally fall into this pattern. First, they don’t know anything about the destination they intend to visit. If it has been his dream since he was a kid, you’d expect him to at least know that the big clock is called Big Ben, the Queen’s house is Buckingham Palace, and the bloody Beatles street is actually called Abbey Road!’

‘OK Balder, calm down’, said Themis, trying to defuse the situation. ‘That doesn’t make him a liar though, does it? You haven’t even given him a chance to defend himself’.

‘Themis, I’m afraid you’re going to be very disappointed in your fellow humans’, said Balder. ‘That perfect world you think you know, it doesn’t exist. Since I began this job, I have stopped trusting even my own shadow! By the end of this shift, you’ll be





on your way to understanding this. At least I hope you will! You just watch. The Themis after working for the immigration service will be completely different from the one before you started here. Anyway, back to work. Come with me. I want to show you something’.

The two officers left the young man in the reserved waiting area, sometimes referred to as the ‘pan’, as they made their enquiries.

‘Let’s make a phone call’, suggested Balder.

‘To whom?’ asked Themis. ‘Buckingham Palace?’ she added ironically.

‘Oh, you’re funny’, said Balder. ‘No, someone far more interesting than that’.


Balder put the call on speakerphone so Themis could hear the conversation. It rang a few times before a woman answered, ‘Hello, information desk, how may I help you?’

‘This is Officer Balder, calling from immigration. Could you put a call out for me please?’ asked Themis’ mentor.

‘Of course’, replied the woman. ‘What do you need me to say?’

‘Please ask if there’s anyone waiting for a passenger called Felipe da Silva, arriving from São Paulo on flight PP8084’, Balder instructed the receptionist.





‘If anyone turns up, let me know and I’ll come down to you’.

‘No problem, Mr Balder’.

As they waited for the call from the information desk, the two officers printed out all the information on the passenger’s record, in particular, a copy of the student visa application form that had been refused, together with the reason for its refusal. The passenger had no idea about what was going on behind the scenes as he waited for the security checks to be carried out in the reserved area, alongside others who were also left to ‘simmer’.

It’s like waiting in the wings for a theatre performance, thought Themis. The script, the costumes, the scenery – but here, someone’s future depended on the behind-the-scenes production.

Themis’ thoughts went back to the time she had dreamed of being in her present position. She had newly arrived in the United Kingdom and was serving at the head of a never-ending queue of a fast food restaurant. She didn’t know much about the money, the culture, or the people, but she knew that, one day, she would be working on the other side of the street, at the Home Office, the headquarters of which were directly opposite the shopping centre where she worked. Her heartbeat quickened every time she saw someone in the queue wearing the ID




badge bearing the British Crown. How she would love to wear that pass one day – maybe even work at the airport!

‘Themis, I want to see these metal cupboards shining before we close for the day’, ordered the manager. ‘I want you to see your white face reflecting in the doors’.

Seven years later, those words still ate at her soul. She knew it had not been easy for her in the beginning, but that was just how it was for immigrants in countries far away from their homelands. When she mentioned to one of her co-workers that she would be wearing a badge bearing the British Crown one day, her colleague mocked her, reminding her that people like them did not get to work in those government positions, because they were nothing more than immigrants.

As these memories crossed her mind, Themis experienced a moment of sadness, but then she remembered that merely three years after those difficult beginnings, she had been successful in her application to join the civil service and began working in that same government department. In time, she had been invited to attend that very building, there, on the other side of the road – the building that, once upon a time, had been nothing more than an oasis in her imagination.





On her first day of work there, she had thought she would just be there for training. The manager asked her to go to the security office to have a photo taken for her ID badge. Placing that pass around her neck gave Themis a great feeling of encouragement and also the certainty that justice had finally been served. She then went on to work there, in that oasis, for four more years before she began work at the airport. On that first day of her new job, Themis crossed over the road at lunch time and went into the shopping centre. She walked past her old workplace and saw that everything inside was just as it used to be: the same workers who did not believe in their own potential and the same manager who had bullied her so badly. It was as if no time had passed at all.

Themis left her reverie as a message came over the internal tannoy system:

‘Officer Balder, please come to the watch house. A call is waiting for you’, announced a voice.

Themis looked sceptically at Balder. She could not believe it could be someone from the information desk outside the terminal.

‘Yes, this is Balder’, said the officer. ‘Felipe’s girlfriend? We’re on our way’.

‘Come on, come on’, Balder impatiently urged Themis, grabbing his interview notebook and a ballpoint pen with the lid missing. ‘Put your personal



stamp in your locker. We can't take that through security to the other side of the terminal'.

They passed through security and travelled down the escalator to the first floor. Arriving at the information desk, they found a young woman waiting for them.

'Good morning. We're from immigration, and we'd like to know if you're waiting for someone?' Balder asked.

'Yes, that's right', the young woman replied. 'Felipe. He's my boyfriend. He's coming to stay with me here in the UK for about six months. I'm studying here, but he couldn't get a visa. Is he OK?'

'Felipe's fine', replied Balder. 'I just have a few routine questions for you', he said, looking at Themis and taking down every detail in his notebook. 'Does your boyfriend know that you're here at the airport, waiting for him?'

'He knows, yes', said the girl.


'Does Felipe have a job in Brazil?'

'No, he's unemployed at the moment, but his dad helps him out from time to time'.

'And how does your boyfriend think he's going to support himself here for six months? I mean, six months is a long time'.

'He's just coming to keep me company', she replied.





‘Thanks for your help. We’ll contact you if we need any more information’.

The jigsaw was starting to come together to reveal a picture, but a lot of pieces were still missing. Despite this, Balder appeared to be in no doubt as to how the case would end. He behaved as though he already knew everything there was to know about this young man.

Maybe he’d just got lucky? Yes, that must be it. How is it possible for someone just to look at a passenger from a distance and know all of that?

Once they were back at the terminal, delayed after getting stuck in an infernal queue behind the crew of an Air India aircraft, Balder and Themis went to the passenger arrivals area and retrieved Felipe from the pan.

