

After Cairo

A Novel ~ By Laura L. Mitchell

Acknowledgements

After Cairo is a novel set as a sequel to *Cairo Time*, a film by Ruba Nadda.

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Musical and Literary References:

Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten, BWV 202, cantata by J.S. Bach, Emmanuel Music translation, pp. 31-32.

Sonnet 116, by William Shakespeare, p. 90.

I Live in Your Eyes, by Farouk Goweedah, p. 150.

The Prince and His Three Fates, Egyptian folktale, retold by the author, pp. 171-73.

Cloths of Heaven, by W.B. Yeats, p. 245.

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The Visitors

Juliette awoke early that Saturday, before sunrise, still able to catch a few stars from her curtainless window. Sleep wasn't always easy for her. Sometimes the problem was falling asleep. Other times, like today, the challenge was to stay asleep. She picked up a book and tried to read in bed, but then gave up and headed downstairs.

She made coffee. Hot. Strong. Ever since her trip to Cairo, she no longer added milk or sugar. After the first cup, the sun began to rise, pale and cold and yet full of the promise that the sun always brings with the dawn of a new day. *That's not just a metaphor*, she mused to herself. Every day was a new day, with new possibilities and new promises. Some promises would be kept and others would be broken, but new promises came nonetheless.

Once the sun flooded the kitchen, she went to the front door to retrieve the newspaper. Everyone else she knew had long stopped getting an actual paper delivered to their doors. But Juliette loved the morning newspaper. She loved the thud as it landed on her front porch. She loved its scent, and she was old enough to remember when newsprint could smudge your hands. She didn't want the Internet to topple entirely that fixture in her life.

The only thing she didn't like about the newspaper was its size. Newspapers were designed for men, for those humans with longer wingspans. She always had to fold the paper back and hold one-half at a time. Magazines – her publications – were human-scaled. But newspapers were more present and demanding: this was what you needed to know before you started your day.

She opened the door and reached for the paper. The April air was crisp and cool, but the blazing forsythia in the garden promised that the day would warm the earth. *April is the cruelest month*, T. S. Eliot had written. But he had probably never stepped out onto a front porch in upstate New York on an April day like this one.

As she rose, paper in hand, she saw them: two men in dark suits, one with sunglasses, entirely unnecessary at this hour of the day. They came up the driveway, the gravel crunching beneath their formal black shoes. She instinctively stepped back, closed the door, and latched the deadbolt. Her heart was pounding. She heard the men's heavy steps on the porch and wondered what to do. Then one of the men said, "Mrs. Laroche? Mrs. Laroche?"

No one ever called her Mrs. Laroche. She had kept her maiden name, published under her maiden name, worked under her maiden name. It was the 80s, after all, when she married. All of her friends had kept their names.

“Yes?” she replied through the door.

“Mrs. Laroche, may we come in?” the voice replied. The tone was official and insistent but not unfriendly.

“Who are you?” she replied, anxiety rising inside her. It was unstoppable and was beginning to overwhelm her.

“Mrs. Laroche, we need to speak with you. May we come in?” He slipped a business card through the mail slot. “Ma’am, if you need verification of my identity, please call the number on this card.”

“Who are you?” she asked again, but she never really heard his reply. State Department. United Nations Office of blah blah blah. He was dead. That’s all she knew for sure. He was dead.

She leaned her back against the door and slid to the floor. At first she whimpered, which was all the shock would allow, but then her whimpers gave way to wails and uncontrollable sobs.

“Mrs. Laroche,” the voice said again. “I’m so sorry. Please, may we come in?”

Something in his politeness focused her. *How rude of me to leave these men standing outside*, she thought. *I’m not being a very good host.*

“Yes, yes. I’m sorry. Yes.” She repeated those words over and over. For a minute? 10? An hour? She would never know.

She tightened the sash on her bathrobe, ran her fingers through her hair, and wiped her eyes. And then she decided to open the door. *This is the last thing I will do*, she engraved in her memory, *before I am told I am a widow. This is the last thing I will do when I may reasonably believe he might call at any moment to say he’s fine, just fine. Once I open this door, everything changes.*

She grasped the doorknob firmly, turned it, and opened the door. The sunlight blinded her, and she could not see the faces of the bearers of her bad news. But she could hear them. “Mrs. Laroche?”

“Yes, that’s me.”

“May we come in?”

“Certainly.”

“I’m from the United States Department of State. My colleague here is from the United Nations. I am afraid we have some difficult news. Would you like to sit down?”

“Yes, yes,” she replied. She thought she would like to sit down.

The two men entered her home, like thieves coming cruelly for her happiness. They looked hardly old enough to even know what bad news really was. She motioned to them to sit, and one of them took Mark’s chair. How could he have known?

She listened intently as the one young man told her that Mark had died – had been killed, more accurately. His words didn’t make sense to Juliette, so she turned her head to the other young man, who looked back at her apologetically and said nothing. She returned her eyes to the first young man and asked him to repeat what he had just said. He obliged, but it still didn’t make sense.

She was in a state of shock. But she was also a trained journalist, and she could summon that persona. She pressed on with questions that made the young man uncomfortable. He responded by repeating the same information: a limited story with a simple and tragic beginning, middle and end. This was not the whole story, and she knew it. But after several attempts at more information, she gave up. What did it matter? He was gone.

“Coffee?” she offered, interrupting the young man who was saying something about what a great service Mark had performed.

“No ma’am. We’re fine. But is there someone you might want to call? Someone who can come here to be with you?”

Juliette shook her head left and right, trying to jar herself into comprehension. “My daughter. My son. He’s Mark, too,” she heard another woman, another self, explain. *This is an out of body experience*, she observed. *I am now having an out of body experience. I must remember this feeling*, she thought, *in case it happens again.*

“Would you like us to call them?”

In her head, the one still attached to her body, she said no. This was news that her children ought to hear from her, not from a stranger in a dark suit and sunglasses who had arrived unannounced and uninvited.

“Yes, I think you’d better,” she replied. She typed in her password and handed him her cell phone. “Their numbers are in here. Search Emily. Then Mark son. Not just Mark.”

“I’ll be a moment, ma’am,” he said, and took her phone to the porch. The other young man, who had not spoken at all, sat silently next to her. *You are young*, she thought, *but you know when there are no words. Thank you for not burdening me with your words.*

The other man, the one who talked, came back into the house. “Your children say they are on their way.”

“Thank you.”

“Would you like us to stay here until they arrive?”

“It will be a few hours before they can get here,” she said. *But the quiet one can stay if he wants*, she thought to herself.

“Is there a neighbor I can contact?”

She shook her head. “I’ll be fine,” she lied. “I’ll be fine.” The two men left, and Juliette returned to the kitchen and watched her coffee turn cold.

Juliette was still sitting at the kitchen table later that morning when she heard new footsteps. She opened the door for Emily, Mark and Samantha before they could knock and scanned their faces, reading the various stories of grief. She did not have the energy to reach out her arms.

Samantha looked anxious but not sad; even though she and Mark had been married for several years, she barely knew her father-in-law. Her grief was for Juliette, and for all women who were widowed young. Mark the son’s grief was almost as remote as Samantha’s. “Mom,” he said, “I don’t know what to say.” Like Samantha’s, his sorrow was more for Juliette than for himself. He registered that his father’s absence would now be permanent, but he was so used to his father being gone that he had stopped missing him many years before.

Juliette found the courage to look at Emily. Her face was streaked with tears, her eyes red. Emily had a capacity to feel pain that her brother did not. “Mom,” she said, throwing herself at Juliette and wrapping her arms around her. “I love you.”

“I love you, too, sweetheart.” Some things in life would never change, Juliette thought, and this was one of them. She stepped back from Emily’s embrace and looked at her daughter. So wonderful. So wondrous. So different than herself. Just to look at the two of them was to contrast; Emily’s face was round, and her dark hair nearly exploded on her head. The artificial streaks of color were intentionally chosen and placed for maximum effect. Two holes in one ear, three in the other. The delicate tattoo around her wrist where Juliette would never put anything but a wristwatch. “I love you, too,” she repeated and hugged Emily for dear life.

Juliette looked beyond Emily to the forsythia in the garden, the yellow blossoms oblivious to what had happened that day. But those blossoms would fade, too, and fall off their branches. New leaves would replace them, then turn brown and drop. The winter would encroach and freeze the ground beneath them. And then, in a year, new promises would bud on the same branches again.

With the same predictability as the change of seasons, the sun set that day. The darkening sky signaled dinnertime on its own that evening; no one felt hunger. Samantha rummaged through a drawer in Juliette’s desk and found a take-out menu for a Chinese restaurant in a neighboring town and handed it to Emily to place an order. Emily would know best what Juliette could be coaxed into eating.

Juliette’s house was well beyond the restaurant’s delivery range, but Mark and Sam were glad to have an errand that would get them out of the house for an hour.

Emily and Juliette were left alone; Emily sat by her mother on the sofa, holding her hand. She put her head on Juliette's shoulder until she knew her head was too heavy, then sat up and made room for Juliette's head on her shoulder.

When the crunch of gravel alerted them that Mark and Sam were back, Emily set the dining room table and put out a pitcher of water. Sam pulled out the little white containers and took the chopsticks out of their wrappers. They all sat down, looked at the food, and wondered what to do next, as though food were some new-fangled invention designed to sustain life that they didn't know how to use.

Emily began putting food on Juliette's plate. "When's the last time you ate, Mom?"

This was a question Juliette could answer. "24 hours ago."

"Yep, time to eat," she ordered.

Juliette obeyed as best she could, picking at the peppers and cashews she normally liked. They ate in a silence that confirmed the news of Mark's death. Normally their dinners together were loud, their voices practically climbing over one another in a friendly race to the top of the conversation heap. But not tonight.

Juliette gave up and put her chopsticks down, directly onto the table; she was beyond caring that the sticky sauce would make a mess on the tablecloth. "Damn you," she said under her breath.

"Mom?" Emily asked in alarm. Emily could count on less than one hand the number of times she'd heard her mother swear.

"I said *damn you*," Juliette spoke calmly. She glared down at her food, her shoulders square and her fists tensing on either side of her plate. "I told your father he was going to get himself killed." She looked up at Emily. "And now he did."

Juliette could recall the conversation distinctly. She could see them at the top of a ridge during their last hike on the Appalachian Trail. And even if she hadn't been able to picture it in her mind's eye, the photo above the fireplace served as proof. They'd sat for a while, nearly above the clouds, and talked, talked like she remembered their talking in years past. During that hike, she had felt that their life together was starting to make sense again, and she'd asked him – begged him, really – to take the job at the local community college that he had been offered. She had begged him to come home.

"Mom," Emily put her hand on Juliette's arm, "bad things happen. You never know."

"I changed everything for him, Emily," she glared down at her food again. "I changed my job. I moved out here. I made time."

"I know, Mom, I know," Emily spoke in measured tones as Mark and Samantha watched silently.

“And now there’s no time left.”

Mark interrupted his mother. “Mom, I’m really sorry. Sam and I are going to need to go.” He knew his timing was bad. “It’s getting late. But Emily’s going to stay here with you. Okay?”

Juliette nodded and stood from the table. “You have to eat more than that, Mom,” Emily stated firmly. “You do.”

“Not right now, honey,” Juliette shook her head. “Sam and Mark need to go.” They said goodbye at the door, and then Emily tried unsuccessfully to persuade Juliette to return to the dining room table. “I’ll clean up,” Emily conceded, “you rest.”

“I’ll help you,” Juliette replied. It was easier to stay in motion than to sit. They cleared the table together, threw out what needed to be thrown out, and put the leftovers in the refrigerator.

“I’m tired,” Juliette said, lowering herself to the chair at her small, square kitchen table. She placed her elbows on the worn, butcher block surface and buried her head in her hands. “Really tired.” It was too early to go to bed, but she couldn’t think of anywhere else to go.

“Come on,” Emily replied, pulling one of her mother’s hands away from her face. She led Juliette upstairs to her mother’s room and sat on the chaise by the window while Juliette undressed and put on some pajamas that were too warm for the season. Emily tucked her in and then lay down next to her. “Let me find some music, okay?”

Juliette nodded from her pillow as she watched Emily walk over to her side of the bed. Emily sat down beside her and let out an involuntary giggle as she looked over at the bedside stand.

“What’s so funny?” Juliette asked.

“I can’t believe you still have that thing,” Emily shook her head in disbelief.

“What thing?” Juliette asked. Emily pointed to the combination alarm clock and CD player. “What’s wrong with it?” Juliette asked.

“Nothing,” Emily replied, stroking her mother’s hair. She sorted through a short stack of CDs on the table and picked the one she thought would be most likely to lull her mother to sleep. “Get some rest, Mom. I’ll be right here.” She kissed her mother’s cheek and returned to her father’s side of the bed. Still in her clothes from the day, Emily lay down next to Juliette and took her hand, and they both fell asleep.

