

Uthman stared intently at the man in the corner of the room, while he looked past his interrogator/recruiter. It wasn't not the first time he's seen that man, one of the few post-Vietnam high-ranking COs with any sort of name recognition, Andrew Jackson Ghardaz. The interrogator, some man named Oliver- Oliver Sarmy or something- was another high ranking officer. If one of little repute outside of those in the know. His was a mousy face, its sad, scrunchy features not helped by the dim lighting of their present abode. Ghardaz's eroded visage was thankfully shrouded in darkness, years had hardly been kind to the general, as his proclivity to yell in a drill sergeant manner resulted in what can only be described as hemorrhoids and hernias of the forehead and neck, respectively. Though his facial features were rather unflattering, he had a body unbefitting of his ancient age, and the strength to match. His uniform's breast region offered a glint which was blinding at the correct angles. Another light, that of an especially phallic cigar, occasionally glowed like a firefly.

Sarmy looked at Uthman with an inch-slacked jaw, a seemingly natural part of the American's pathetic face. "As you know, we are offering you amnesty if you're willing to change the present terms of our current relationship." Sarmy offered a limited smile with teeth stained, crooked, Uthman surmised the man was either moronically wasting money on sports cars and West Virginian properties, or, despite alleged bravery, deeply afraid of any sort of dental care- likely both. "Think of it as taking some sort of puppy love public, like showing your months-long secret girlfriend off to your sister who hates her, in this case, you're the girlfriend, and the sister is our 'allies' in the Middle East, as well as the uh, American public." He looked quite smug, proud of his overly convoluted jokes and metaphors.

Uthman did something which resembled nodding in response. The Americans and select other countries had secretly helped to create and funnel money to Uthman's Sunni sectarian outfit, *A-Thowara Islamia* in the hopes of quelling increased Shi'ite unrest, and to decrease Iranian influence in war torn Iraq. The plan hardly worked, but Uthman was a hit with state department officials: an enemy whose odiousness preceded him, tarnished by both his Ba'athist father, and his own horrific credentials. Of course, many of his worst excesses were either exaggerations to garner clicks or his own propaganda to help him gain territory. Regardless of some aggrandizement from various parties, his reputation was well earned, and his moniker, "Ibn Al-Mawt," which while referential to his father, "Abu Al-Mawt," had taken on a life of its own, to the point that the former was more well-known than the latter.

Sarmy continued eagerly. "Our plan presently is to have you continue

your work in the Middle East, but only after we begin our more ambitious operations. I'm sure you've been filled in." Uthman gave a small thumbs up, looking again over to the far more interesting man, the contours of his aged lips around their penile object becoming oddly seductive in the current lighting.

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The combination of sensations took him back to a very similar occasion that occurred decades before. Some other suit in the military, funnily enough, also accompanied by Ghardaz at the time, met with Omar, Uthman's father, in some warehouse in West Germany. His father decided that since he was operating under cover of darkness, and that his reputation had yet to reach the west, he had no reason not to go decked out in his full military gear; he once explained to Uthman that he felt it was almost a second skin. Uthman and their two American acquaintances dressed in business casual- though at the time Uthman was still a child, and thus had little choice.

"How ironic, that the Aryans are selling us weapons to fight their Aryan brothers!" One of his father's signature wry observations, and far from the only one that night that still stuck with Uthman. When they entered the facility the two Americans were side by side, standing ominously below the only light on. A few seconds after stepping in properly, Ghardaz stepped aside to turn the rest on, and the armament being offered was tantalizing to say the least. While the weapons were hand-me-downs from forty years prior, as far as Omar was considered, any arms were welcome arms. The suit bowed politely to Omar, then went in to kiss him on the cheeks, which Omar allowed with some chagrin. He then offered a sideways glance to Uthman.

"What's with the boy? Is that one of those..." Omar shoved the suit at the offense, and Ghardaz chuckled.

"He is my son, you pervert. I needed to look at least somewhat discreet." The suit and Ghardaz both eyed Omar's military uniform. "Yes, yes. Very funny. I feel I should be at least accorded the dignity of wearing my fatigues."

Ghardaz looked as though he was about to say something, but didn't make a comment.

"Anyway, as you can see, we'll be supplying your military with a fine selection of arms, which while perhaps somewhat outdated, shall provide a well needed boost to keep your effort going." The suit smiled intensely as Omar surveyed his new acquisition, looking intensely at the entire inventory, while the suit handed him the corresponding sheet confirming all the contents in front of him were, in fact, the real deal. Omar took out some spectacles from his suit pocket as he began to the paper.

"You'll have to forgive me, I haven't kept up with my German studies since '45!" He said with a wry smile before even looking at the list.

"Excuse me, it's in Arabic and English." The suit blurted.