‘Just to make me feel better, can I ask him again what he came to do here?’ asked Themis, still struggling to come to terms with Balder’s verdict on this young man.

‘Ask whatever you think you need to. After all, you’re the officer in charge of this case’, Balder said encouragingly. ‘When you’ve got a bit of experience in this job, you’ll see how two or three questions are generally enough to know what sort of a person you’re dealing with’.



‘OK’, said Themis, still somewhat unconvinced. ‘Felipe, please tell me again the reason for your visit to the United Kingdom’.

‘Tourism. I came for a couple of weeks to see the place’, he stated once more.

‘Do you have a return ticket to Brazil?’ she asked him.

‘Yes...’, said Felipe, taking a crumpled piece of paper from the pocket of his jeans.

‘And where are you going to stay?’ she asked.


‘In a hostel, but I only paid for a couple of nights’, he replied, doing his best to convince Themis. ‘In case I wanted to go and stay somewhere else’.

‘Here we go!’ Balder sceptically exclaimed. ‘Same old story. Themis, please explain to this gentleman that he is detained as of now and that we’re going to confiscate his passport and luggage for further enquiries. Fill in the IS81⁶ form that explains the legal grounds that give these powers to immigration officers. But before we take him to the holding room, tell him that we need to see his luggage’.

‘Felipe, we just need to check a few things regarding your journey to the United Kingdom’, explained Themis. ‘While we do that, we’re going to ask you to wait in our internal waiting room, where you’ll be more comfortable and can have something to eat

⁶ Notice to a Person Required to Submit to Further Examination; this document permits the detention of passengers in order to carry out further investigation.





and drink. First, though, we need to collect your luggage. How many bags did you bring with you?’

‘Two’, he replied.

‘Two cases for a two-week holiday?’ she asked.

‘Yeah, I didn’t know if it was going to be cold or not, so I thought it would be best to bring more clothes just in case I needed them’, Felipe replied.

The two officers led him to the baggage hall, where his were the only suitcases still going around on the carousel. The other passengers on his flight had already gone through immigration checks and collected their belongings. A calm atmosphere had been restored to the terminal, at least until the arrival of the next plane. Felipe, though, was starting to show signs of discomfort at having been held there for so long.

On opening the cases, Themis and Balder were surprised at the number of chocolates and wrapped gifts stuffed into the pockets of the cases.

‘We have to open these gifts for security purposes’, explained Themis. ‘Why have you brought along so many presents if you don’t know anyone here?’ she asked.

‘Erm... I... well...’, said Felipe, confused. ‘I might meet up with my cousin. She lives in Europe’, he offered after a long moment of hesitation.

‘Ah’, said the officers, looking at one another.




Returning to the second floor of the terminal, they led Felipe to the holding room – or, as Themis preferred to call it, ‘the waiting room’. Once he was in there, the assistant immigration officers would take his fingerprints and photographs. These biometric details would then be entered into a database that would carry out a search of the British immigration system across the world. Any information related to an adverse history on the passenger’s record, at any British port of entry or visa application post, anywhere in the world, would be there.

While the identification process was underway, Balder and Themis prepared to interview the passenger. They had already sent over the details of the situation to the chief immigration officer on duty and entered all the information into the system. They had also prepared a file containing all the information collected about Felipe so far – his arrival, the initial desk interview, findings in his luggage, and other observations that had been made, including the details of the interview with Maria, his girlfriend.

‘Standard procedure is for the officer to speak with the passenger directly, in their own language. This is only permitted in cases where the officer – as is the case with you, Themis – has the authority and the appropriate linguistic qualification issued by the border agency’, explained Balder. ‘However,





to make the conversation easier between the parties, we'll use an interpreter this time. That way, you won't have to translate everything for me while simultaneously making the case notes'.

'OK Balder', agreed Themis.

They arrived at the interview room in the holding area. Felipe was already waiting for them. It was a medium-sized room. Themis could see a cold drinks machine and another vending machine with crisps and snacks. There was a public payphone, a television, a toilet, and, at the back, three interview rooms. Outside, there were two security guards, who were responsible for taking care of security and providing assistance to the passengers. They recorded the times at which people went in and out, including officers, and provided microwaved meals to detainees who wanted to eat lunch or dinner while they were in the 'waiting room'. Just ahead of this area, there was another room where the detained passengers' bags were stored. Balder asked one of the security guards to open the door so Themis could take a peek inside.

'It's like the suitcases are alive in here', laughed Balder.

'What do you mean?' asked Themis.

As they opened the door, they were met with a cacophony of beeps and buzzes from various mo-



bile phones. These, no doubt, were calls from the detainees' relatives, friends, partners, and bosses, who were waiting outside and wanted to know what was going on. Those who got in touch with immigration would be given the number of the public payphone in the holding room, and this was the only way in which they would be able to contact their loved ones. Very often, a number of hours would pass before this contact was possible. This helped the officers, who preferred to speak to passengers before they contacted the people waiting outside for them. The credibility test was essential for the investigative work of the officers, who compared the responses given by all parties involved.

'Why aren't they allowed to keep their phones on them?' Themis asked somewhat naively.

'Unless you want your face and your identity broadcast live all over Facebook or YouTube, I don't think it's a great idea for us to let them have smartphones in there', said Balder, laughing. 'We only let them keep their phones if they don't have a camera. All detainees are searched before they go into the holding room, not just to see if they're carrying phones, but also to make sure that they're not hiding any pointed objects that could be used as a weapon against one of us'.





‘Blimey!’ exclaimed Themis. ‘I hadn’t thought about that’.

Even the Bic ballpoint pens were tied to the table and had their caps removed. Themis now understood why Balder always took the caps off his pens. All the tables and chairs in the room were screwed to the floor, and alarms and CCTV were installed all around the interview rooms for the safety of everyone. Balder told Themis that, on one occasion, a passenger had stabbed a pen into an officer’s hand.

‘Felipe, can you please come into the interview room with us?’ Themis asked. ‘Are you feeling OK? You understand the interpreter?’