Emily stayed with her mother through the next day and would have stayed into the workweek as well, but Juliette told her to go. The mother in Juliette knew that routine was what they all needed, and Emily had finally found a job she really

liked. On Sunday night, she drove Emily to the train station, kissed her goodbye, and returned to the house of which she was now the sole owner.

Juliette entered her living room with trepidation and sat in her chair. At first she sat with her eyes closed, but then she summoned the courage to look over at Mark's chair, its extra cushion crumpled just as he had left it. It had been weeks since he had sat in that chair. His work had always kept him far away, for long periods of time, and in places where she could not visit. In all of his years working abroad, she observed to herself, she had only travelled once to see him. A trip to Cairo she would never forget.

Juliette got up from her chair and deliberately sat down in his. The chair's seat cushion felt stiffer and newer than hers; it had not experienced nearly the same hours of use. She looked up at the mantle from his seat and surveyed the family photographs. Mark smiled down at her, his eyes hidden by sunglasses. It had been a bright day when they hiked that mountain.

In her mind, she inventoried the house for other signs of his presence: the coaster on the table between his chair and hers, some papers in the desk in the foyer, a few clothes in the closet, and a stack of books by his side of the bed that he would never finish reading. But evidence of his existence was thin in this house, which was much bigger than the apartment they had shared in the city. In their cramped urban quarters, they were inescapable to each other. But in this house, he had never really taken hold, no matter how hard they had tried.

They had moved to this house after Cairo. One lesson, one metaphor, from Cairo had stuck with her more than any other. A marriage, she thought, is like a pyramid. You build it slowly, one block after another. Some moments are so significant, so spectacular that they cover the structure with gleaming limestone so that it shines brightly in the sun. But if you don't care for the pyramid, it can crumble. If you strip it of its limestone, it loses its luster. But the building blocks remain below. Those blocks can still be climbed, can still be reclaimed. Even thousands of years later. All it takes is determination. And effort, endurance, stamina. Work.

Compromise helped, of course, too. Two people sharing the teeter-totter. Sometimes you're up, and sometimes not. Sometimes it was your turn to kick start from the ground, and sometimes you got to soar high above where you could ever go on your own.

When it came to the teeter-totter of her marriage, of *their* marriage, Juliette corrected herself, she had to admit there wasn't much room for compromise. She had to kick start, she had to make the compromises. This reality was not going to change before he retired. Or caved to a desk job she knew he would hate. *So it's my job to kick start*, she told herself after Cairo. And she did.

And in many ways, she knew, this had also allowed her to soar: she loved the creative freedom that her new arrangements allowed. Now she wrote for herself, edited other people's work for fun, and published what she could when she got the chance. It was a freedom she hardly remembered from before work, before marriage, before kids. Work and marriage and children were blessings, but they came with the price of rigid structures, often seemingly endless demands, and the

relentless need to walk on the paths of others, leaving your own path unexplored and overgrown.

The newfound flexibility had been an even bigger prize. She remembered the first time she had said, “I won’t be taking any assignments in June. Mark will be home then.” She had expected the Editor-in-Chief to say, “Well then, you’re fired.” But instead she piped cheerily, “I’m so happy for you. I’ll call you after the 4th.” And that was it. She had begun her career as an independent contractor and had had a steady stream of projects ever since.

In this new environment, she focused on learning how to carve out time. Time for herself, time for Mark. Time to be married at all. This is what Cairo had taught her: the importance of the gift of time that we give to each other, for which there is no substitute. But time, she knew, had to be carved from the most solid and stubborn of stones: neglect.

She and Mark had lost track of time. They had not always been more married to their work than to each other, but over the years, their work had consumed them more and more, devouring their time for each other as relentlessly as locusts devour all before them. And this had cost them in Cairo. Cairo, and Tareq in it, had jolted Juliette. And so after Cairo, Juliette decided to claw back time, no matter what it cost.

She looked at the clock on the mantle. Now she had plenty of time, but only silence with which to share it. But in the weeks that followed, the silence gradually subsided, like a storm that passes to make room for the songs of nature: serenading birds, rustling leaves, the nearby stream. Some sounds were less welcome, like the breeze that made its way through the aging window frames of her century-old farmhouse. There was no silence, not really, except the silence inside her.

Contact

Everyone, it seemed, knew what to do with death. There were rituals for death and the bodies of the dead, when there were bodies, even for someone only obliquely connected to a religious tradition. There were rituals for grief as well, although more fluid than those for death. Early in grief friends and relatives made frequent contact, brought food and flowers, came around unexpectedly and stayed until the tears subsided. As the initial shock wore off, people encouraged her to get out, asked her to lunch, suggested books to read and did their best to make small talk – anything to ease the transition from two-ness to one-ness. Or from one-ness to one-half-ness.

But by mid-summer, the stream of condolence cards adorned with flowers, all kindly meant to comfort, had largely dried up. The phone calls had nearly ceased, and no one had brought a casserole in weeks. The well-intended visits dropped off, too, and the questions of *How are you doing?* dissipated like fog. The period of grieving was ending and the days of widowhood opened ahead of her. Grief had its rituals. Widowhood did not.

Friends and loved ones dispersed on summer vacations. Those who decamped to homes on New England's coastal islands made repeated invitations. "Come to our place," they offered, "stay as long as you like." "We've got wifi here, too," one friend implored, "and you can work from anywhere. Come get a change of scenery. And you wouldn't be alone."

But she would still be alone. And the idea of being a widow among happy couples was not something she could absorb, let alone consider seriously. "Maybe next summer," she politely declined each invitation, "maybe then."

As the season's long, bright days called others out of doors, Juliette spent time with her computer at the tiny table in her kitchen that barely accommodated two chairs. She always sat in the chair nearest the archway to dining room, her back to the memories of that first dinner after she was informed of Mark's death. She edited in this chair, ate in this chair, and cried in this chair.

She looked at the empty seat across from her, the one with the view into the dining room. She could move that chair to the basement, she thought. Why let it take up precious real estate in her kitchen? But it was a good place to put her purse, she reasoned, and so the chair remained.

As she ate lunch alone again one day, she heard the postal carrier push the mail through the opening in the front door. The brass cover on the mail slot slapped shut with a clang as the papers swished onto the floor. Junk mail had its own particular sound, she thought, and she returned her attention to the manuscript she was editing. Work was not enjoyable these days, but deadlines provided welcome structure. Three more paragraphs, she told herself, and then take a break. Then three more after that. 18 by dinner. Maybe have a good cry after that, and then six more. Then hit the send button. “You’ve got to have a plan,” Mark would always say. “If you have a plan, you can get through anything.”

Eventually the dusk settled enough to require her to turn on a light in the kitchen; this was a signal to lean over from her chair to open the refrigerator for inspiration. Nothing appealed, which made her hunger intensify.

She thought back to the meals she had made when the kids were younger, the wide-ranging conversations at the dinner table, and the number of times she’d have to remind them not to talk with their mouths full. But once the kids were out of the house, she didn’t cook much at all, unless Mark happened to be at home. But now she was on her own. He was not coming home for dinner. Ever.

Juliette gave up on dinner and decided in favor of sorting through the junk mail that had arrived earlier. Putting useless advertisements in the recycling bin would be far easier than figuring out what to eat. She walked to the foyer and reached for the delivery sprawled over the worn wooden floor. And that’s when she saw it. A letter. An actual letter with a stamp and a hand-written address. She was certain of it. This was a letter.

The handwriting was flawless. She didn’t recognize it at all. The stamps were as beautiful and unfamiliar as the penmanship. She reached for the pair of reading glasses she kept on the old roll-top desk and did a double take at the stamp. Her heart simultaneously jumped and sank. She flipped over the envelope to see the return address, aware that she didn’t know what his address was anyway. She didn’t know his address any more than she knew his handwriting. But she could see that the return address read *Cairo*.

She searched the desk for the letter opener that she had dug out when the condolence cards were arriving daily, but that had since been lost to the desk’s cubbyhole recesses. Letter opener reclaimed, she carefully slit the envelope open and withdrew a folded sheet. The paper was thick and textured. She scanned straight to the end and read his name. Tareq. The enclosed name card confirmed she was not misreading.

He had written. She had thought many times that she should contact him to let him know of Mark’s death. Mark and Tareq had, after all, worked together for many years. But she wasn’t sure how to reach him, wasn’t sure she should even try, and assumed that someone else would have told him anyway. But she had wanted to tell him, and as she held his letter in her hand, she was grateful that he had taken the risk that she had not.

Dear Juliette,

I offer my sincerest condolences on the death of your husband, Mark. May God rest his soul. My mother and sisters also send their condolences.

I am sorry I was not able to attend the memorial service.

If you will allow, I wish to pay my respects in person. With your permission, I will travel to New York in the near future.

You will be surprised that I now have a smart phone. My sisters' children presented me with it and insist that I must use it. The number is on my calling card.

Sincerely,

Tareq

The letter was formal and polite, professional and even distant. A bit gallant, which was authentic, and written in what she thought had to be a fountain pen.

She put the letter back in the envelope, keeping his card in her hand, and walked in a daze the short distance to the living room. Sinking into the sofa, she looked at the card again. As promised, there was a phone number. She glanced at the clock. It was after midnight in Cairo. Probably a good thing, she thought; had she opened the letter when it had arrived, she might have found calling him irresistible.

His email address, though, was also on the card, and there was no time zone reason to delay an email. She returned to her computer in the kitchen and sat down to write. *Don't think about this too much*, she told herself, *just write*.

Dear Tareq,

Thank you for your letter, which arrived today.

She stopped. What else should she say? What should she say to a man after nearly two years without any contact? When the last glimpse she had had of him was as the elevator said goodbye for them both?

It was lovely to hear from you.

Well that's prosaic, she scolded herself on the page. But she felt that the situation called for kabuki-like control of the dialogue.

You are very kind to plan to visit.

That's honest, she told herself. But not complete.

I would be very happy to see you.

There. She'd said it. How to sign off? Sincerely? Regards? Yours truly?

Juliette

Just Juliette.

She hit send. Emily had once showed her how to recall an email after sending it. Juliette was glad she could not remember how it worked.

She closed the computer and returned to the refrigerator. Noodles with cheese would be fine that night. Vegetables should be microwaved, she was confident of that. And wasn't lemon pepper the perfect seasoning for anything? At least the bottle of Pellegrino looked like more than what she'd had on hand in graduate school.

He had written her a letter. His words were still circling above her head, asking for final permission to land. A letter.

The phone rang. It was just past 7 o'clock, which was when Mark or Samantha called every day to check on her. It was a bit smothering, but Juliette also looked forward to it. She accepted that Mark's death had sped up the role reversal that occurs with all parents and children. Parents cared for dependent children, but as those children grew, the relationship evolved and the next thing you knew, everyone around the dinner table was an adult. And then those adults cared for their parents, sometimes in ways similar to how the parents had once cared for the children. This was the way of life. And her two adults had proved more than up to the task of comforting her as she found a new footing.

Reaching for the phone on the counter, she pressed the reheat button on the microwave, tapped the phone to answer and lifted it to her ear, all without looking. "Hi sweetheart. How was your day?" she asked into the phone.

"Good. It was a good day," came the reply.

She stood silent. Was this another out of body experience?

"Juliette, is that you?"

"Tareq?"

"Yes! How was your day?"

"I thought you were Mark," she stammered. "My son, Mark. I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"Tareq. It's so good to hear your voice."

"It is good to hear you, too, Juliette." His voice was just as she remembered, and when he said her name, she could taste coffee in Cairo, smell jasmine blossoms and feel the Nile beneath her.

And then the familiar silence that was often a third party in their relationship.

"I know you do not like the telephone," he continued with a wry tone, trying to deflect both his uncertainty and hers. *He remembers*, she thought, and she hoped

he could somehow hear the smile on her face. Nervous, he repeated himself. “It is good to hear you, Juliette. Very good.”

More silence, and then she blurted out, “When are you coming?” As soon as she asked, she felt her face redden at her eagerness to see him.

“Ah,” he began, the disappointment evident in his voice. “This is why I called.” In the days since he had sent her the letter, he explained, he had attempted to get a visa. But a visa was going to be impossible at the moment. Cairo was convulsing, Egypt was convulsing, and travel abroad was difficult.

“But you used to work for the UN,” Juliette said, confused. “Surely a former UN employee can get a visa to the US.” Her heart was pounding. In the minutes since she had read his letter, she had set her heart on his visit. In those mere minutes it had not occurred to her that a trip would not be possible. The severity of her disappointment startled her.

Tareq described life in Cairo. She would not recognize it, he was sure. Well, she would recognize it, but it was not the same. Only the pyramids were unchanged. There was violence. Reports of people disappearing. People felt fear. She thought she even heard fear in his voice.

“Tareq, what if I called one of Mark’s colleagues? I keep in touch with some of them. Are you sure no one at the UN can help?”