"I see that now." Omar began to read, skimming the long inventory. In the meantime, Uthman began his own inspection, unsure of what to look for. More so his young mind was looking for anything to distract from the idleness of these adults. There was much to spark the imagination in this dank facility, old munitions and arms which Uthman could use in games with his siblings rather than wasting it on some war. His mind's eye showed him an image of himself- looking like Napoleon, decked out with medals upon medals, on his chest and down his legs, astride a horse, atop the dazed bodies of his siblings. He preened happily amongst the rows upon rows of shells, guns and assorted canisters, until something strange and unassorted caught his eye.

Meanwhile his father had hardly noticed his son's absence, instead he was too focused on perfecting the best dig at this surreal situation. He had bored himself already, and the three adults were standing idle, as the Americans presumed that Omar was still reading. Suddenly, with one hand he covered up his fat mustache partially to form a chaplinesque one, and harshly raised his arm in salute. He tried his best to do a German accent, and bellowed: "Look at me, Western arms supplier extraordinaire! Do not ask about my arm, it does this naturally, ja!" The suit groaned, while Ghardaz smirked. "We make good deal, ja? Good deal with the weapons of chemicals, the mass destructions weapons and the weapons you could not dream of... Jabol! Heil, heil!" The last bit meant to be a mimic of 'hey, hey!' He froze his act when he realized Uthman had fled somewhere. "Ah shit. Excuse me." The Americans nodded and Omar looked back first to make sure the door hadn't opened, and upon confirming, he went into the muntion maze.

"*Ya Uthman? Mn Ainak?*" He cried out in Arabic, not quite at the point of desperation yet. "*Astaghfirullah!* That boy." He continued to yell to little avail, until eventually he rounded around a dead end. "*Al-Hamdulillah!*" He noticed his boy was acting a bit weird, as though he was concealing something. He stared guiltily like a piss-and-shit-on-the-floor dog. "*Sho? Sho Al-Mushkeyla?*" He asked, knowing he would get no answer, and he noticed that Uthman had his arms behind his back, and a smile crossed Omar's face. "Ah, you grabbed a souvenir, *Mish Mushkeyla!* Come now, I want to get this over with. What a buzzkill that moron is." Omar seized Uthman's shoulder with a certain paternal gentility. His son accepted the gesture with little protest, allowing himself to be dragged back to the makeshift meeting area. Uthman nursed a small beaker with an unidentified, india-ink black fluid which gyrated about in a delayed rhythm with his steps. It was a bit denser than water. He held it tightly to prevent spillage.

They returned to their meeting area to find the two Americans waiting with

certain chagrin. The two were both smoking in silence though were revived with subtle animation as soon as they saw the Iraqi father and son returning. The business of weapons trading was largely finished, but it seemed that there was something else. Omar's expression betrayed a minute worry about some sort of setup. Instead, Ghardaz produced a walkman and a tape with a smile.

"It isn't much," The stoic man said with an ever-so-slight Slavic accent. "My daughter doesn't want it anymore, and I just carry it around. But I don't really get this sort of thing. I didn't expect a lad to come. He might like this, a bit girly though." Ghardaz leaned down slightly, attempting to mold his late-middle aged visage into something appealing for the child to look at. The effort was a failure, but Uthman remained stoic, peering at the walkman and tape when he wasn't being induced to nervousness by the unwelcome, horrific face before him.

The tape's cover was a reddish purple mix in its background, and an immaculately beautiful woman whose skin was like a corpse: pure white, with blood red lips, a short cut of hair and long earrings which seemed to pierce her neck. Her smile, like the rest of her was unnatural, unnerving even, yet far from unattractive. Uthman was hypnotized by the illustration, feeling a seduction whose source and feeling he could not fully comprehend or articulate. He nodded in thanks without looking at Ghardaz, whose face was still dangerously close to his own.

Omar gently nudged his son on the shoulder, who took the hint and allowed himself to be corralled. He stuffed the surprise gifts into his pockets with certain difficulty considering he was already holding the beaker. The two shuffled back to their boat in the West German night, greeted by the general's bodyguards, loans from Saddam. The boat was a fairly inconspicuous pleasure craft, of decent size, resembling that of any Western tourist that docked in Hamburg, aside from the burly men with rifles. As soon as they stepped on the bow, Uthman freed himself and dashed to his room. Slamming the door, Uthman rushed to lean against a wall to mess with his newfound toys. His child instincts demand that he take the beaker up to his mouth, and take a sniff. Odorless. Shrugging, he mindlessly took a few sips, and put the headphones for the walkman around his ears. It was a rather awkward and uncomfortable feeling, which mixed horribly with the undulations of the ship. He studied the mechanism of the walkman for a time, before eventually discovering how to work the thing. At first he stuffed the tape with its case on, but upon encountering opposition, realized that the tape could be removed, and placed it into the machine, by sheer luck it was facing the correct side. It took several guesses with the button to play the tape, however.