‘Yes’, he replied.

‘What is the purpose of your trip to the United Kingdom?’ enquired Themis.

‘I’ve already told you this several times!’ he replied impatiently.

‘I want you to tell me again’, said Themis. ‘We’re formally interviewing you this time. Everything you say here will be recorded on your file. At the end of the interview, we’ll make a recommendation to our chief immigration officer as to whether you should be granted permission to enter the country or refused entry. And I should point out that it is a crime to lie to an immigration officer. Do you understand everything I just told you?’



‘Yes’, said Felipe, somewhat calmer now.

Themis repeated her question.

‘So, as I was saying, what is the purpose of your visit to the United Kingdom?’

‘Tourism’.

‘How long do you intend to stay?’ asked Themis, writing down all the questions and answers on the passenger record sheet.

‘Two weeks’.

‘Do you know anyone in the United Kingdom, either British people or citizens of other countries?’

‘No, no one’, he said. ‘I came on my own, and I’ll stay on my own’.

‘So, how do you explain the gifts and chocolate inside your case?’

‘Like I said, they’re for my friend who lives in Europe. She might come over to meet me here’.


Friend! thought Themis, incredulously. ‘When we were looking through your suitcases, you told us that you had a cousin in Europe’, she said. ‘So, what is she, your friend or your cousin?’

‘Well, to be honest, she’s a friend, but we think of ourselves as cousins because we grew up together’.

‘Have you ever made any type of visa application for the United Kingdom or any other country?’

‘No’, he replied emphatically.





‘Are you sure?’ Themis persisted. ‘Are you categorically telling me that you have never applied for a visa to the United Kingdom?’

Themis found herself starting to agree with Balder. She was overwhelmed by a mixture of feelings. Sitting there in front of her was a fellow human being – someone from the same country as she – who was lying in a way that was almost convincing.

How can someone lie so openly – he’s not even blinking – and worse, without feeling the slightest bit bad about it, thought Themis.

Up until this moment, she had really believed that Felipe would, at some point, own up to the whole thing and admit that he was actually there to meet up with his girlfriend, who was spending the year in the United Kingdom as a student.

‘So, to sum up...’, concluded Themis. ‘You’re coming to the United Kingdom, this is your first time outside of Brazil, you don’t know anyone here, and you’ve come for a two-week holiday to see the Queen’s house, the clock, and the Beatles street, right?’

Before Felipe could come up with another fabricated response, Themis opened his file in frustration and showed him a copy of the visa application he had made in Rio de Janeiro less than a month before. She also showed him a copy of his previous



passport and a copy of the visa belonging to Maria, his girlfriend, who was waiting for him outside.

‘So, who is Maria?’ asked Themis, somewhat annoyed. ‘And this passport here? Who’s this, your doppelganger? And this student visa application with your signature on it, that’s not yours I suppose? Look Felipe, I’ve defended you from the start. I really thought you were going to tell me the truth when we came in for the interview. But you’ve really let me down.’

‘Well done, Themis’, said Balder with pride in his voice. ‘I think we’ve got our newest immigration officer in the terminal. I’m sorry if that was a bit difficult for you, but there’ll be thousands more like him’.

‘I didn’t know that I had to tell you my girlfriend was here’, said Felipe. ‘I’m sorry if I didn’t tell you the truth’.

‘Felipe, unfortunately, I have to refuse you permission to enter on this occasion’, said Themis. ‘As I explained at the start of our interview, lying to an immigration officer is an offence. In addition to being refused entry, you’ll be banned from entering the United Kingdom for the next ten years. Don’t worry, we’ll let Maria know of our decision. I’ll give her the internal contact number so she can call you if she wants to’.





‘Can you give her the gifts I brought for her?’ he asked.

‘Unfortunately, that isn’t allowed for security reasons’, explained Themis.

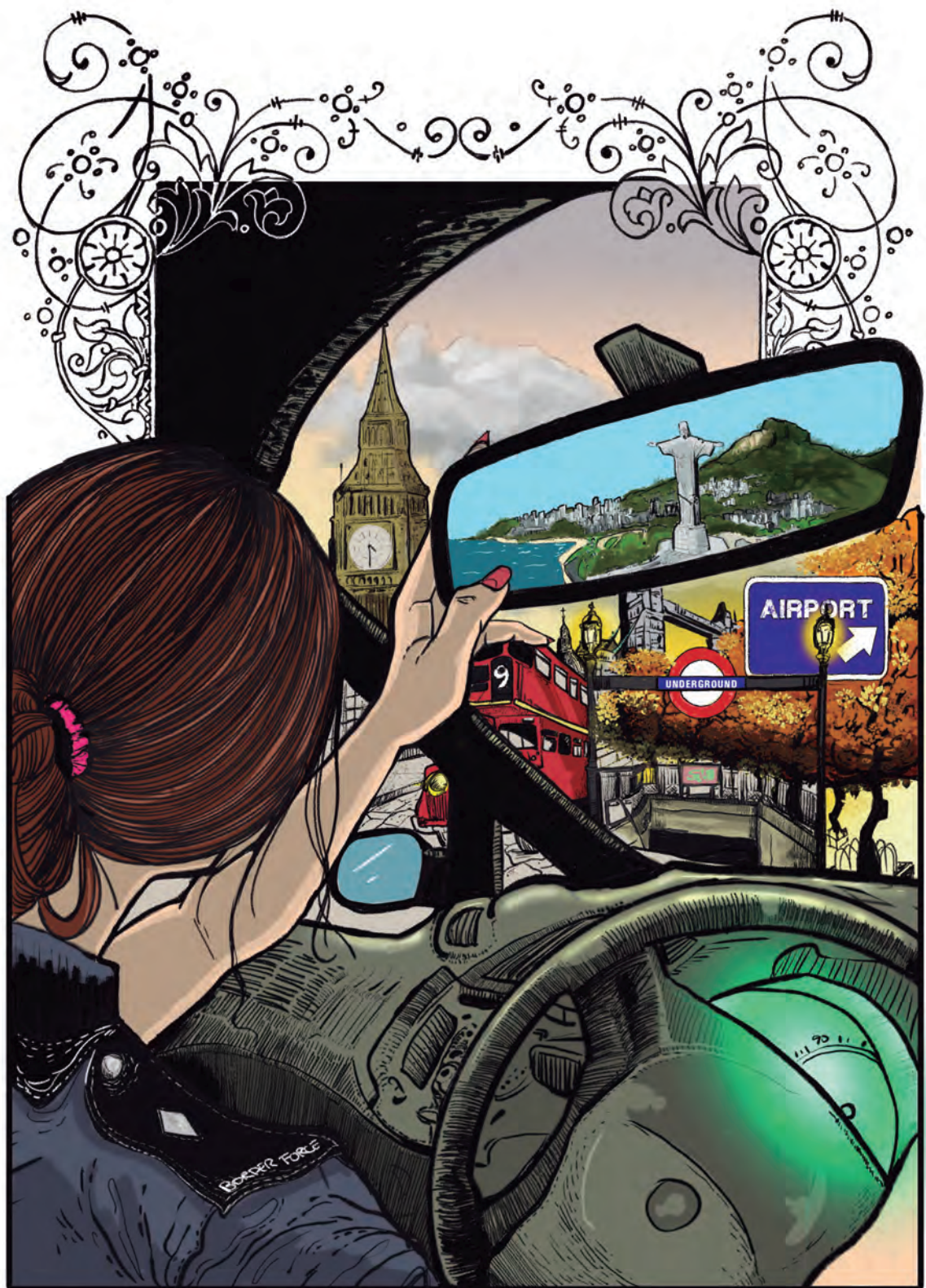
‘We’ll make the necessary changes to your ticket, and you’ll be returned to Brazil on the next available flight. We’ll be in touch with you again once we’ve spoken to our chief immigration officer. If you’ve understood everything, please sign here at the bottom of your interview notes. See you later’.