“No, no.” More silence. “Thank you, but no,” he replied. He was happy that she had offered help, but could not accept. Had his intention been only to pay his respects, he might have considered it. But the truth was that, while he did wish to pay his respects to a murdered colleague, he wanted to see that colleague’s widow even more.

“And I know someone at the State Department I could contact,” she continued. “Maybe that would help?” Juliette thought back to the men who had appeared on her doorstep that fateful morning. The man from the State Department had left his card and told her to contact him if he could ever be of assistance or if she “had any questions”. She had kept his card in the desk, but had had no intention of contacting him. Not yet, at least. She had many, many questions about how Mark had died – how he had really died – but she did not yet have the strength to ask them.

But she could ask him to help with Tareq’s visa. She had the will to do that.

“No, no,” Tareq repeated. “It is useless at present. The current political situation. Maybe later. Yes. Later. Things will improve.”

More silence. She wanted to tell him how much she wanted to see him. She wanted to beg him to find a way. She wanted to cry.

“What time is it there?” she asked.

“It is past one in the morning,” he replied.

“You’re up late.”

“Yes. I was watching television.”

“Because you couldn’t sleep?”

“Yes. And my reward? I was awake to see your email when I could still call you.”

“Thank you, Tareq. Thank you for your letter. Thank you for calling.”

“You are welcome,” he said in a way that conveyed a thought interrupted. “I am very sorry that I cannot travel to New York at this time.”

More silence. And then, in a statement that to Juliette seemed to come from nowhere, Tareq declared, “I will go to Berlin.” He announced this with an upbeat tone that made it sound as if it were the only sensible alternative to his plans to go to New York.

“Berlin?” she asked.

“Yes. Berlin. They have many Egyptian treasures there, and I have long wished to visit them. And I have a cousin there. He has come to Cairo for several months for sabbatical and has offered me his flat. I need a rest from Cairo, and I am able to travel to Berlin.”

“Berlin is wonderful, Tareq. Have you ever been?”

“No. You?”

“Yes, but before the Wall came down. I’ve never seen the city since it reunited. I loved it, though. And the coffee should be good there!”

Now they were talking like two friends of a lifetime who had never said goodbye. The ease with which they spoke was extraordinary, she thought.

“Come,” he stated matter-of-factly, again as if this were the only sensible suggestion anyone could make. As soon as the words left his mouth, he remembered the impulsive kiss he had given her back in Cairo, back in time.

“To Berlin?” she replied, not sure she’d heard him correctly.

“Yes.” Silence. “Why not?”

The truth is, she told herself, there’s no good reason why not. *Go*, she told herself, nudging her fear aside. “Oh, Tareq, I don’t know,” she hesitated. But what didn’t she know? She didn’t know what would happen, true, but that would be the case whether she saw him in New York or in Berlin.

“When?”

“Soon. In a few weeks? Can you leave your work?”

“Yes, I could get away. I’m just finishing up a deadline and then I could go.”

“Always a deadline,” he chided with a laugh. “With you, always a deadline.”

“Actually, I’m working a lot less these days. I just do contract work. I work from home mainly.”

“Much has changed, then, Juliette.”

“Yes, Tareq, much has changed.”

“But you still do not like the telephone,” he said knowingly. “I can tell. We will talk more about change in Berlin.”

“Sure. Yes. Good. Change in Berlin. I could write an article about that, or even a book,” she mused, paving the way for more silence between them. A pregnant pause, to be sure, but what it was giving birth to, neither of them knew. “Well, then. I guess goodbye? For now. We’ll sort out details by email?” She didn’t want to say goodbye, but she felt the conversation was supposed to end.

“Indeed. *Sort out details*. I like that. Yes.”

“Let me know where your cousin’s flat is, and I’ll try to book something nearby.”

“Kreuzberg,” he offered quickly.

“So goodbye, then. You’ve got my email address now, so that’s good.”

“Yes, this is good,” Tareq agreed. “This is very good.”

“Tareq,” she concluded their phone call, “I’m really glad you called.”

“I am as well,” he replied. They said their goodbyes, but were now thinking about their hellos.

She held the silent phone in her hand as though it were his hand. Her brain whirred. Berlin. Tareq. Change. Stupidity? Fate? Even love? What would her kids say? What would Mark say, if he could tell her? What had Tareq said? Much had changed.

Eventually she put her phone down on the counter by the microwave. She was standing in the same place as when she first picked up the phone. She looked up at the clock over the doorway into the dining room. It was well into the middle of the night in Egypt, and he would not be calling again. *Berlin*, she thought to herself. *Berlin*.

Over the next few weeks, Juliette and Tareq exchanged a handful of brief emails. Their messages were largely logistical, as though they were mere travel agents representing two people who happened to be planning trips to Berlin at the same time. He called once more to confirm a minor detail that he convinced himself was important. He was careful to note her flight details. He never said anything about meeting her at the airport, nor did she ask if he would. But they both knew that this was what he would do.

Tareq would be staying in Berlin for six weeks. Juliette decided on 10 days in mid-October. She wanted to arrive after he did so that he would have time to settle. Then, when she landed, neither of them would be new to Berlin and neither of them familiar.

She called Emily to tell her she'd be gone for a bit more than a week. Would Emily check on the house once while she was gone?

“And water the plants that you're always killing with artificial drought conditions?” Emily needed.

“Those too. Thanks for remembering!”

“Where're you going?” Emily asked.

“Berlin.”

“Germany?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Just a vacation,” Juliette downplayed the decision.

“What's his name?” Emily teased, doing her best impression of a nosy, irritating, impossibly inappropriate younger sibling, and never, ever expecting to hear her mother actually mention a name.

Juliette bit her lip and then said, “Tareq.”

“Tareq? How do you know a guy named Tareq?”

“He's from Cairo.”

“Cairo?”

“Yes. He used to work with Daddy.”

“You met him when you were there a few years ago?” Emily queried.

“Yes.”

“Uh-huh,” Emily continued. “And?”

“Don’t you remember? Your father was stuck in Gaza for most of the time I was in Cairo. Tareq was my tour guide. He showed me around.”

“And now you’re meeting him in Berlin?”

“Emily, I know it sounds odd. But it’s innocent. Believe me. He wrote me to offer his condolences and to say he was sorry he couldn’t attend the memorial. He wanted to come to New York to pay his respects, but he can’t get a visa.”

“And so you’re meeting him in Berlin. Now those dots all line up, don’t they?”

“He’s going to be in Berlin for a few weeks and asked if I might visit.”

“To pay his respects?”

“Well, I guess.”

“Mom, do you even know this guy?”

Emily’s question was the right one. Juliette had spent at most 10 days with Tareq in total. She’d had no contact with him in the intervening years until his letter. Did she really know this guy?

“I know him well enough, honey. And besides, I need a vacation. And you know me. I need an excuse for a vacation or I’ll never go. I haven’t been to Berlin since college, when the Wall was still up. I’ve always wanted to go back. Now I’ve got the prompt.”

“Wait,” Emily was wracking her brain, “is this the Tareq Dad sometimes talked about? His bodyguard, right?”

“He was a UN security officer,” Juliette explained, “not a bodyguard.” It was hard to imagine Tareq as a bodyguard. He was tall and strong, but slight in build. His physical presence was not intimidating, but his intelligence could be. His real strength was his ability to survey a scene, observe his environment and make snap judgments that favored safety.

“I think I remember now, Mom,” Emily continued. “He’s the one Dad always said he trusted with his life, right?” *There’s irony for you*, Juliette thought. *Perhaps if Tareq hadn’t retired, Mark would still be alive.*

“That’s the one, honey.”

“Well, have fun then,” Emily continued, “and don’t do anything I wouldn’t do under extreme circumstances.”

“Like dye my hair purple or pierce my nose?”

“Something like that.”

“I have the most wonderful daughter,” Juliette cooed over her younger child. “I love you so much.”

“I love you, too, Mom. Enough to try to resurrect your house plants.”

Reunion

Her flight landed on time.

Juliette could feel the anticipation congealing inside her. She didn't exactly feel sick, but she didn't feel at ease, either. She fiddled with the cartouche around her neck. She had debated with herself at length whether or not to wear it. But in the end, she found she could not leave it behind. For nearly two years, it had rested in her jewelry box, wrapped neatly in tissue paper. The tissue paper was now in the recycling bin.

She followed the herd through immigration and customs and emerged with her fellow travellers into the arrival hall. Her bleary eyes scanned the crowd for him, never doubting that he was there. It was just a matter of finding him. And then, rising above the cacophony of reunions and public address announcements, she heard her name. "Juliette," Tareq called, "I am here!"

She pivoted and caught a glimpse of him, his hand raised above his head. And then, amidst the bustling crowd, she lost him just as quickly. He reappeared a few steps closer. And then closer, maneuvering his way nimbly through the masses. And then he was upon her, mere inches away. It didn't feel quite like a dream. It was more surreal than any dream she could imagine.

"Tareq," she sighed audibly. "It's so good to see you."

She had spent much of the flight considering her options for their first greeting. Shake his hand? No, too formal. Kiss him on either cheek casually in the way friends do? This was probably the appropriate choice, she counseled herself. Abandon all decorum and throw her arms around his neck? Tempting in a frilly romance novel sort of way, but she could not work the scene out in her mind.

She placed her hands on his arms and kissed him first on one cheek and then on the other. To her relief, this seemed to be his expectation for their initial reunion as well.

"I trust you are well?" Tareq searched her face for clues.

She nodded. "A little tired," she sighed, searching his face with equal care.

"Let me take your bag," he offered, moving to her side and placing his hand protectively on her back. This was a gesture she remembered well and, in the

intervening years, had thought of in unguarded moments. “The express bus to the city is this way,” he pointed. “Shall I take you to your hotel?”

“That would be great,” she said with relief. “I’d love a shower.”

“You have had a long flight. Was it comfortable?”

“Comfortable enough,” she answered. “Not too much turbulence. I hate turbulence.”

“Yes, I know,” Tareq noted with a nod. “Mark told me once that you were not ... how did he put it? You were not a *confident* flyer.”

Tareq had mentioned Mark’s name. To her surprise, she felt relieved. A part of her wanted to hide Mark from this trip to Berlin, or maybe shield him from it. But Tareq’s casual recollection was exactly what was needed. She and Mark had been married. They both knew that. She was now a widow. They both knew that, too. Her late husband had been acknowledged. He was not present, but he was there, in whatever rightful place was his.

“Yes, I think you could say I’m not a confident flyer.”

“We have no wings,” he observed with scientific detachment, “perhaps it is wise to fly with caution.” His eyebrows peaked playfully. “Wait here a moment. I will buy our tickets.”

“I should go to an ATM. I don’t have any Euro with me.”

“Later,” he waved off her suggestion. He returned quickly and handed her a ticket. “Shall we?” he invited, returning his hand to her back as they walked to the bus.

Once outside the terminal, the bracing, late afternoon autumn air took her by surprise. She was really in Berlin. She had bought a ticket, boarded a plane, and flown to Berlin to see him. “It’s colder here than I thought,” she remarked. “I looked at the weather online, and I’ve got a coat in my bag, but I wasn’t thinking it would be so cold.”

“And you are tired,” he added. “But I have brought something.” From his jacket pocket he pulled out a small package. “I believe this will help.”

She opened the bundle to find a pashmina in a vibrant turquoise blue. “It’s beautiful,” she spoke softly as she ran her fingers over the silky fibers. “The blue, it’s so, so . . .”

“It had – I heard this phrase in a movie – *it had your name on it.*” His delight, both in knowing the colloquial phrase and in having chosen an appreciated gift, danced in his eyes. He opened the scarf fully and draped it over her shoulders. “There,” he proclaimed, “much better.”

He stood back to get a better view of her in the shawl and allowed a few memories of their time in Cairo to reawaken, if only a little. And then he noticed the

cartouche around her neck. “Your cartouche!” he exclaimed. “You are wearing it.” A smile fluttered across his face as he allowed more memories of Cairo to wriggle free from the mass of remembrance he stored safely away.

“Tareq, I’m so sorry. I didn’t bring you anything.”

He leaned toward her to correct her. “Yes, you did.”

The bus ride into the city was pleasantly short, but long enough for Juliette to take in the new Berlin. She was so absorbed by the scenes outside the bus that for a moment she forgot that Tareq was sitting next to her. But then his arm appeared over her shoulder, pointing out Berlin’s landmark tower, the Fernsehturm. “We’re almost there,” he said, leaning his shoulder lightly into hers.

By the time the bus stopped, the sun was nearing the horizon, and some city lights were flickering on. They hailed a taxi for the rest of the distance to her hotel. As they neared their destination, they passed Checkpoint Charlie. “We can go there tomorrow,” Tareq suggested. “I have done some sightseeing in Berlin, but I did not go there yet.”