The world began to disappear around him, the light emitted from every object became streak-like, as it smeared his vision, disappearing to the top of his eyes. He could barely feel the impact of his sheets as his body slouched into his bed without his control. A haunting screech echoed throughout his ears, synthetic and low-quality. The music began in a language he normally would not really comprehend, discussing concepts he had no experience with, things he was too young to really have thought of, but he understood it perfectly. The lack of visual stimuli meant his mind salvaged some of its earlier absorptions to explain what it was he heard. The world began to reapproximate itself, Uthman sat atop a flattened bed of reeds. The sun shone brightly, yet there was no unbearable heat. The desert which surrounded him was alive, dry and alive, dead and living, blue and tan dominated all, life and life. A mirage, striding confidently towards the young boy. She ruined the even scenery- her skeletal skin, red dress and jet black hair forced his eyes upon her. Something in his mind screamed joyfully in its description of her, an untraceable source. She walked along a river which wound and weaved, eroding the desert sand instantaneously into a sea behind her each step. He could see the smile on her now, welcoming is perhaps the closest concept his brain could wrap his mind around to describe the expression, though it was far from solely that. Despite knowing her name, his mind assigned her something he had heard on radios and the news. *Shaitan Al-Akbar*. Some deep sense felt that even if she wasn't *Shaitan Al-Akbar*, she doubtlessly was an avatar of it.

Her eyes had no soul, but he knew he would listen to whatever she wordlessly commanded him to do. While she had no soul, she was more than glad to play with his, he realized, and he would have very little choice in the matter. She wanted nothing more than his compliance, and she would have it. As a reward, she would visit him in his dreams every night, and when it was time would be sure to give him the appropriate gifts. Every night. All he had to do was cooperate. He couldn't understand. He was scared, but intrigued. Ghardaz's horrific face appeared briefly, and red sprayed everywhere. It squirted from his arm, and drooped down slowly from above his eye. Soon his whole body began to flare up in pain. The cost of non-compliance. How much he could be awarded if he just worked with her. How much! The world seeped out wondrous ballads of her beauty, tempting Uthman to submission. All he had to do was work with them, and be awarded endlessly, rewards he would understand in adolescence!

All he had to do was listen to her adherents on Earth, and that which he wanted in some animal part of his brain would be given. He would even find gifts on his own along the way. Another part of him refused. The pain and scarlet returned, and he tried to scream but couldn't. There was nothing

stopping him. The woman's expression was unchanged, she was very close to him now, there was no more desert. Her impossible earrings seemed to brush up against his neck, offering an even stronger dimension of pain. She wished to pierce his neck for his constant defiance. He felt something different brush up against him, and the pain began to stop. He was coming down ever so slightly. Yet the face of the woman still remained.

The music which had become encoded into his soul stopped, and he saw a different vision and a softened, ever minor feeling of rain appeared on his shoulder. One of a warm hearth, and he felt the welcome embrace of a stern man. One who he could never truly reach the expectations of. One who was perhaps a horrible person in his own right, even a monster. Yet one who was human, not some faceless machine or system. A man who despite everything, would always love him. The music that echoed now was not music- rather Uthman was becoming one with his father's voice. Uthman's soul took the shape of each of its little imperfections, its slight quivers, a result of undoubtable concern.

He was his own individual, yes, but he could never escape his father. He was experiencing a second birth, perhaps even a third. His soul was an ovum- externalities were the fertilizer, different memetic influences competing and merging to create a new soul, a new man, for one who already had one. His mind was a stained and bent camera lens, which had yet to take a worthwhile picture- *Shaitan Al-Akbar* took the picture, but it was under the red light of Omar that it was to develop.

Uthman began to come to, and found his father holding him in a bear hug and sobbing. He couldn't open up one of his eyes, but it was still there. The smell of a middle aged man: ash from aged cigars, cologne and a couple of untraceable odors, overwhelmed the boy. "*Ya Allah! Ya Allah, laysh? Ibni, Lazam Arja Ili!*" Looking beyond Omar's shoulder, Uthman saw a knife that he must have produced and harnessed while in his daze. The pain which had previously subsided now returned in force and Uthman wailed like a newborn babe, and his sweat and blood were molded into something akin to vernix caseosa. His father stopped talking, and held him close and began to rock his son about and gently hummed some old Um Khathoum song between his sobs. Uthman could hardly lift his vivisected arm to return the embrace, but it seemed his father didn't mind.

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Uthman felt a blush coming on as he continued to stare intently at the older man's mouth. Something had gone deeply wrong with him, the wires in his brain were recrossed once again as he felt an erection emerge watching the old man, whose unsightly mug had so tortured him in dreams. Ghardaz turned slightly towards him, and the Iraqi could almost swear the man was

wearing some sort of bright red lipstick. He totally tuned out of the conversation, instead going over to the Trillion-Star General.