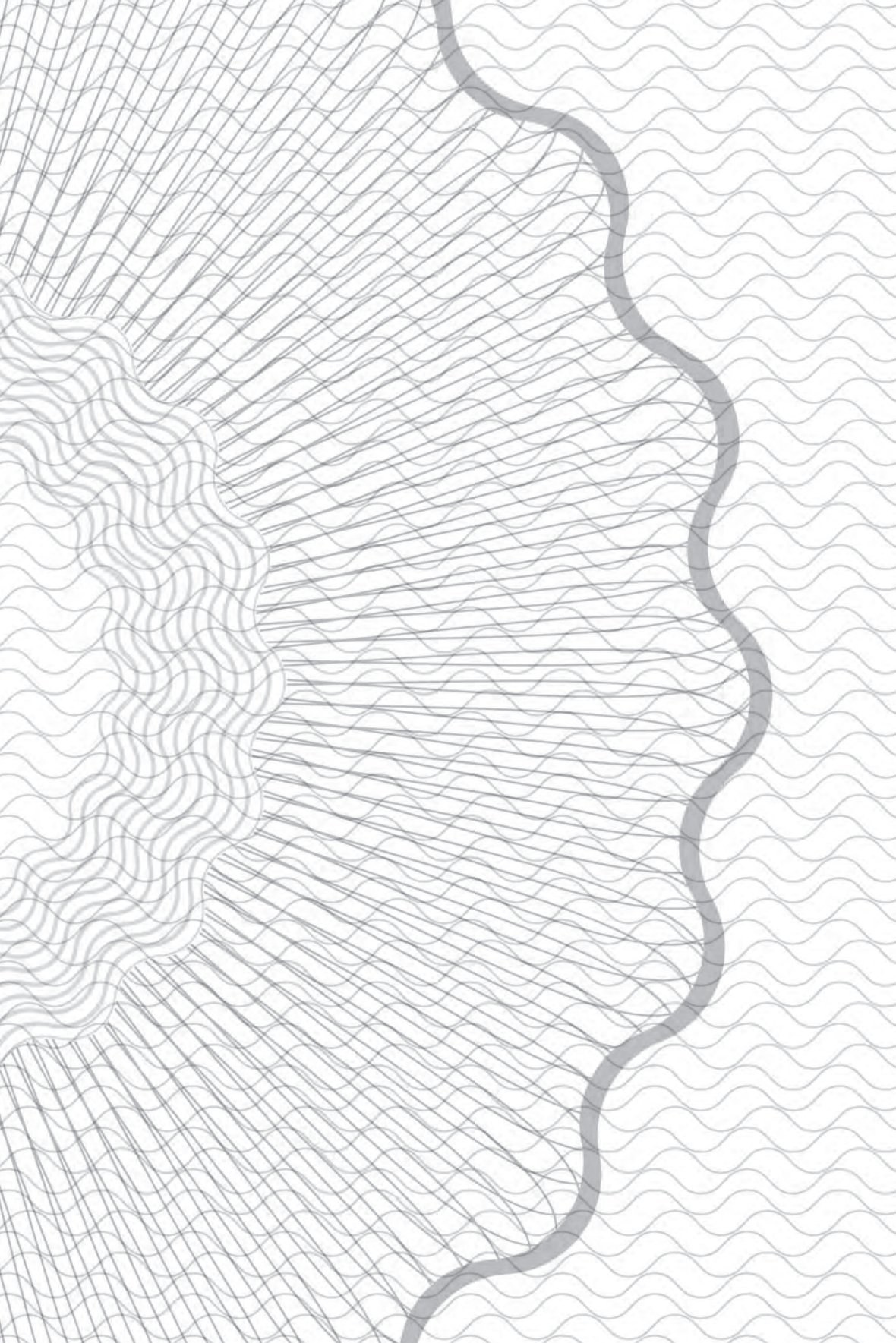
Themis and Balder left the room to take care of the paperwork necessary to send Felipe back to Brazil. They handed over the summary of the interview to the chief immigration officer and then called the airline company to inform them that a refused passenger would be returning to Brazil on the next flight that evening. Refused passengers always had priority seats. Even if the flight was fully booked, the airline was obligated to remove a checked-in passenger in order to make room for the detainee on board. Very often this led to bad feeling between airline workers and immigration officers; however, they were required by law to take the refused passengers. This was the main reason airlines required passengers to have return tickets, unless they held a valid entry visa for the United Kingdom.