“That would be great,” she replied. “I went through Checkpoint Charlie when I was here in college. I was only 20. It was one of the most terrifying things I had done up to that point in my life. I’ll never forget the East German guards. They were so imposing.”

“Checkpoints,” Tareq muttered bitterly, shoving disparate emotions into a drawer in his mind and slamming it shut. Checkpoints were something he knew well. They had been a fixture of his work, and now they seemed to be a fixture of life. And in Tareq’s experience, all checkpoints were fundamentally the same: a man, who was usually only a boy, tried to fill his uniform with some authority that was not his, and passed judgment on people he did not comprehend.

Juliette heard the anger in Tareq’s voice and did not press him for his unspoken thoughts. She was sure he was remembering how he and Mark had once watched a man die at a checkpoint, trying to get to a hospital on the other side. The guard had watched the man die, too, and had done nothing, despite Mark’s and Tareq’s repeated attempts to assist the man. Mark had told Juliette this story many times.

“You were 20 when you crossed Checkpoint Charlie,” he reiterated, taking her hand briefly and releasing it as quickly. “The guard was probably also 20. Maybe 19.” That thought had never occurred to Juliette. She had been so nervous at the time, it had not crossed her mind that the guard who took her passport was also young, perhaps also nervous. “Checkpoints are run by adolescents,” Tareq pronounced definitively. “They should not be, but they are.”

The taxi pulled up in front of the hotel, and Tareq got out quickly. He opened the car door for her, retrieved her bag from the trunk and escorted her into the hotel lobby. The lobby was sleek and modern, with plenty of leather, granite and stainless steel. The light fixtures looked like abstract birds glowing from the ceiling, and the windows were, in Tareq’s opinion, relentlessly vertical and so accurately plumb as to raise suspicion.

He did not find the lobby comfortable, but he did his best to relax while Juliette checked in. He took a seat in a curved, cream-colored chair, crossed his ankles and then quickly uncrossed them again. He searched his pockets for cigarettes and was just about to light up when a hotel employee looked at him severely and pointed to a prominent “No Smoking” sign next to the front desk. He returned the package to his pocket somewhat sheepishly and shifted his weight within the chair.

“All done,” she told him as she walked over from the front desk. “I can go to my room.”

“And then would you care for dinner? Or would you prefer to rest?”

Food had not occurred to her, but now she realized that she was hungry. It was past lunchtime in New York, and she knew that if she didn’t eat then, she’d wake up later and regret it.

“Dinner would be nice. But can I change first? Are you in a rush?”

“I am on holiday, Juliette. I do not rush.”

He walked her to the elevator and extended his arm against the door to keep it open while she pulled her bag inside. He nodded as the door closed between them and then winced at the memory of the elevator door in Cairo. He returned to the questionable chair and glanced around the lobby, looking at the guests coming and going, the art on the walls, the pattern of the floor tiles. He also noted the locations of all the exits, considered the thickness of the glass in the floor-to-ceiling windows, and scanned for a fire extinguisher. He had spent many years as a security officer. He surveyed a room in the same manner he drew breath; he couldn’t forget those skills any more than he could forget himself.

In her room, Juliette showered, changed clothes quickly and then grabbed her coat. Pausing briefly at the mirror by the door, she adjusted the pashmina around her neck. After Cairo, she had worked hard to forget that shade of blue, to forget everything about Tareq. But now the blue was wrapped around her, keeping her warm.

At some point, Tareq got up and stood by the elevator to wait for her. The doors opened and closed several times, taking in some passengers and letting others out. When the doors opened and she emerged, they were both startled to be standing so close together again. He put his arm akimbo, and she threaded her own through his, tucking his elbow close. They entered Berlin’s twilight streets in search of food and, they both knew, in search of each other. For this journey, they each had a reliable compass, but neither had a map.

“Here we go,” she whispered to herself, not realizing her words were audible.

“Here we go,” he agreed.

They didn’t have to walk far to find a place to eat. The district of Kreuzberg, long a destination for immigrants, burgeoned with cafés, restaurants, bars and more.

“We could try that one,” Juliette pointed across the street.

“No, we cannot,” he replied, biting his lip to limit the grin that was forming.

“Why not?”

“That café is for men only. Turkish,” he explained with a chuckle, “and this time, I cannot invite you in.” They both laughed, remembering how Juliette had entered Tareq’s men-only café in Cairo, unaware she was crossing any boundaries. “But this will do,” he stopped in front of a small establishment. “My cousin likes this one very much.”

The restaurant bustled, and they found a table for two wedged among couples and families speaking various languages. They ordered absently, both nervous to be dining together. “I can’t believe I’m here,” Juliette said both to herself and to Tareq. This was not an attempt at idle conversation; a part of Juliette truly could not believe she was in Berlin and that Tareq was sitting across the table from her. And she was only beginning to let herself comprehend that nothing stood between them now – they could be anything they wished to be to each other.

Their conversation rambled over many topics as dishes and coffee cups came and went: his visa application, her children, his café (the chess board was still where she would remember it), and her work. But all the while, they were both asking the same question inside: where do we go from here?

“Let us walk,” he suggested after paying the bill. “The lights will be on now.”

Juliette had forgotten. “The lights! Of course! Where should we go first?”

“To Potsdamerplatz. 15 minutes on foot. Or are you too tired?”

“No, not at all,” she was certain. She had been looking forward to Berlin’s annual Festival of Lights and was eager to see the monuments and other buildings brought to life with projections of images and patterns. “Let’s go.”

They walked to Potsdamerplatz, passing streets and landmarks mapped out somewhere in Juliette’s memory. But this time there were no checkpoints, no guards, nothing to stand in her way. Just Tareq, with his hand at her back and a blue pashmina around her neck.

The Dead

With the time change, Juliette slept fitfully, woke up tired, and half-stumbled to breakfast. She grabbed an English language newspaper and took the table nearest the door to keep an eye out for him. She was just finishing a cup of coffee when she saw him enter the lobby. She waved to him, and he joined her at the table.

“Good morning,” he greeted her cheerfully, pulling his seat up as close to the table as he could. “You are well?”

“I’m fine, just jet lag! Would you mind if we put off Checkpoint Charlie until tomorrow? I want to be more awake for that.”

“Of course. Maybe the Charlottenburg Palace this morning? I am told the gardens are lovely, even at this time of year. And I have this,” he pointed to a guidebook, “to help us after that.”

Juliette liked the idea of the gardens, and a palace would not, she was hopeful, prove too taxing on her foggy brain. “Your job today,” she informed him, “is to keep me going until 8 pm. If I keep walking, get some fresh air, I’ll get over the jet lag.”

He nodded in obedience. “We will walk. But first we will take a train. The palace is too far to walk.”

On the train, they perused the guidebook and mapped out a plan for the day. Once at the palace, they entered through a grand main gate beneath the watchful eyes of two soldier-sculptures, their shields and knives drawn. A gravel courtyard spread before them, with the wide, low-slung main building in the distance. The initial approach was plain and, in Juliette’s opinion, not particularly attractive. The only green in this view was the dome’s copper cladding with its verdigris that testified to its age and grandeur, suggesting possible splendor within.

They climbed the front steps and passed through the towering main doors into a different world entirely. Tareq pointed simultaneously left and right to ask her which way to go. They peeked briefly at the palace’s grand banquet room, and then Juliette guided them upstairs to the Gallery.

The view in this room was dizzying. The parquet floor, in different depths of honeyed tones, created moving patterns of chevrons and diamonds that evoked an Escher design. The ceiling was a baroque canopy with golden twists and curls; its

medallions competed with the heavens themselves for richness and beauty. Each side of the long, narrow room boasted floor-to-ceiling windows that were so large that Juliette mistook them at first for French doors. Between each pair of windows hung an enormous, gold-encrusted mirror that supported two golden candelabras. The candelabras' reflections bounced infinitely from mirror to mirror across the room; from any vantage point, the hall looked like a repository for endless sources of light.

"It's stunning, but a bit disorienting," Juliette said as she walked over to Tareq and rested her hand briefly on his arm. "I wonder how long this room is."

"Over 40 meters," Tareq replied. He walked a few steps on and then stopped to inspect a detail. In that moment, Juliette could see him front and back at the same time, his face in a mirror and his back to her, his silhouette repeating like the candelabras, becoming smaller and more distant. He turned slowly on his heel as he surveyed the room, and as he did, she observed him in the round. When his face arrived at hers, his expression was calm, and he gladly assumed his place in her field of vision.

After exploring the rest of the building, they strolled the length of the formal garden slowly, remarking casually on the color of the leaves turning crimson and amber in the early autumn weather. They followed the curved path around the pond and, reentering the formal garden, took in the size and scale of the palace itself. "What is on top?" Tareq asked, pointing to a statue on the dome. Juliette consulted the book. "Fortuna," she read. "The goddess of happiness."

With Fortuna keeping watch from a distance, they wandered further and found themselves in a wooded area that was as fresh and open as the formal garden was studied and well-rehearsed. Birds flew from tree to tree, but Juliette's flight was catching up with her. "How are you?" he asked.

"Tired," she admitted. "Permission to sit for a while?"

"If you promise not to tell me that I failed in my duty," he replied with a grin.

"I promise."

They sat on a bench situated beneath an ancient tree. The jet lag was unbeatable, and Juliette felt her body become heavier and heavier. Without thinking, she leaned her head on his shoulder and closed her eyes. A few minutes passed, and she did not move. "Juliette," Tareq whispered, looking around at her face. She did not answer. "Juliette?" She was fast asleep, and Tareq let himself remember how he had longed for her head on his shoulder in Cairo. Now it was there, her hair tumbling over him.

A gentle rain began to fall, and Tareq fumbled for his umbrella. He opened it with as little movement as possible and held it over both of them. As the rain strengthened, the bench itself became wet and inhospitable. "Juliette," he nudged her now, "time to wake up."

She raised her head groggily, looked up and saw the underside of an umbrella. Then she saw his hand, his arm, his face. “How long was I asleep?”

“I do not know.” He stood up from the bench and offered her his arm. The transparency in his eyes arrested her. “I do not know,” he repeated.

Their tour of the palace complete, they departed the grounds in the direction of lunch. Finding shelter under the glass atrium of a café, they settled into wicker chairs that clung to the idea of summer. A large indoor tree spread its branches above them, and the rain fell softly on the glass panes as they sipped ginger lemonade – delicious but hardly seasonal, Juliette remarked – and regrouped for the afternoon.

They had chosen this café because it was near a museum dedicated to the works of Käthe Kollwitz. Tareq had never heard of the artist, but when Juliette saw the reference in the guidebook on the train that morning, she made it a destination. They walked through the café’s courtyard garden to the adjacent museum and were immediately met by the artist’s dark vision, shadowed by war and hunger. The morning’s lark of green and gold quickly turned somber.

“What are the most important things to see?” Tareq asked, thinking that the shortest route through the museum might be the safest for them both. Judging by what was on display on the first floor, he sensed that this museum would not be easy for him. Juliette took an English language floor plan from a rack near the entrance. “Here. This is what we shouldn’t miss.” She pointed to a museum highlights list for navigation.

Even taking the quick tour, the catalogue of pain and injury in this one building was overwhelming. Timeless faces of suffering, war, hunger and death surrounded them as they climbed the museum’s central staircase. A woman and her two children, panicked with hunger, yearned for bread. A person shrieking *Nie Wieder Krieg – No More War* – universalized the pacifist cry with features that defied race and gender. And everywhere the children. The baby being held by its mother over a corpse, the girl on death’s lap, the young soldiers heading toward sacrifice.

“Her own son died in World War I,” Tareq paraphrased from the leaflet he had picked up. “And her grandson died in World War II.” Tareq was not a parent, but he was sure that Kollwitz captured the agony of all those who had lost children. He felt drawn to Kollwitz now. She had seen the worst humanity could inflict on itself.

After staring dumbfounded at a larger than life sculpture of the artist herself, her globe-like eyes looming out of her sadness, they had both had their fill. “Coffee?” Tareq suggested. Juliette nodded.

When they stepped outside the museum, bluer skies awaited and Berlin’s tree-lined streets invited them to contemplate life beyond the horrors chronicled in the museum. “I read,” Juliette reported, trying to lighten the mood, “that when the Wall was up, the government planted hundreds of thousands of trees to make the city more livable.”

“They remind me,” Tareq thought out loud, “of one of my favorite paths in Cairo.”

“I remember,” Juliette nodded. “We walked there.”

“We did,” he recalled.

Juliette’s legs were now leaden beneath her, and she leaned on Tareq’s arm. “Tired?” he asked. She nodded, and he supported her as they looked for a place for a quiet cup of coffee. “I did not know Kollwitz,” Tareq interrupted his own thoughts. “But I will never forget her now.”

“I first saw her woodblocks decades ago,” Juliette told him, “with Mark.”