Sarmy didn't stop him, he was mostly repeating the same statistics and orders anyway, and welcomed the disruption. Uthman never really experienced any sort of thoughts or feelings like this outside of his dreams and in intercourse. But Ghardaz would haunt his moments of arousal- any of his various sexual encounters he saw Ghardaz and the woman dancing about in the stars in his closed eyes, his two maternal figures.

Oedipal rage filled him as he approached the old man, who resembled a bruised cabbage. Ghardaz seemed to reach for his sidearm, but instead fiddled around a bit to find the remote for his electrolarynx. Uthman stared into his eyes, there was a hint of seduction which vaguely resembled the woman of his dreams that only confused him further. This was the face of the man who laughed in celebration at Omar's sentencing at the Hague, and smoked a comically large novelty cigar while watching the man get executed.

"What do you want, boy?" The ancient officer pleaded with eyebrows raised. Uthman seized the American's chin, then leaned in to harshly whisper.

"I want you, old dog. I want every inch of you. I want my reward." Ghardaz went agape, but did not seem opposed to the idea. The 'reward' part only confused him, though. He had no idea where Uthman was getting that from. Uthman grabbed him by the shoulder, and escorted him to a storage closet. Despite his disorientation, Ghardaz offered no resistance, and Uthman removed the man's Pinochet-sized cap and began to sniff the small strands of combover he had left. He was only met with dandruff clogging his nostrils. After a sufficient amount of expulsion, Uthman breathed heavily into the man's ears, and sent his tongue down as well, giving him an absolutely horrific taste. Deterred slightly, but not unbeaten, Uthman then nibbled gently on his helix, which had the texture of wet paper.

A sigh composed of mixed emotions was released from Uthman as they entered into some storage closet. He undid his belt and began to kiss Ghardaz intensely, thrusting and lancing at the still uniformed man as he did. They exchanged spit and bit each others' lips, moaning quietly. Ghardaz's lips were cracked and dry, and slightly hardened with age, at the point of recession back into the mouth. Uthman's still had some volume, flexibility. He himself also was quite virile, something which surprisingly Ghardaz could handle, at least relatively well for his age.

The older man replied to Uthman's thrusts in kind with groans and quivers, as he loosened his old bones and sinews at a snail's pace. Ghardaz took off his jacket and shirt, and the clatter of medals upon the floor followed. Below, a well defined musculature with minimal sagging flesh- the kind that

dominated the rest of his body- was revealed. The impressive physique was ruined to some extent whenever the old man would breathe- whenever his diaphragm emptied it left a gaping pit below the ribs. It had the exact same texture as sandpaper, with similar gradations and to some extent, the same grayness with certain kinds. Veins and arteries bulged like some horrific map of sprawling rivers and at random intervals thumped to show that there was possibly still life. Uthman ran his hand across this strange surface, and sometimes his fingerprints would get caught in wispy, nearly invisible hairs that the dim light in the closet just couldn't catch.

Uthman dropped his pants and underwear fully, then flipped and pinned Ghardaz to the wall, who was still clothed below the waist. A massive tattoo of a U encircling the crest of Croatia spanned the entirety of Ghardaz's back, and it was crowned by various melanomas and other strange splotches only present with age. Uthman only took a brief note of the strange thing as his mind was too clouded with carnal lust as he ground his now exposed rod against the wrinkly glutes of Ghardaz. Frustrated and to some extent literally burnt by the tough sewing of the man's fatigues, Uthman forced the General's bottoms down in order to top him. He let out a thick hock of spit onto his shaft and after some poking around, managed to find his way into the chapped cavern.

It was tight and unnaturally dry, and while Uthman extract some pleasure, it his exploration would have to be limited, as for one the General was practically yelping in some hard to decipher mix of emotions, for two, he wasn't sure if the old man could even sanitize himself properly, or of his bowel integrity at his age and of what diseases he may carry, and for three, how much of this his dick could even tolerate. The general let out a watery, diarrhea-like discharge from his own cock which could in some generous way be described as semen fairly quickly after he was penetrated. Uthman too released a much more dignified deposit near the General's prostate, though his face could not attest to him being a man of any valor at that moment. Uthman was able to remove his instrument with some effort, and it made a sound like a wine bottle being opened after it was let out. He put on the General's underwear and left the old man in the closet alone, and walked out without expression. In some other room in the Pentagon, a radio played some 80s song which was a secret favorite of the Iraqi's:

*He thought he was the King of America,
But it was just a Boulevard of Broken Dreams
A Trick they do with mirrors and with chemicals,
The words of love in whispers
And the acts of love in screams
I wish that I could push a button*

*And talk in the past and not the present tense
And watch this loving feeling
Disappear like it was common sense*