Back in the changing rooms, Themis removed the insignia from her uniform and placed it in her locker, together with her personal stamp. Her first shift was coming to an end, and while she knew that she had done what she had to do, she could not help thinking about Maria, who must now be returning home alone. Felipe was on his way back to Brazil, having seen nothing of London other than the airport. He was going back to the same old life in the knowledge of one thing for sure: it would be a long time before he would be able to visit the Queen's house, the clock, and the Beatles street.







CHAPTER 2

A Waterfall of Nail Varnish




Hundreds of passengers were surging through the airport terminal, all at the same time. As security staff ran from one side of the terminal to the other, and intermittent tannoy announcements mixed with the deafening hubbub of people shouting and trying to communicate in different languages, Themis looked in despair at the hordes of people arriving. It was a portrait of a lawless land; there was no order – only fear and uncertainty. What did it all mean for the country’s security? The economy would not be protected; there were nowhere near enough jobs for all these people who were trying to get in. What about public services? They would collapse! There would not be enough beds in hospitals or places in schools. Not enough police to contain the violent disorder that would almost certainly break out on the streets! Chaos looked inevitable! Without work, there would not be any money, and without money, no one would be able to buy food or have a house to live in. In the midst of all this turmoil, people would end up invading supermarkets to steal food. Some families might even be forced to sleep rough.

‘Look! They’re opening the gates!’

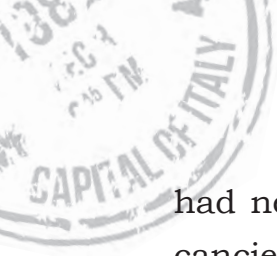
‘No, you can’t just come in like that! There aren’t enough visas for everyone! No! No! Balder, Balder, Balder!’





Outside, heavy rain beat against Themis' bedroom window. Her breathing was laboured, and she was bathed in sweat. She looked at the ceiling as her eyes adjusted to the constant darkness, broken only by the lightning flashing outside. She sat up, realising that it had all been just a dream. Relieved, she looked at the time: 2:22 a.m. Since starting work at the airport, Themis had woken up at the same time every morning. Were these changes in her sleeping pattern the result of working shifts? Insomnia? Had she made a mistake at work?

No, she was still with her mentor, Balder, "the impeccable supervisor", she reminded herself. It had not escaped her notice that he was always very well groomed. Rather dishy, as her grandmother would have said. He had black hair, with the bluest eyes she had ever seen, always clean shaven and smelling good. He was over six-foot tall and clearly worked out at the gym. He brought in his uniform on a hanger every day, so it would not get crumpled on his journey to work. He kept his shoes so shiny that they looked like a new pair every day. His voice was soft, but his words cut like a sharp knife. He had started working with the immigration service soon after leaving school. Twenty years on, now aged thirty-eight, he was one of the most experienced officers at the airport. Themis had once asked him why he




had never applied for any of the management vacancies, given he had so much knowledge. Her “impeccable supervisor” explained to her that he liked getting his hands dirty and could never see himself inside the watch house, supervising other officers, so far away from the action. He did not want to direct the show; he wanted to be the lead actor. In addition to this, he enjoyed training new officers and often joked that he needed to multiply the number of immigration rats who were just like him.

Damn! It's four a.m. already! Themis realised with a start. *I'm supposed to be starting at six!*

She jumped out of bed, and after a quick shower, set off for work. She had bought her house in Kent a year after her arrival in the United Kingdom, but her place was more than eighty miles away from the airport where she worked and the daily commute on the motorway was already starting to wear her down.

I must have slept badly last night, Themis thought to herself, trying to play down her tiredness. Until recently, she had never thought that she would be able to sit behind the wheel of a car. In 1997, she had lost her best friend in a traffic accident in Rio de Janeiro, and for the longest time, she could not contemplate the very idea of driving herself. She had not known just how far this was from the truth though.





As soon as she got through the application process to become an immigration officer, she realised her days of public transport were numbered.

How will I be able to do all these different shifts if I don't drive? When she started attending the officer training course, she also started taking driving lessons. She would never forget her first lesson with an English instructor.

'Right, Themis, so here we have the steering wheel, the clutch, the brake, and the accelerator. OK?'

This guy has got to be joking, she thought.

'Yep. OK. And where's the key?' she asked.

'Here it is'.

'Ah, yes. So, where do I go to switch this thing on? Inside the steering wheel? Outside?'

'What do you mean, Themis?' the instructor asked her, sounding slightly shocked. 'You do know it's on the outside, right?'

'Yes, of course!' replied Themis. 'See, the thing is, I've only got six weeks to learn to drive. I'll be finishing my training in six weeks, and after that, I'm going to have to drive to work'.

She remembered having to face her fellow officers when she came back to work after failing her first attempt at the practical test.

'How did you get on, Themis? Did you pass?'



Themis' expression was enough to tell them that the test had not gone well. She was unable to get into fifth gear on the main road.

I really messed it up, she thought.


The gears on the instructor's car were not exactly smooth at the best of times, and on the day of the test, the stupid thing had decided to get stuck. Themis realised that she was going to have to buy her own car, and this was where things started to get surreal! In the car showroom, whilst she looked at some models, the saleswoman explained the procedure to Themis, who then decided upon the car she would get. She wanted something economical, so the saleswoman suggested she bought what was, at that time, the latest Peugeot – the 308. Powerful, economical, and comfortable, it was exactly what Themis needed, as she did not relish the idea of spending a night at the side of the M25 with a broken-down car. When the time came to sign the paperwork, the saleswoman asked for her driving licence.

'Ah, yes, my licence. It's going to be issued next month', said Themis.

'What do you mean? Did you lose it?' asked the saleswoman.