“Did you ever write the article on Egyptian street children?” Tareq inquired. Kollwitz’s depictions of frightened, almost hollow children reminded him of tragedy everywhere, including his native country.

“No, I didn’t,” Juliette flattened the question. She remembered telling Tareq she would write something on that topic, but after she returned to New York, she put everything in Egypt and about Egypt behind her.

“Here?” he pointed at a café with a low door topped with a thick wooden lintel. She walked through the door, but he had to duck to clear his head. He pulled out her chair for her and ordered two coffees. The interior was dark, and Juliette rested her head against a standing beam by their table. She drank her coffee this way, head tilted, and eyes closed. “Shall we?” he beckoned her from near sleep after her cup was empty. “The concert at the church will begin soon.” They had put the concert on the list that morning, she recalled, when she was still fresh.

“You’re not going to let up, are you?” she grumbled good-naturedly.

“You made me promise,” he replied. He stood up to pull back her chair and helped her with her coat, straightening the lapels solicitously. “You are tired. We must keep you warm.”

“Hopefully I’ll last through the concert.”

“The organ will be loud,” he chuckled. “That will help.”

He took her arm, and they headed down the street toward the sky-scraping Memorial Church. They stopped to take in the bombed out late 19th century original, standing defiantly next to its successor, a jutting, modernist cylinder of glass brick. The new church, which opened mere months after the Berlin Wall was built, was to many Berliners a symbol of peace and a place of meditation. To Tareq, though, it didn’t look much like a Christian church or a particular expression of any faith at all.

But the interior changed his mind. Rows upon rows of cobalt blue glass brick soared to the heavens and soothed the mind. The streambed-like floor, with its many colored, circular inlays, flowed irregularly within the stark octagonal structure and pushed the soul in – into the building, and into itself.

Juliette brushed her hand against Tareq's. "I don't know much about the Bible," she said, "but I know there's a verse about the peace of God surpassing all understanding. I think this is what they meant." They stood in each other's presence, breathing in the stillness. And then the pipes of the organ began to fill the air.

"Wow," Juliette exclaimed in a half-voice as the instrument's vibrations shook the sanctuary.

"A Bach prelude," Tareq noted with approval. "Very beautiful. I like it here." The music was a signal that it was time to sit, so they picked up the printed program and found places in the seats arranged in a semicircle around the altar which was set up for a small orchestra.

The organ music concluded, and an angular man with spectacles appeared before the crowd of a few dozen listeners. He explained first in German and then in English that the evening concert would feature Bach's *Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten*, a secular cantata that Bach may have written for his own wedding to Anna Magdalena. If so, Anna Magdalena herself might have been the soloist. The possibility clearly delighted the conductor.

The text was not biblical, he noted with apology, perhaps thinking that the audience was expecting a more stereotypical Bach that evening. The lyrics were a poetic reflection on love; the words were printed on the sheets provided. He introduced the visiting soloist, who appeared to be the reason for the choice of the cantata. He thanked the group of instrumentalists for being there on short notice, lifted his baton, and out poured music, as blue as the glass bricks and as flowing as the church's floor.

The soloist sang:

Dissipate, you troublesome shadows,
Frost and winds, go to your rest!
Flora's pleasures
The heart will
Never exchange as joyful delight,
Since she brings flowers with her.

The world becomes new again,
On the mountains and in the valleys
The loveliness clings with doubled beauty,
The day is free from any chill.

Phoebus hastes with rapid horses
Through the newly-born world,
Indeed, since it pleases him,
He himself will become a lover.
Therefore Love himself seeks his pleasure,
When crimson laughs in the fields,
When Flora's magnificence glories,
And when in his kingdom,

Just like the beautiful blossoms,
Hearts make a fiery triumph as well.

When the springtime breezes caress
And waft through colorful meadows,
Love will often slip abroad
To seek after his treasure,
Which, it is believed, is this:
That one heart kisses another.

And this is happiness,
That through highly favorable fortune
Two souls achieve such a treasure,
Around which much worth and blessing shines.

To be accustomed, in love,
To cuddle in playful tenderness
Is better than Flora's fading delights.
Here the waves swell,
Here on lip and breast
The triumphal palms smile and wave.

So may the bond of chaste love,
Committed pair,
Be free from the inconstancy of change!
May no sudden fall
Or thunder crack
Disturb your amorous desires!

May you behold in contentment
A thousand bright happy days,
So that soon in the coming time
Your love may bear fruit!

Following the cantata, the organ music resumed, giving Juliette and Tareq welcome time to distance themselves from the cantata's lyrics. Neither had expected the day to take such a decidedly romantic turn, and they both avoided eye contact, each wondering what the other was thinking.

The concert's final work was a rapidly-paced toccata. Tareq tapped the complicated rhythms on his knees, each hand in a different pattern. Juliette watched his fingers fly; it helped her stay awake. The toccata's final strains were met with resounding applause from the appreciative audience. One man called out for an encore, but none came.

Tareq and Juliette left the church with the others and made their way into a now dark Berlin. As they left, they chatted casually about the organ music, flying over any mention of the cantata. But Juliette noticed that Tareq folded the concert program and put it in his pocket. He would take those words with him.

The concert-goers flowed onto a plaza near the church toward a massive, sculpted, spherical fountain. In the dark, they could hear the fountain more clearly than they could see it. But suddenly the metal orb appeared out of the night; the Festival of Lights had begun for the evening. The illumination that shone on the fountain reflected on their faces as well, and they smiled at each other in various shades of blue.

By this time, Juliette could scarcely keep her eyes open. “Let’s go back, Tareq,” she yawned. “I’m exhausted.”

“I promised to keep you awake until 8 o’clock,” he chided with a grin. “I will keep you awake.”

“Okay,” she gave in. “But only if you can find Chinese food.” She thought that was a safe demand; he’d have to concede defeat and take her back to her hotel.

“Chinese food in Berlin?” Tareq questioned.

“Why not. Turkish was good last night, right?” He could not disagree.

He searched for a restaurant on his phone. “You are in luck,” he told her.

“How far?” she groaned.

“Not far.” Within a few minutes they arrived at a Chinese restaurant with the words *Good Friends* written above the door in English. “Plenty of seats,” she said looking through the window, “give it try?” Tareq opened the door for her, and they chose a table in the farthest corner. They ordered, and the waiter brought them tea in delicate porcelain cups. “This will help!” Juliette exclaimed. “And I’ll take your cup, too, just to be safe.” He pushed his cup close to hers; the rims touched. But then he assumed a formal posture that attracted Juliette’s full attention and made her uncomfortable for the first time that day.

“I must apologize, Juliette,” he began.

Oh no, she thought.

“I have yet to offer you my condolences. I was very sorry to hear of Mark’s death. He was a good man.”

Juliette was not at all prepared for this conversation. The jet lag alone had her off-kilter, and even wide-awake, she did not want to talk to Tareq about Mark. But it was unavoidable. “Yes,” she nodded. “He was a good man. He was,” her voice searched for more adjectives, adjectives that would fit both Mark and this particular conversation. “Yes,” she said again, beckoning words that would not respond to her command. “He was...”

“Your husband,” Tareq completed her sentence.

Tareq’s simple statement of the noun – the thing he was, the person he was, her

husband – arranged all the adjectives about Mark at once, like a magnet arranges iron filings.

“My husband,” she echoed, letting out the breath she’d been holding in all the while.

Finally she summoned her courage. “Tareq, what really happened to Mark? Do you know?”

He turned his face away from her and regretted it instantly. But he could not look at her. He did not want her to see the horror he felt. He took his time to recover and then looked at her directly. “Yes, Juliette, I know.” He stopped at that, implicitly asking her if she really wanted to hear the whole story. He read the uncertainty in her eyes and reduced the reality to something more palatable than it was. “He died caring for people, and he died with the people he cared for.”

“But who killed him? Who killed *them*?”

“I do not know Juliette. No one knows for certain.” This was true. If pressed, Tareq could have produced specific suspects and likely scenarios, but this would have meant little to Juliette. “Fire,” he waved one hand in the air in a mocking gesture. “Friendly fire,” more mocking hands. “It is all fire.”

He shook his head in disgust at the chaos he knew so well and then looked at her with a compassion that came from having observed much human suffering. She remembered that look, and now it was here again, a gift right before her eyes. His compassion made her feel safe.

“Tareq, if you hadn’t retired...” her voice trailed off.

“I’d be dead, too,” he stated flatly.

“Fate,” she winced.

“Fate,” he replied, fidgeting with the chopsticks on the table.

“I’m sorry I didn’t contact you to tell you, Tareq. I just didn’t know how.”

He shook his head at her. “Juliette,” he started, and then weighed his next words carefully. “I believe I knew he was dead before you did.”

Checkpoints

The next morning, Tareq was waiting in the hotel lobby by the time Juliette came down for breakfast. He held a newspaper in his hand, but kept his eye on the elevator. When he saw her, he rose quickly to greet her. His heart raced, and his legs nearly followed suit. But his head took control of his limbs, and he walked calmly to greet her. “Good morning,” he said, sunshine in his voice.

“Good morning,” she replied. They brushed each other’s faces with a kiss. “Have you been here long?”

“No, no,” he shook his head.

“Breakfast?” she offered. “We can sit here.” She turned her head in the direction of the informal dining room off the lobby. They took a table nestled between two large potted palms. “Have you eaten?”

“Yes,” he replied. “But take your time. The Checkpoint Charlie museum opens only at 9. I will take a coffee.” He placed the folded newspaper on the table and opened his face to her with anticipation, but without expectation.

Juliette glanced at her watch. It was only 7:30 am, and the museum was mere minutes from the hotel. All of a sudden, 90 minutes seemed like a long time to sit with Tareq at a table. 90 minutes over dinner seemed casual and easy. But that same length of time over breakfast felt intimate in way that was also intimidating. Dinner was for people getting to know one another. A breakfast like this was for couples with settled routines.

She reached for the guidebook in her purse. “I was reading this,” she passed him the book and hoped her nervousness was not evident. “Want to look?”

He took the book from her and flipped through the pages. He read some sections to himself and others aloud to them both. A waiter came and went with coffee, and Juliette shared some bread from her plate with Tareq. “Bread in Europe is better than in the U.S.,” she opined. “But maybe not as good as in Egypt?” Tareq tilted his head rakishly to agree.

“So,” he concluded, putting his coffee cup down on the table, “Checkpoint Charlie, the Topography of Terror, and then to Potsdamerplatz? This time by day.”

“And I’d like to see the Resistance Memorial and the Memorial to the Berlin Airlift,” Juliette added. “I think they’re on the way. And there’s an area near here called Bergmannkiez,” she sounded out the word haltingly.

“It is very close, but in the other direction,” he spoke with authority.

“You know it?”

“Yes, it is near my cousin’s flat.” He stopped full. Would he invite Juliette to his cousin’s flat? “He emailed me last night,” Tareq changed his own subject. “He reminds us not to neglect a walk along the Maybachufer.” In truth, Tareq’s cousin had reminded *Tareq* to enjoy a stroll on the Maybachufer. No one in Tareq’s family knew that Juliette was in Berlin.

“Sounds good.” Juliette interrupted Tareq’s thoughts of his family, his home in Cairo and the walls that asserted themselves as if they were a part of the natural universe. But if Berlin proved anything to Tareq, it was that walls were meant to come down.

Juliette glanced at her watch. “Almost 9!” she exclaimed. Where had the time gone? “I’ve got everything with me. Should we go?”

As he always did, Tareq rose from the table first and pulled out her chair for her. By now she expected this gesture and waited for his assistance. She did not need his help, but she understood that it was important to him to provide it. But for Juliette, to let him fulfill his sense of duty required a significant shift in her own mind. She was not used to help, and wasn’t always sure she wanted it. But Tareq was chivalrous in an old-fashioned, black-and-white-movie sort of way. And, she let herself remember, he had once put his suit jacket on the stone of a pyramid to provide a place for her to sit.

“The weather is beautiful today,” Tareq granted his approval as they left the hotel. And it was: the sun shone as if it were late summer, and the clouds floated as though they had no care in the world.

By now, Berlin was awake and humming with activity. “Berlin is so vibrant,” Juliette remarked. “I wonder what it’s like to live here.”

“My cousin says it is very interesting. Many people from many places. My cousin says that I may have worked for the United Nations, but that he lives in the nations united!”

“So many stories,” Juliette’s voice wandered.

He squeezed her shoulder knowingly. “I do not think you have retired as much as you say you have.”

His comment hit Juliette like a bolt of lightning. *This*, she thought to herself, *is the first real idea I’ve had for a magazine story since Mark died*. She could feel her creativity fluttering its eyelids after a long hibernation. She took a notebook from her purse and scribbled down a few lines. As she put the book back in her bag, she

caught sight of the historic Checkpoint. “Look!” she exclaimed, taking Tareq’s arm. “Checkpoint Charlie! Or at least what’s left of it!”