'I didn't lose it, no. I've actually never had a driving licence in my life, but that's not important, is



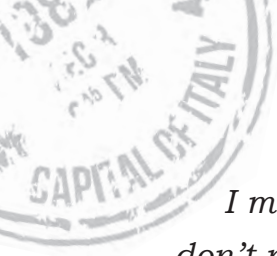


it? Next month I'll be passing my driving test, so I'll have my licence then'.

An uncomfortable silence filled the air. Themis was so confident she would pass the test that she did not realise just how ridiculous her words had sounded. She was about to buy a brand-new car without even having a driving licence. She had failed her first attempt at the practical test and did not know, if she was being totally honest, how many more attempts she was going to need before she passed – or even if she actually would! A few seconds went by before the saleswoman finally broke the silence. It had taken her a little time to absorb the bizarre situation before her: selling a car to a crazy woman who did not even have a driving licence.

'If it's OK with you, I'm just going to talk to my manager'.

A few minutes later, she returned and let Themis know that everything was fine, but that she would have to come back with someone who had possessed a driving licence for more than three years. 'No problem', Themis replied, and that was the end of it. Things often happened like this in Themis' life: she had never been great at making too many plans ahead of time. Instead, she resolved problems as they came up and did not waste a lot of her time thinking about what could go wrong.



I mean, what's the worst that could happen? If I don't pass the next time, I'll just have to put up with that instructor for another three weeks, not to mention three weeks of the other officers taking the piss! Oh yes, she really needed to pass the next time, come what may!


'Morning Themis. You OK?' asked Balder, spotting her having a coffee in the international arrivals area of the airport.

'I'm fine. Well, apart from my apocalyptic dream last night', she replied with a laugh. 'But yeah, we won't go into that. Hang on, I'm just finishing my coffee'.

The pair walked through security, to the Airside zone of the terminal. On arriving at the watch house, they had to sign the attendance book – although officers would usually leave a stamp rather than a signature in the book to indicate their presence. It was at this hour of the morning that some unwary worker would invariably get reprimanded by the chief immigration officer, usually at 6 a.m., after the night shift was almost over and having been in such a hurry to get out, for setting the wrong date on their stamp.

I've seen people put the date as 1008 instead of 2008, thought Themis. I mean, back then Brazil – and its gold, to be more precise – hadn't even been 'discovered' by the Portuguese!





She sometimes thought that her beautiful homeland would have ended up in a better shape if its future had been left in the hands of the indigenous *Tupiniquim* people. Instead, Brazil had been invaded and its people massacred by Europeans, who spent many years ravaging and ransacking the country, and the effects of the whip were still felt to the present day. The indigenous people offered little resistance to the white man who, besides inflicting upon them the diseases that he brought with him on his giant ships, enslaved, tortured, and forced his culture onto the original inhabitants of the country. A rather curious thing happened when the Portuguese forbade the entry of foreigners into Brazil during the colonial period. It was not until 1808, in the years leading up to Brazil's independence, that the stream of Europeans coming to start a new life in the country increased, and the country received Portuguese, Spanish, Swiss, German, English, Italian, and, later, Japanese settlers. The beloved homeland of Brazil was kind to her children – both native and adopted – looking to prosper in the New World or work on the cultivation of its immense coffee fields. Now, in the twenty-first century, the opposite phenomenon was being observed, as Brazilians were leaving their country to seek new lives in Europe. In present times, Europeans were not as eager to welcome



their South-American cousins. These new Brazilians were the result of a mixture, in large part, of native Indians, white Europeans, and black African and Caribbean people.

'The Air France flight is on chocks. Everyone to their posts', came the alert from the chief immigration officer.

'Balder, are bosses always in a bad mood?' asked Themis.

'Not always. Most of them just stick a couple of officers in the watch house and go off to sleep in the back office. The sneaky gits set their alarms to wake up just before the six a.m. shift begins. The Dungeon Master's pissed off because he's one of the few people here who actually take responsibility and stay awake all night. He may even interview a passenger or two if he's feeling particularly animated. Do your job properly, and you won't ever have to see his bad side', warned Balder.

Passengers began to filter through. Most of them passed quickly through the European Economic Area (EEA) arrivals control, while a smaller number formed a queue in the area designated for travellers from outside the EU. Balder put out an announcement stating that their position was open.

'Hang on Balder, I haven't even got into the system yet!' cried Themis.





‘No problem. We don’t wait for them; they wait for us!’ replied Balder.

Upon opening their positions, a woman, who looked about sixty-five, approached them.

‘*Bom dia*, I don’t speak English’, she said politely.

‘Not a problem, madam. My supervisor over here speaks Portuguese’, said Balder, pointing towards Themis who was sitting next to him.

Balder spoke fluent Italian and decent Mandarin, which made him a great colleague to work with: In addition to his unquestionable knowledge and experience in matters related to the job, he was a first-rate linguist.

‘Did you just promote me, Balder?’ asked Themis, laughing.

‘Not yet, Themis’, replied Balder. ‘I just said that because I have a feeling you’re going to be soft on this passenger because of her age. Am I right?’ He went on, ‘Well, you’re about to find out that rule number one, everyone here is a liar, has a second part. The passenger’s age means nothing!’

‘You scare me a bit when you talk like that’, said Themis. ‘Passport, please’.

‘Yes, of course’, replied the woman. ‘Do you want to see my return ticket? And my travel insurance? I’ve got travel insurance too. My daughter’s waiting for me outside. I’d love to see my granddaughter too,





but she'll be on her way to school with her dad'.

'Just your passport is fine, Mrs Rodrigues, thank you', said Themis. 'How long are you planning to stay in the United Kingdom?'

'It says on the ticket, dear', replied the passenger.

'You don't know how long you're going to stay here, not even a rough idea?' asked Themis, finding the answer a little strange.

'Yes, yes... two, three months... the same as always, dear'.


Themis examined the woman's passport and saw that she made the same journey every year, always in the summer. For the past five years, she had a single-entry stamp for each year she had come to visit her daughter.