The guardhouse, a lonely remnant of times past, stood in the road with sandbags in front of it. “I think I have a picture of myself standing around here,” Juliette pointed in the general vicinity of the structure.

“I will take another now,” Tareq offered, pulling his camera from his pocket. “Go, stand there.” Juliette walked across the street, and Tareq snapped a photo. A stranger approached Tareq and said something in German. Tareq replied in German and walked over to Juliette. “He will take a photo of us,” Tareq explained as he put his hand against her back. The stranger snapped the photo and walked toward them to return the camera. Tareq thanked him and checked that the photo had been taken properly.

“You speak German?” Juliette asked.

“A little,” he replied. But Juliette thought that Tareq’s *little* was probably more than her own *little*.

“I want to walk across,” Juliette told Tareq. “Over that street, Zimmerstrasse. That’s where the Wall was.” They waited perfunctorily at the intersection until they could cross safely and then, in fewer than 15 seconds, were inside the former East Berlin. They turned around to look at the Checkpoint again, this time from the other side. “It’s hard to believe that something that was so difficult in the past is now so easy,” Juliette shook her head in disbelief. “It’s been years now since reunification, but to cross the street here, it’s still a big thing.”

Tareq was now engrossed in the guidebook’s description of life on Zimmerstrasse when the Wall was up. Near the intersection where they stood, the Wall had blocked the view from one side of the street to the other. Further down, the buildings had been so close together that people living on the western side of the street could reach out of their windows to shake hands with those in the east. And because the Wall was built just inside the border, West Berliners walking here were actually in East Berlin. This had made the street a perfect place for anyone evading the law, as no one – including the police – could drive down the street. It was in West Berlin as defined by the Wall, but was beyond West Berlin’s laws.

This street spoke powerfully to Tareq. Between worlds, he reflected silently, there is always a path. It is often traveled only by rule-breakers, but there is always a way between two worlds for those who seek it.

“Hey,” Juliette waved her hand in front of his face. “Back to the museum?”

They turned back toward the Checkpoint Charlie museum. Juliette remembered the collection of escape vehicles and inventions, some elaborate, like the hot air balloon and submarine on view. But it was the more mundane escapes that struck Juliette, then and now. The ladder, the suitcase, the huge stereo speakers that no contemporary teenager would even recognize as audio equipment. And the escapes that seemed incongruently like play: the zip line, the tight rope. And the photos of the people who, in the early days of the Wall at least, climbed out of windows,

jumped barricades and ran – just ran – maybe according to plan, or maybe only on impulse.

Juliette and Tareq made their way through the displays, alternately amazed by the ingenuity of some of the escapes and disturbed by the pain of the thwarted attempts to reach freedom. The images made for startling contrasts: the radiant face of a woman whose escape succeeded, and the lifeless body of a teenager, shot on the border and left to bleed to death tangled in barbed wire. A label noted that a fast food restaurant now stood on the spot where this young man had lost his life.

At the end of the exhibition, they lingered at one of Checkpoint Charlie's most enduring symbols: a sign reading *You Are Now Leaving the American Sector* written in four languages. The sign was deceptively humble, even homemade looking. "I definitely remember this sign," Juliette told Tareq. "I don't know if it's this exact one, but I remember going past these words and wondering what would happen next."

"Let me take your picture," he told her, positioning her at the edge of the sign. He clicked the photo and turned the camera around so she could see the image for herself.

"Let me take yours," she reciprocated.

"But I was never there," Tareq protested.

"You are now," she insisted.

Tareq complied. "But in truth," he joked, reaching out in her direction, "I think I am now *entering* the American sector." She snapped the photo with his hand outstretched toward her. He walked behind her and peeked over her shoulder at the camera's screen. "I like it," he said, running his hand lightly along her arm. "You must send me a copy."

They proceeded from one of the most significant icons of the Cold War to images of how that war had ended. The photos and news clips looked dated; the Wall had come down a long time ago. "I remember seeing all of this," Juliette contemplated aloud, "and thinking that I would never forget any of it."

"But we do forget," he assessed their collective memories. "We forget even what is important."

She nodded in assent, but said nothing. There was plenty to forget, and plenty more to remember. This is why she had come to Berlin. She wanted to put the past in its place, both by forgetting and by remembering.

"Come," he said, taking her hand briefly to pull her from her thoughts. "We have much to see today."

They left the museum and headed toward the aptly named Topography of Terror. Walking along the bombed-out shells of former prison cells, they read the stories

of those who were imprisoned there during the war. The exhibition spared no gruesome detail. Or if it did, it was perhaps for the best.

“Oh look,” Juliette called to Tareq, taking his hand briefly. “Here’s a photo of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.”

“Who?”

“A German theologian and member of the resistance. It says he was imprisoned here in 1944 and ’45. I remember my grandfather talking about him. He heard him speak once in New York, before the war. When I was a little girl, I remember my grandfather reading a collection of letters Bonhoeffer wrote from prison. It must have been this one.”

“And what became of him?”

“He was executed right before the end of the war.”

Juliette looked up and down the long gallery of remembrance. This was not her particular history, nor was it Tareq’s. But it was the history of the world: past, present and probably future. The ghosts were very much alive among the ruins, whispering their stories, issuing their warnings, and making their judgments.

“Tareq, I think I’m done.”

He nodded, sighed heavily and put his hand at her back. “Coffee?” he asked. “Lunch?”

“Lunch.”

They walked on to Potsdamerplatz, which the guidebook described as a Cold War no man’s land now transformed into an oasis of food and drink. They happened upon a casual restaurant that seemed as good as any in terms of the menu and offered far more in terms of sight and sound. The glass façade squared off with three white walls decorated with curved neon lights. The tubes, in varying hues, clung to the walls in random patterns, almost dancing to the echoes of Mike Oldfield’s Tubular Bells that pulsed from small speakers dotted on the walls, creating a stereo effect.

“Sit here,” Tareq directed, taking them to a particular table. “The sound will blend best here.”

Juliette did not entirely understand what he was talking about, but she had no reason to contradict him. “Sure,” she said as he pulled out her chair for her. “Probably don’t have a café like this in Cairo, do they? Or did I just miss it?” She heard her own sarcasm and scanned his face to make sure he had not mistaken her tone as criticism.

“No. No such café in Cairo,” he confirmed, his eyes widening at the thought.

“You’d find this sort of place in New York,” she continued. “In the city, I mean. Not in the part of New York where I live now.”

“Do you miss it, the city?” Tareq had no idea how complicated his question was.

“Yes,” she responded immediately. “But also no.” She was unsure how much more to say, how much to reveal to Tareq that he was, at the root of it, the reason she had moved out of the city. “I moved for the right reasons, and it’s been good.”

“Is it lonely?”

“It can be. I have neighbors, but it’s not like being in a building in the city with lots of people around. And I’ve been snowed in a few times, and that made me nervous.”

“I am sorry,” Tareq consoled.

“It’s okay,” she went on. “It’s affordable in a way the city is not. And that gives me flexibility. If I were still working and living in the city, I could never have come here right now.”

“Then I am glad you moved.” He paused to take in a particular swell in the music. “And I am glad you came to Berlin.”

“So am I,” Juliette affirmed. “It’s really good to see you again, Tareq.”

“It is wonderful to see you, Juliette.” And he meant it: it was full of wonder to be with her once more. After they had parted in Cairo, he had never dared to believe he would see her again, and he had worked hard to not wonder about what might have been.

Her thoughts preoccupied her in tandem with his. *Could it really be this easy? Could they fall into step with one another this readily, this effortlessly?* She could see cracks forming in the edifice of her second guesses. The relationship she and Tareq had begun in Cairo was not just a fantasy, not merely a mid-life spasm or a desire for validation. She and Tareq genuinely got along. They were genuinely happy in each other’s presence.

By the time they finished lunch, they were both ready to leave the restaurant. “This was interesting,” Juliette remarked. “But I wouldn’t want to work here.”

“No,” Tareq agreed, putting his hands to his ears. “It becomes too much.”

“Where to?” she asked.

“Maybachufer. The Turkish Market. My cousin will ask if I have gone there.”

They took the U-Bahn and then walked the short distance to the Market, crossing a picturesque bridge with a view up and down the canal. The narrow waterway’s tree-lined banks cradled the small boats that basked in the afternoon sun. On the other side of the river, they entered the Turkish Market, a lively expression of

Mediterranean culture in the heart of Berlin. The market resonated with the chatter of immigrants from around the Islamic world, and Juliette recognized a few Arabic words. Dried fruits and nuts abounded, along with fresh fruits and vegetables in a kaleidoscopic display of color. The aroma of cooked food perfumed the air.

“I wish I were hungry,” she said, stopping to breathe in the market’s lush aroma.

“The merchants, they wish so too!” he replied. “Later. My cousin told me where to go. But for now, coffee.” He could see the jet lag in her stooped shoulders. “It is still my job to keep you awake.”

They found a café with a view of the water and ordered coffee. “How long has your cousin lived in Berlin?” Juliette inquired.

“Many years now.”

“What brought him here?”

“University. He earned his doctorate in Germany and then took a position here in Berlin.”

“What does he teach?”

“Music.”

“An instrument?”

“No. History. The history of music.”

“Sounds interesting. I’d like to meet him.”

Their coffees arrived. Tareq breathed in its scent. “This,” he put the record straight, “is coffee. What we drink at the hotel in the morning is not really coffee.” He took a sip and exhaled with delight. “He would like you,” Tareq continued, acknowledging her last statement.

“Maybe next time.” She paused as a question formed in her mind that she was not sure she should ask. But having already taken so many risks, she felt emboldened. “Tareq, does any one in your family know that I’m here?”

He had hoped she would not ask, but he would be forthright. “No,” he replied. “They do not.” He looked at her directly and awaited her response.

“I didn’t tell anyone I was meeting you here, either,” she replied, both because it was true and because she wanted to put him at ease with his own secrecy. “Well, I didn’t tell Mark. Emily wheedled it out of me.”

“Wheedled?” he asked, his eyes narrowing with the question.

“You know, like this.” She reached across the table, placed her fingertips on his chest and pretended to bore into him. “She made me tell her. She’s very good at

this,” Juliette sighed in defeat, once again, at the persuasiveness of her younger child. “You’ll find out when you meet her.”

“I would like to meet her. And Mark, too.”

“Are you going to try for a visa again?” She asked as casually as she could.

“I do not know that the result would be different.”

“Tareq, let me contact the person I know at the State Department. It’s worth a try, right?”

Tareq knew his answer but was afraid to give it. But now that he was with her again, he couldn’t bear the thought of letting go. “Yes,” he nodded his head. “Thank you.”

They lingered at the café, watching the river flow. Eventually, Juliette felt hungry enough to be tempted by the Market’s aromas. “Can we eat now?”

“Of course,” he replied. “But not that way,” he pointed back to the market. “Tonight you will have koshary.”

“What’s that?”

“You will see. My cousin recommends a particular place. A friend of his from Cairo.” Tareq rose, helped her with her chair, and offered his arm. “A few minutes from here. Let us walk.”

Their path headed back toward Kreuzberg, and soon they stopped in front of a restaurant that offered only about a dozen seats. When they entered, Tareq greeted the owner in Arabic, and they quickly fell into conversation. Tareq introduced Juliette in Arabic, and then translated. “Youssef speaks only Arabic and German, not English. I have explained that you are a friend visiting from New York.”

Youssef bowed his head several times to Juliette and said, “Wilkommen.”

“Thank you,” she replied. “Shukran.”

Youssef motioned to them to sit down, and Tareq ordered. Youssef spoke quickly, and Tareq nodded as he pointed to himself. But then he pointed at Juliette and shook his head. Youssef walked back to the kitchen, calling out in Arabic what Juliette assumed must be their order. “What was that all about?” Juliette asked.

“I told him spicy for me, but not so spicy for you.”

“I think I should probably thank you for that.”

“Perhaps,” he agreed. “We will see.”

Youssef returned momentarily with two bowls of koshary. Steam rose from the mixture of pasta, rice, beans and other ingredients cooked together, like a thick

stew. Next to the bowls Youssef placed two bottles with labels Juliette could not read.

“Shukran,” Juliette said to Youssef. “This smells wonderful.”

Tareq nodded his thanks to Youssef who padded back to the kitchen. Juliette took a spoonful of the warm soup. “It’s delicious! And it’s not spicy at all. Can I try a bite of yours?”

“Of course,” Tareq replied. He would not attempt to dissuade her, but he was not sure what to expect next.

Juliette took one bite and then, a moment later, felt flames ignite in her mouth. Her eyes popped, and Tareq immediately handed her the bottle before her. “Drink this,” he commanded. She did, and the excessively sweet beverage countered the pepper from the stew.

“What’s that?” she asked, once able to speak again.

“Sugar cane water,” he replied. “Very popular in Egypt. And sugar calms the spice. Water would make it worse.”