'You come to the United Kingdom every year? Who lives here?' asked Themis.

'Yes, I come every year to stay with my daughter and her family. I stay for a few months and then I go home'.

'Themis, ask if her daughter's working here', interjected Balder. 'I would guess probably not, given that she's got a daughter of school-going age. If that is the case, I'd be very interested in finding out if it's the husband who pays for his mother-in-law's air ticket every year. That's what I'm curious to know'.





‘Balder, please have a bit more respect’, pleaded Themis. ‘Do you really think she’s coming over here to work at her age?’ She was somewhat taken aback by Balder’s suspicions.

‘Themis, stay focussed’.

‘So, Mrs Rodrigues, what does your daughter do here in England? Does she work?’ asked Themis.

‘No, no. My daughter stays at home’, the lady replied. ‘Only her husband works’.

‘Bingo!’ said Balder. ‘Themis, do you really think a pensioner is going to have enough money to pay for international flights every year?’ he asked her. ‘Chuck her in the pan!’

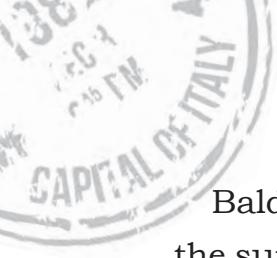
‘Eh? But why, Balder?’ asked Themis, still not understanding.

‘Come on, let’s have a look in her luggage’, ordered Balder.

The officers went to the watch house to tell the chief immigration officer what had taken place up to that point and the reasons behind their intervention. They then took the passenger to the baggage reclaim area.

‘How many bags did you bring?’ asked Themis.

‘Three, dear’, replied the elderly lady, finding this question a bit strange. After all, she came to the country every year and no one had ever stopped her before, never mind all the embarrassment.



Balder always liked to look through contents of the suitcases by himself. While he was checking the first one, Themis and an assistant officer examined the second one. Themis had some difficulty opening it because it was very full – probably well over the baggage limit.

'I think I've managed it', she said finally.

As she opened the case, a waterfall of nail varnish bottles spilled out and cascaded onto the table, some crashing down onto the floor. Themis did not react. She could not, after all, stop hundreds of bottles from falling.

'What on earth!' she exclaimed in shock.


'It's nail varnish, dear', replied the woman, who did not quite know where to look.

'Yes, I can see it's nail varnish', retorted Themis. 'My question is, why would you need so much nail varnish just for a holiday?'

'I like painting my nails', replied the woman, somewhat disconcerted.

Themis looked at Balder, not quite knowing what to make of everything in front of her. Balder returned her gaze with the same expression he had had on his face when he went to fetch the young man filling in his landing card at the end of the arrivals hall. That look, like the one when you find out who took the last chocolate biscuit...





Some of the nail varnish bottles smashed when they hit the ground, creating a rainbow of colour where they fell. The officers closed the suitcases and led the woman to the holding room. After the standard procedures had been carried out, she was left there to rest, as the officers examined their findings and made various other checks.

‘I’m going to have a quick look at her Facebook page. What do you think, Balder?’ asked Themis.

‘I think that’s an excellent idea. You can often find something useful there’, Balder encouraged her.

Their work colleagues were watching the pair from a distance. Some came towards them and made jokes at their expense.

‘Themis, what on earth is Balder teaching you? I didn’t know that we were supposed to be stopping little old ladies coming to see their grandchildren’.

‘Balder, take a look at this’, said Themis, not believing what she had found. ‘People will never cease to amaze me. Just when you least expect it, just when you think it’s impossible to get it wrong, you discover something that turns everything upside down’, she marvelled.

There, on the passenger’s Facebook page, was the following announcement:

‘Hello my lovely clients! Ângela Rodrigues will soon be back in London, and she’s bringing some




amazing new colours to give you the most up-to-date nails around! Book now on 07987654321. Incredible offers available! Inbox me for more information.'

'Themis, check this mobile number. See if it's the same one she just gave us to call her daughter in London', asked Balder.

'It is!' replied Themis, amazed. 'Balder, when I grow up, I want to be just like you!'

Themis wondered if she would ever be half as good at her job as Balder was. He made everything seem so obvious, so easy. It was true that things were getting easier for her as her knowledge of the job increased, but she still doubted if she would ever get any pleasure or, even, job satisfaction from carrying out those difficult and, at times, challenging tasks on a day-to-day basis. She was not sure she would be able to deal with all the negative energy: a broken dream, a lie discovered, the rejection felt by an unfortunate passenger, the pain caused by a wound she had picked open – even if she did have the law on her side. Themis felt she was interfering with the passengers' destinies. These were not just a few broken bottles of nail varnish on the floor; they were broken dreams, a shattered rainbow of hope and happiness. It was her job to decide whether this passenger should have the opportunity to improve her life or whether she should go back from where she





came. Still, Themis knew that her job was important, a job that had to be done – after all, there were good reasons for immigration into any given country being controlled. Protecting the economy and public services, promoting national security, preventing crime and the illegal entry of merchandise, to name but a few. Something that could appear innocent, like a person coming to the United Kingdom for a few months to work without permission, had far greater repercussions than the little money that they would earn. Informal workers took away work from those living legally in the country, and they did not pay taxes that would be used for public services. An increased offer of illegal work led to a lowering of wages, as consumers tended to seek out the lowest possible price for the services they required. Yes, it could seem insignificant when only one person was taken into consideration, but the large-scale impact was significant and damaging.

‘Good afternoon. This is Officer Themis. Am I speaking to Amanda?’

‘Yes, is my mum OK?’ asked the passenger’s daughter, who was waiting outside.

‘Yes, she’s fine. We just need to ask you a few questions about your mum’s trip to the United Kingdom. Is that OK?’ asked Themis.



‘Yes of course, but is there anything wrong? Why has she been stopped?’ asked the daughter.

‘We’re just asking for a little more information for the moment’, said Themis. ‘How long will your mum be staying in the United Kingdom?’

‘Six months. She always comes and stays for that long, and we’ve never had any problems before’.