He was right. Another few sips and the heat of the *koshary* subsided. “I think I’ll stick to mine,” she let out a deep breath.

A few minutes later, Youssef reappeared, this time with a woman. Again, Tareq began a jovial conversation in Arabic. Juliette could tell that she was the main topic. Youssef’s wife, Mariam, was very interested to know more about the woman dining with the cousin of their friend, the music professor.

“Juliette,” Tareq whispered after Youssef and Marian walked away from their table, “I told you before that I had told no one in Cairo that you would be in Berlin. That was the truth. But I believe that all of Cairo may soon know that we dined together here this evening.” Tareq and Juliette giggled self-consciously and continued with their *koshary*, speculating about the extent of Mariam’s network. When they had finished, Tareq asked for the check, but Youssef shook his head. They were his guests that evening. Tareq and Juliette thanked him profusely and headed out into the night, which was now dark and cold.

Shortly after they had left the restaurant, Tareq’s phone chimed that he had a message. They stopped in front of a lamppost while Tareq read the text on the screen. “Juliette,” he rolled his eyes and shook his head. “My cousin says that he is told that you are very beautiful and he hopes that you enjoyed the *koshary*.” Both Tareq and Juliette let out shy, nervous giggles and leaned against the lamppost together.

“So much for secrecy,” Juliette closed her eyes. Tareq wrapped his arm entirely around her waist briefly, held her a moment, and then slid his hand to her back as they walked back to her hotel.

The Living

“Do you have an umbrella?” Tareq asked as Juliette walked out of the elevator the next morning.

“Yes, I grabbed it just as I was leaving the room. Looks like rain?”

“Maybe. But perhaps our luck will hold.” He kissed her on each cheek. “Good morning.”

“Good morning to you, too.” She smiled brightly enough to scare away the clouds. “Have you eaten?”

“No. May I join you?”

“Yes. Please do.” She turned to the wait staff standing at the entrance to the dining room and raised two fingers. They sat down at the same table as the day before and ordered coffee.

“My cousin sent me an email today,” Tareq mentioned as they were finishing their breakfast of bread, cheese and fruit. “He says there is a free concert at the Philharmonic today at lunch that we might like. Would you care to go?”

“Sure,” Juliette replied. “Good for a rainy day. And then where after that?”

“Tiergarten, if the weather agrees,” he suggested.

“Sounds like a plan,” she concurred. “Ready?”

“Ready.” He stood quickly, pulled out her chair and then helped her on with her coat.

“Walk or take the train?” Juliette asked as they left the hotel. The sky couldn’t seem to make up its mind, and neither could she.

“Walk?” he asked.

“Let’s risk it,” she agreed. “But remember: sugar melts.” He furrowed his brow in confusion. “When sugar gets wet, it melts,” she explained. “It’s just a way of telling someone not to get wet in the rain.”

“Ah,” he said. “But I am not sugar.” He raised puckish eyebrows. If Egyptian mythology had imps, Juliette thought to herself, this is what they would look like.

Their route to the philharmonic hall wended its way through parks, along waterways and across a canal. Most of the buildings looked old, but were largely post-World War II construction. Amid the traditionally-styled buildings, masterworks of modern architecture claimed their rightful places. As they neared the concert hall, they stopped to look at the New National Gallery with its piercing metal frame and soaring glass. “I remember going there,” Juliette recalled, “I saw an exhibition by an artist who used nails in everything. And somehow he made them flow, like waves of wheat blowing in the wind.”

“Things are often not as they appear,” Tareq continued her thought. “Even the sharpest of realities can be made soft.”

Their private stroll gave way to thickening crowds as they approached the Philharmonic. Berlin was awash in tourists for the Festival of Lights, and many of the light-lovers appeared also to be drawn to music. At the entrance, a staff member gave them each a token to serve as a concert ticket. “They limit attendance to 1,500,” Tareq explained to Juliette, “and it is often full.”

They entered the hall’s cavernous foyer and were enveloped in a grand architectural statement of modernity. The seemingly unanchored staircases drew them upstairs and put them on eye level with red glass bricks that spread out like the sun; whether rising or setting, that was uncertain. Tareq looked down at the floor and tried to find a focal point; the square and rectangular tiles, in varying shades of gray, were laid in parallel lines, but still seemed to radiate out from some center.

They worked their way through the crowd and found two seats together on a balcony with a good view of where the musicians would soon take their places below. Tareq sat to Juliette’s left. To her right sat a couple honeymooning in Berlin. Not the usual destination, the newlyweds told Juliette, but they wanted to see the lights.

Juliette and the new bride chatted while they waited for the concert to begin. Tareq introduced himself courteously, but then returned his attention to the printed program notes for the performance.

“Where is your husband from?” the woman asked Juliette.

“My husband?”

“Yes, he has a beautiful accent. Where is he from?”

“Cairo.”

“That’s on our list of places to visit. But not now, unfortunately. After things die down, then maybe.”

“Yes,” Juliette concurred. “After things die down.”

Applause erupted as a cellist, a violinist, and a pianist took their places on the raised podium on the ground floor to perform the first piece on the program. The trio was beautiful, and the performance flawless. The audience rewarded the musicians with more applause as the pianist and violinist left the stage.

The cellist then stood and addressed the audience in German. “He will play from the Bach cello suites,” Tareq whispered to Juliette. “We have come on the right day.” The cellist arranged himself in his chair and closed his eyes. From memory, he graced the enormous hall with the warmth of his single instrument. Juliette relaxed back into the cello’s strains, but Tareq leaned forward, his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands. And, Juliette noticed, he sometimes moved his index finger along his cheekbone as though he were conducting the piece to himself.

When the concert ended, Juliette and Tareq were pushed out onto the plaza with the waves of listeners leaving the hall together. The threat of rain was now past, and a bright autumn sun reflected off the building’s golden walls, making Tareq and Juliette squint. As they let their eyes adjust, Tareq returned his hand to Juliette’s back and leaned in close. “I should tell you. I am not from Cairo.”

“What?” She was confused.

“When people ask about my accent,” he turned to face her, “you should know, I was born in Alexandria. I grew up in Cairo, but I am from Alexandria.” He smiled at her winsomely and let other assumptions remain as they were. “Come,” he directed, “to the garden.”

The sun, growing bolder as it pushed the clouds away, lured them across the street to the Tiergarten, Berlin’s largest garden, with its promises of lakeside strolls and pleasant views. They walked first along a well-trodden path, but then crossed a bridge to a small island. Its trees burned with autumn colors, but its manicured lawns insisted that spring was not too far gone, nor too far away.

“You know,” Tareq said, pointing beyond them toward the main garden, “my cousin tells me that at one point, the Tiergarten was a refugee camp.” Juliette took in this bit of history with surprise. “Yes, I know. It is hard to imagine. But Huguenots put up their tents here.”

“Not much like the camps where you worked,” Juliette surmised. Tareq turned his head away abruptly. It was an anguished gesture, Juliette observed, a pain that he hid from her and perhaps from himself. If Käthe Kollwitz were with them right then, she thought, she might find Tareq a worthy subject.

They followed the island’s loop and, finding a bench, took a seat facing west into the afternoon light. They sat with a calmness that matched the waters surrounding the island. In this stillness, Juliette had to know. She had to ask the question that had been somewhere in her mind for nearly two years.

“How is Yasmeen?” she ventured.

“Yasmeen?”

“Yes, Yasmeen. How is she?”

“Well. I believe. Hanan and her husband, they have a child now.”

“Is she still in Alexandria?”

“Yes, I believe so.”

“You believe so?”

“Yes. We have not spoken of late,” Tareq’s tone was clipped but not impolite. He didn’t want to talk about Yasmeen, but he was also eager to make clear to Juliette that Yasmeen had no place in his life.

“Oh. You didn’t contact her after I left?”

“I did.” He paused, not entirely sure how to continue. “Juliette, you once asked me, *What is your fate, Tareq?*”

“I remember.”

“After you left, that question nested between my eyes. It sat here,” he pointed to the bridge of his nose, “staring at me, waiting for my answer. *Why*, it poked at me, *was Yasmeen at the airport the day you were sent to meet Juliette? Why were these women at the airport at the same moment? Did fate send you to the airport to meet Juliette? Or did it send you to the airport to see Yasmeen?*”

He cast his eyes to the side as he revisited the question. Looking back to Juliette he spoke plainly as a man of uncomplicated action. “I went to Alexandria to meet her a few months after your departure.” His tone was laced with a defiance that had no immediate object. “Just lunch,” he continued, his voice softening. “You Americans, you have something called Just Lunch. Do you know it? A young man who worked for Mark once told me he had met his wife on a date arranged by a company called Just Lunch.” Tareq laughed out loud at the concept of such a company. And then he returned to the topic of Yasmeen. “We talked.”

“That was all?” Juliette prodded. He nodded a nod that Juliette could not read.

“Nothing left?”

“Much left, and then left where it should be left. In the past.” He spoke as though presiding over a memorial service for something that had come to its rightful conclusion. “Juliette, on the boat in Cairo,” he continued, “do you remember? You taught me the word *crush*.”

“I did?”

“You asked about Yasmeen, but I did not have the words. You called it a *crush*. Yasmeen was a crush, you said. I did not know that term for an affair of the heart. But it made sense. Yasmeen had crushed my heart. Many, many years before.”

“But in English, a crush is a mild thing, an infatuation.”

“I know this now. But then I did not. And the word fit, in its true meaning. Americans should not use this word so carelessly.” He shifted topics quickly. “I still have the photo I took of you that day.”

“I do, too.” Her copy was buried in a book about the pyramids, shelved in her office. She knew exactly where to find it, but had not looked at it since her flight home from Cairo. “I still can’t believe we ran into her at the airport like that.” Juliette changed the subject back. She regretted any discomfort she might cause him, but she had to know.

“I could not believe my ears or my eyes,” he shook his head as he relived the moment. “I had not seen her in many years – how many I do not know – and I had not received a letter from her since my retirement.”

“Did she even know you were back in Cairo?”

“Perhaps not.” Tareq seemed untroubled by this. “I knew that the young woman with her was her daughter. But I did not know of the death of her husband. “

“What did you think when she told you?”

“At first, nothing. And then I wondered. But so many years had passed.”

“Nothing to rekindle?”

“There is perhaps always something to rekindle,” he replied, looking at Juliette directly. “But my heart would not go to her.”

He closed his eyes, and they both allowed the silence to have its say. Memories crowded in on them, and Juliette and Tareq each mentally made room for them on the park bench. Tareq drew his next breath with determination. “I told myself one night,” he declared, “Tareq, Yasmeen may now be yours. Juliette may not be yours. Take your heart from Juliette and give it to Yasmeen.” He paused for a moment and then laughed out loud, his head back, eyes still closed. “You know, *Just do it!*” He punched his fists into the air.

“And did you?” Juliette asked. Hers was a question, pure, simple and trembling.

“No.” He brought his head forward to meet her gaze. “I did not.”

“Why not?”

“Because,” he said, lifting his empty palms for her to see, “my heart was no longer mine to give.”

About Tareq

There was no need to plan an itinerary that morning. Tareq had fixed this day within hours of receiving Juliette's email that her plane ticket was booked. He would visit the wonders of the ancient world with her: the Pergamon Museum's extraordinary collection of art and architecture and the Neues Museum's famed Egyptian collection. When Tareq's cousin had offered his flat in Berlin, visiting these museums was the first thought that had come to Tareq's mind. After Juliette bought her plane ticket, he thought more about Juliette beside him at the museums than he did of the museums themselves.

Over breakfast, Tareq read to Juliette about the treasures they would encounter. They drank one last cup of coffee and then walked briskly to the Museum Island. Once at the river, they crossed the pedestrian bridge that took visitors to the entrance of the Pergamon. They proceeded through the entry hall and found themselves before the museum's signature installation, the Pergamon Altar itself. It rose high before them, and to Juliette's surprise, visitors were walking up the altar's steps, just as people would have done more than 2,000 years earlier. Such a wonder of the world might at least have a velvet rope in front of it, she thought to herself. But then again, having survived so long as living architecture, perhaps it could well survive 1,000,000 tourists a year.

Juliette and Tareq climbed the altar together, Greek gods and giants warring to their left and right. Some creatures fought with full bodies; their twisted torsos, unable to cry out in pain, paired off with lifeless forms carved to perfection. In other places, only fragments remained – stray legs, hooves and angel wings – ravaged by time if not by war.

From the top of the altar, they looked back into the hall. "The German archaeologists did everything big," Juliette observed sardonically. "They didn't just take a chunk here or there. They took entire buildings back with them."

"What is more impressive?" Tareq asked, circling his hand in the air. "That this altar exists, or that it exists here in Berlin?" Tareq imagined the engineering required to move the altar. But then his thoughts turned to the engineers themselves: why would anyone want to move something this big? What did it require for a human being to wake up on an ordinary morning and decide to uproot such magnificence, transport it over thousands of miles, and reconstitute it in a foreign land?