‘Who paid for your mum’s ticket?’

‘She bought it herself. She used her Brazilian pension money’.

‘How much pension does she receive each month?’

‘About six hundred *reais* a month, but we pay for her food and cover her living costs while she’s here’.

‘Can I ask you if you are working at present? And what’s your immigration status in the United Kingdom?’


‘I’m not working at the moment. I have a five-year-old daughter who’s in primary school. I’m married to an EU citizen’.

‘Thanks for your help, Amanda. We’ll get in touch again if we need to’.

‘But how long are you going to keep my mum? She’ll be tired... she’s an elderly lady, and she’s been travelling since yesterday’.

‘Yes, we’re aware of this. Don’t worry, your mum’s fine. Thanks again’, said Themis, ending the call.





‘So, you see my problem here, Themis?’ asked Balder. ‘This passenger has an income of just over a hundred pounds a month, which comes from her pension. There’s no way she can afford to pay for an international air ticket every year and still survive in Brazil on that kind of money. So, in this case, given that the daughter doesn’t work, it would be fair for us to assume that the passenger is going to have to work here in order to cover her costs. Otherwise, there’s no way she’d be able to come to London for such a long time every year. The law on visiting the UK forbids work. We have to do this to protect the economy, amongst other things’, he explained. ‘I think you already know where all this is going – but before we make a decision, we’ll have to interview her formally’.

Life is pretty tough for economic migrants, thought Themis. In developed countries, the general idea is that retired people can enjoy their old age without having to worry about their financial situation, about how they’re going to pay the rent, because they’re very likely to have their own house. They don’t have to worry about paying for medical treatment, because the State looks after their health. Or how they’re going to pay for food and general expenses, because their pension contributions, taken from their salary over their years at work, are usually enough to cov-



er all these. This is far from the reality in developing countries such as Brazil, she mused.

‘Hi Mrs Rodrigues, we’re here to interview you formally. We’re going to ask you some questions about your visit to the United Kingdom. I must warn you that it’s a crime to lie to immigration officers. After the interview, we’ll pass on your case to our manager and then make a decision as to whether you can come into the country. Are you OK? Do you understand the interpreter?’

‘Yes, I understand. I just don’t know why I’m here’, replied Mrs Rodrigues.

‘You’re here because we don’t believe that you’re a genuine tourist, and this is why we need to ask you some more questions. So, to begin with, what is your purpose for visiting the United Kingdom?’

‘Like I said before, dear, I’ve come to visit my daughter, my granddaughter, and my son-in-law’.

‘How long do you plan to stay?’

‘That depends’, replied the woman. ‘Sometimes I stay for four, five, or six months. Never more than six months, though. Because I know that’s the maximum allowed’.

‘What do you do in Brazil? Do you work? Are you retired?’

‘I’m retired, and I live with my son. My husband has passed away’.





‘I’m sorry to hear that. Why hasn’t your son come with you?’

‘Ah, he couldn’t afford the airfare. He’s not working at the moment, you know. Life in my country is very difficult right now’.

‘But if it’s that difficult, Mrs Rodrigues, how do you manage to buy a ticket every year?’

‘I put aside a little money here and there, and my daughter helps me as well’.

‘But your daughter just told me that she isn’t working at the moment. Where does she get this money to help you?’

‘I don’t know. I imagine her husband helps her out’.

‘Do you work while you’re in the United Kingdom?’

‘What do you think? I can’t even speak English’.

‘We found a large amount of different nail varnishes as well as a manicure set in your suitcase. Why are you bringing along these objects if you’re here as a tourist?’

‘It’s like I said. I like to do my nails, and I also do my daughter’s nails. And her friends’ nails’.

‘We found this advertisement on your Facebook page. Did you write this post?’ asked Themis, showing the woman a copy of the profile page that she’d printed out.

‘Yes, I did’, she admitted.

‘And you know that, as a tourist, you’re not





allowed to work in the United Kingdom, right? Every year when you come into the country, we stamp your passport as a visitor, and this stamp clearly states that while you're here, you may not work or claim benefits. On that basis, I'm afraid that we're going to have to refuse you entry on this occasion. I really am sorry. We'll let your daughter know that you'll be returning to Brazil on the next available flight'.

'But... I won't be able to see my granddaughter?'
'I'm afraid not'.

'Will I ever be able to come back again?'

'If your circumstances change, you'll be able to apply for a tourist visa from Brazil', said Themis. 'If you've understood everything, please sign here, at the end of the interview record'.

The officers left the holding room and walked towards the office to organise the removal of yet another passenger. Themis had thought that things would get easier with her work, but this refusal had made her very sad. She thought about the precious moments between grandmother and granddaughter that she had just prevented. The embrace that the woman would not be able to give her daughter.

What if something happens to her, she could not stop herself from wondering, and this is her last opportunity to see her family?





‘Themis, you’re doing really well!’ said Balder, trying to lift her mood. ‘See how confident you were in that interview? You know, I think you’re ready to work alone now. Your supervised stage will be complete at the end of this week’.

‘Thanks Balder, but I can’t stop thinking about that family’, Themis sadly said.

‘I know Themis, but nobody said this job was going to be easy. Unfortunately, it has to be done – and you’re doing it really well. Now, let’s get a move on. The flight back to Brazil is in two hours, and we have a lot we need to do before then’.

‘OK, I suppose you’re right, Balder’.

Themis quickened her pace at the end of her shift. She did not want to miss the next staff bus that would take her to the car park. She wished to be on the road before the traffic started getting too heavy on the M25. She took her handbag from her locker and ran to the bus stop with Balder.

At the end of yet another working day, Themis felt this was the perfect job for anyone who did not like routine, as one day was never the same as the next. Officers never knew what story the next passenger would tell them when they arrived at their desks, but they had to be prepared at all times. After all, as Balder would say, it was up to the passengers





to prove their innocence. In criminal law, the State had to prove, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the defendant was guilty. For immigration services, according to Balder, every passenger was a liar until they proved otherwise.