They walked down the stairs through a doorway and were greeted by Orpheus, enshrined in a mosaic floor, along with the birds, animals and people he charmed with his music. The 2nd century Market Gate of Miletus towered above them, its columned alcoves and curved arches reaching up to the sky-lighted roof. “According to what I read,” Juliette turned to Tareq, “most of the gate was destroyed in an earthquake. But I guess the reproduction gives you a sense of scale.” She looked around again, wondering if she had ever before seen a building contained entirely within another building. She touched Tareq’s shoulder blade and then pointed up. “This entire museum is an enormous superstructure for structures that are only slightly less than enormous.”

He slipped his hand behind her back as they passed through the market gate’s human-scaled opening and moved a few centuries forward in time to the Ishtar Gate. Its tiles of blue and gold shimmered in the 21st century light just as they had hundreds of years earlier, but without the benefit of the original precious stones. Ishtar, the goddess of love and war, deserved nothing less than lapis lazuli ornaments, but she had not been able to hold onto them.

From Ishtar’s blue boldness, they followed the Procession to Babylon with its ceramic bas relief lions on either side; whether the lions were guarding them or stalking them, they could not tell. Beyond the procession, two Assyrian winged creatures – men who were part lion, part bird, or perhaps, birds who were part lion, part men – looked benevolently down upon them. Just beyond, two more lions held watch, their eroded faces no longer capable of inspiring fear, their ancient roars now muted. The past was the past. Only Hammurabi’s Code, preserved for the generations, spoke aloud to the present. “An eye for an eye,” Tareq muttered. “Some things do not change.”

At the end of the long corridor, they passed a statue of Hadad, the god of storms, and then turned around amid the pale colors of antiquity and headed upstairs to Tareq’s real destination for the morning: the Aleppo Room. At breakfast he had explained to Juliette how this room, originally from the home of a Christian merchant in Aleppo, had been dismantled piece-by-piece and then reassembled in Berlin. In this room, some 400 years earlier, the merchant had greeted guests, impressing them mightily with his wealth and erudition. The room’s decor was a crossroads of culture and faith, a place where different beliefs coexisted harmoniously in pattern, color and imagery. Christian Psalms and Arabic poetry conversed eloquently and easily, and the Virgin Mary sat happily next to scenes from Persian literature.

“What’s this panel?” Juliette asked Tareq, pointing to a painting of a young woman.

“That is the story of Leila and Majnun,” he explained. “They were in love, but Leila’s father would not allow them to marry.”

“Romeo and Juliet,” Juliette summed up. “You find that story in every culture.”

They continued through the rest of the collection and stood appropriately in awe before the Mshatta Façade, its expanse as impressive for its delicate, curled, and almost filigreed detail as for its hulking mass. The wall was neutral in tone, but

shared the gallery with exuberant works of art: the brilliant Alhambra Ceiling, colorful arrays of tiles, and vibrant textiles. The patterns and hues unleashed Juliette's memories of walking with Tareq in Cairo. She could remember Tareq in Cairo easily, but now as she studied him, engrossed in the façade of King Nebuchadnezzar's throne room, she recognized him more fully. He had not been unfamiliar to her in the past days, but now she absorbed him deeply.

He turned to her from the remains of Nebuchadnezzar's glory. "Coffee?" he asked.

They hunted until they found the museum's cramped café on the basement level and squeezed around a small table. "Tell me about Aleppo," she said, not knowing that this query was as intricate as the Aleppo room itself and as layered as his question to her about whether or not she missed the city.

"Aleppo," he pursed his lips and looked at her, nodding his head in thoughts he had no intention of sharing, at least not then. "Aleppo," he intoned like someone narrating a documentary, "is a jewel of the Middle East." He lingered on the words *Middle East* and cocked one eyebrow.

"I know you don't like that term," she remembered.

"No, I do not. But it is the term that others use."

"And?"

"It is an ancient city of culture. Art, music, poetry. They all flourished in Aleppo." That was not the whole story, but he did not wish to think further. But summoning his courage, he continued. "It is a city of fortification. The castle crowns the city. But the castle began as a temple to the storm god Hadad."

"Like the statue we just saw?" Juliette asked.

He nodded. "Hadad is one name for Aleppo."

He looked at her to see if he were holding her interest and saw she was eager for more. "It is one of the longest continuously inhabited cities on earth, maybe 7,000 years old. A center of trade, and important in the time the Silk Road." Settling further into his detached descriptions, he continued with increased confidence. "Some of the best olives in the world come from Aleppo. And the weather is temperate, at least most of the year. And there is rain."

By now, he thought he must be boring her, but her eyes still fixed upon him. "In the last 2,000 years, Aleppo has been Greek, Roman, Armenian, Persian, Mongol, Egyptian, Turkish..." he waved his hand in the air to show that the list went on and on. "And it is all of those things today. And for the last 2,000 years, Aleppo has been home to many beliefs: Greek, Roman, Jewish, all manner of Christian denominations and Muslim sects. It is said that Abraham gave milk to travellers from white cows as they went through the region."

Here he paused, his sense of confidence faltering. When he spoke again, his voice was hushed and, Juliette thought, forlorn. "When I was in Aleppo," he breathed

deeply, “we lived together.” He held that thought in his mind for a moment. “Not all agreed that we ought to live together, but in many ways, we did. Not like now.” His eyes gazed out over a mental landscape of sadness. “Not like now.” Juliette followed him into his silence and asked no further questions.

“Come!” he changed gears completely. “I have an appointment with a Queen.” He got up abruptly, helped Juliette with her chair, and ran his hand over her hair before catching himself at the nape of her neck.

They left the Pergamon and walked the short distance to the Neues Museum and its famed Egyptian collection. In planning this visit, they had both devoured information on the museum: he, because it was Egypt; she, because he was from Egypt. Under the main hall’s cobalt blue ceiling, they meandered among displays of small objects documenting daily life in ancient Egypt. Tareq moved slowly, reading labels carefully and stopping to look at artifacts that he, on some level, recognized, but which for Juliette held less meaning. He pointed out something to her here and there, but mainly lost himself in the fragments of clay, metal and stone.

In the next room, they were greeted by the head of the Pharaoh Amenophis II, who famously married a commoner. Carved in a reddish quartzite, the Pharaoh smiled from the stone and looked at ease, even with his nose gone missing. “He looks friendly,” Juliette commented to Tareq, “like he might just say *hi*.” Perhaps, she thought, this is what one might expect from a man who had disrupted venerable traditions by marrying outside the royal circle.

In the next room, they took in the *Berlin Green Head*, an Egyptian priest carved from greenish sandstone which, the label informed, was intended to show the wisdom of the priest rather than portray a particular person. “I do not believe it is the *Berlin Green Head*,” Tareq joked half-heartedly.

“Sort of looks like you,” she teased, caressing the creased lines between his eyebrows. He swatted at her playfully and took the opportunity to hold her hand for a moment longer than was necessary.

They ambled through a room with pieces of temples and then made their way up the stairs, arriving in a shadowy gallery populated with vertical glass cases, each housing a single statue. The cases were illuminated from above, and the light through the glass refracted across the floor, creating angled patterns around each statue. Some sculptures stood, some walked toward them or away, some sat, others kneeled. And some looked like they were carved within a single block, trapped in stone, but not unhappy with their fate. The sculptures formed an inanimate ancient community now on display in Berlin.

From this fraternity hewn in stone, they walked through a collection of artifacts from Amarna, and in the distance, they saw the bust of Nefertiti, the wife of Akhenaten, dug up from the sand in 1912, and now resplendent in a room devoted only to her.

By now Juliette was accustomed to the weight of Tareq’s hand at her back. Outdoors, through her coat, his touch was reassuring but remote. Indoors, the

pressure of his palm was unmistakable, and his thumb occasionally ran absent-mindedly up and down a short length of her spine. When they stood still, as they now did before the serene face of an Egyptian Queen, Tareq stood slightly behind her, his shoulder nearly touching her, his face moving closer and closer to her own. Juliette responded by not resisting, and neither of them acknowledged in words their evolving choreography. They danced slowly, both aware that there was no need for, and no wisdom in, any sudden movements.

“Her name apparently meant *a beautiful woman has come*,” Juliette said to Tareq. “She lives up to the billing.”

“Is that her name?” he asked. “I did not know this. But this is how she looked,” he added. “The sculpture was done from life, in the sculptor’s studio.”

“I like the lines around her mouth,” Juliette observed. “And the indentations in her cheeks. She looks real, like the sculptor didn’t feel he had to hide her age.”

Tareq placed his hands on Juliette’s shoulders and leaned his face forward to hers. “Age has its benefits, does it not?” His cheek was close enough to hers that she could feel his beard, but not his skin.

“Tareq,” she said, turning around to face him directly. “How does it make you feel to see this statue here? I can’t imagine what it would be like for me to see, oh, I don’t know – the Liberty Bell? – in a foreign country.”

“The riches of Egypt have been admired . . . and plundered . . . for centuries. I accept this.” When he was younger, the sheer number of Egyptian artifacts in museums outside of Egypt had rankled him. But now, at middle age, he had no desire to fight a diaspora.

On the way out of the building, they retraced their steps and bid farewell to the objects they had gotten to know. Back in the fresh air again, they headed over another bridge, pausing for a moment to take in the sun’s dance on the River Spree below. They enjoyed the view in silence, and Tareq pulled out a package of cigarettes.

“Please, don’t.” Juliette reached out for his hand reflexively. “Don’t smoke. People die of smoking.” Her tone was caring, but adamant.

He stopped, aghast. A bit falsely dramatic, but aghast nonetheless. He was not accustomed to anyone telling him what to do, especially a woman. She had asked politely, to be sure, but there was a clear order implied in her plea. He had not forgotten her frankness; indeed, this was one of the things he cherished most about her. But in the years that had passed since their time Cairo, he could not recall any woman challenging him, his thoughts, or his decisions.

“Please, Tareq.” She put her hands on his upper arms, almost as though she would shake him. “Please.”

He softened his stance and glanced down at the cigarettes in his hand, the box occupying the narrow space between their bodies. He knew she was right.

Smoking was a nasty habit. He had lost relatives to cancer. Why did he smoke? It was reckless. He didn't want to be reckless anymore. He wanted to love her.

"I know," she jibed. "You hate agreeing me."

"I do, I do hate agreeing with you!" He glowered at her playfully and then looked down at his feet as they shuffled beneath him. *It's important to matter to someone*, Juliette had once told him. And he knew that he mattered to her. Mattered enough that she was telling him to stop smoking. Neither his mother nor his sisters had ever told him to quit. To them he was a man who made his own decisions. They would not interfere. To Juliette, he was also a man who made his own decisions, but she interfered. She reminded him that that his decisions impacted more than just himself.

She released him, and he walked away from her. He leaned on the bridge's parapet and looked out at the river. He held the cigarettes in front of him at arm's length to get a good view. Taking a deep breath, he said "goodbye" and threw what Emily always called *death sticks* over the side of the bridge. It was no mere toss. He threw the package as hard and as far as he could. The cigarettes were gone, and along with them, any desire to smoke.

"Thank you," he said into her eyes. He slipped his arm around her waist, pulled her body against his side, and kept her there. She rubbed her head against his shoulder and put her arm around his waist. They matched their gaits evenly and continued across the bridge.

Dusk fell pleasantly, and Tareq checked his shirt pocket for a print out with information about viewing the Festival of Lights from the platform of the Fernsehturm. "Hungry?" he asked her.

She nodded and then cajoled him into a burrito restaurant she had spied along the way. "You'll like it," she promised. She ordered for them both, and they settled into a booth. "Berlin makes me think of New York," she commented between mouthfuls. "Think of it: in just a few days, we've had Turkish, Chinese, Egyptian, and now Mexican. I like this city!"

"I like it, too," Tareq replied. "I like you in it. And this burrito, it is good as well." After dinner, they proceeded to the tower and took the elevator as high as it would go. The viewing platform was packed, and they had to work their way to a spot where they could stand comfortably together, their bodies pressed close as tourists jostled around them. Tareq put his arms around Juliette, in part to protect her from being bumped by strangers, and in part to carve out a space just for the two of them. They viewed the lights together, but it was an experience they shared with a multitude, not with one another.

After the excitement of the initial illumination had subsided, the crowds on the viewing deck thinned. Tareq looked out onto Berlin's lightscape, but spoke to her. "Juliette, when we were at Hanan's wedding, I told you I would miss you."

"I remember."

“I missed you very much.” He leaned forward and turned his face to her. “I have missed you.”

“I’ve missed you, too, Tareq.”

He kissed the top of her head. “I am glad we are here together now,” he said, looking out at Berlin awash in light. “I am glad to see all of this with you. I am glad you came.”