

CHAPTER 3, PAGE 124-127

When I arrived at my mom's home around 4 p.m., only my (REDACTED) and my sister (REDACTED) were there, and both were asleep. My mom had gone outside to gather her scattered sheep; it was feeding time. I went inside the house and put on my bathrobe. On my way to the shower, my mom and two secret police guys surged almost simultaneously into the house.

"Salahi, the Director General wants to see you!"

"Why?"

"We don't know," said one of the guys.

"OK. I'm going to take a shower and change my clothes." "OK!" said the guy, stepping out. "We're gonna wait on you outside." The secret police respected me highly since I turned myself in a couple of weeks ago; they knew I am not a person who flees. I had basically been under house arrest since 2000 but I could have fled the country anytime; I didn't, and didn't have any reason to. I took my shower and changed. In the meantime my aunt woke up because of the noise. My sister didn't wake up, as far as I remember, and that was good, because I was only worried about her and the extreme depression she had been suffering.

"I think the police called you because you bought a new TV, and they don't want you to watch TV. Don't you think?" said my mom innocently.

I smiled and said, "I don't think so, but everything is going to be alright." My

mom was referring to the new satellite antenna I installed the night before to have better TV reception. The irony is that the (REDACTED) was the one who helped me install the antenna. When I was in prison the month before, he had asked me to find a job for him because the police paid him miserably. I promised him I would, and in the meantime, I wanted to offer him an opportunity to do some work for me, so I called him to help fix my antenna, and paid him adequately. That was the only way for a man like him to survive. I helped him get some work, and we were sipping tea and joking in my house.

“I didn’t bring you to my house to arrest me,” I said jokingly.

“I hope you will never be arrested,” (REDACTED) said.

My mom’s house is next to my brother’s, with a short wall that separates them. I could simply have jumped to my brother’s house, and escaped through his door that opens to a completely other street, and guess what? There would be no finding me, not only because so many people would shelter me, but also because the police agents would not have been interested in finding me. I even believe that the government would have been much happier saying to the U.S., “He fled, we couldn’t find him.”

The secret police agents obviously wanted me to flee, especially (REDACTED). But I wanted to keep it real—not to mention that the government itself assured my family that I had done nothing, and so my family always wanted me to go to the police whenever they asked to see me. The funny thing about “Secret Police” in Arab countries

is that they are more known to the commoners than the regular police forces. I think the authorities in Arabic countries should think about a new nomenclature, something like "The Most Obvious Police."

There were four of them when I stepped outside the door with my mom and my aunt. My mom kept her composure, and started to pray using her fingers. As to my aunt, that was her first time seeing somebody taken by the police, and so she got crippled and couldn't say a word. She started to sweat heavily and mumbled some prayers. Both kept their eyes staring at me. It is the taste of helplessness, when you see your beloved fading away like a dream and you cannot help him. And same for me: I would watch both my mom and my aunt praying in my rear-view mirror until we took the first turn and I saw my beloved ones disappear.

"Take your car, we hope you can come back home today," one of the guys had instructed me. "The DG might just ask you some questions." (REDACTED) occupied my passenger seat, as sad as he could be.

"Salahi, I wish I were not part of this shit."

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Over the next several days, I almost lost my mind. Their recipe for me went like this: I must be kidnapped from (REDACTED) and put in a secret place. I must be made to believe I was on a far, faraway island. I must be informed by (REDACTED) that my mom was captured and put in a special facility.

In the secret place, the physical and psychological suffering must be at their highest extremes. I must not know the difference between day and night. I couldn't tell a thing about days going by or time passing; my time consisted of a crazy darkness all the time. My diet times were deliberately messed up. I was starved for long periods and then given food but not given time to eat.

"You have three minutes: Eat!" a guard would yell at me, and then after about half a minute he would grab the plate. "You're done!" And then it was the opposite extreme: I was given too much food and a guard came into my cell and forced me to eat all of it. When I said "I need water" because the food got stuck in my throat, he punished me by making me drink two 25-ounce water bottles.

"I can't drink," I said when my abdomen felt as if it was going to explode. But (REDACTED) screamed and threatened me, pushing me against the wall and raising his hand to hit me. I figured drinking would be better, and drank until I vomited.

All the guards were masked with Halloween-like masks, and so were the Medics, and the guards were briefed that I was a high-level, smart-beyond-belief terrorist.

“You know who you are?” said (REDACTED’S) friend. “You’re a terrorist who helped kill 3,000 people!”

“Indeed I am!” I answered. I realized it was futile to discuss my case with a guard, especially when he knew nothing about me. The guards were all very hostile. They cursed, shouted, and constantly put me through rough Military-like basic training. “Get up,” “Walk to the bin hole.” “Stop!” “Grab the shit!” “Eat.” “You got two minutes!” “You’re done!” “Give the shit back!” “Drink!” “You better drink the whole water bottle!” “Hurry up!” “Sit down!” “Don’t sit down unless I say it!” “Search the piece of shit!” Most of the guards rarely attacked me physically, but (REDACTED) hit me once until I fell face-down on the floor, and whenever he and his associate grabbed me they held me very tight and made me run in the heavy chains: “Move!”

No sleep was allowed. In order to enforce this, I was given 25-ounce water bottles in intervals of one to two hours, depending on the mood of the guards, 24 hours a day. The consequences were devastating. I couldn’t close my eyes for ten minutes because I was sitting most of the time on the bathroom. Later on, after the tension was relieved, I asked one of the guards, “Why the water diet? Why don’t you just make me stay awake by standing up, like in (REDACTED)?”

“Psychologically it’s devastating to make somebody stay awake on his own, without ordering him,” said (REDACTED) “Believe me, you haven’t seen anything. We have put detainees naked under the shower for days, eating, pissing, and shitting in the shower!” he continued. Other guards told me about other torture methods that I wasn’t

really eager to know about.

I was allowed to say three sentences: “Yes, sir!” “Need my interrogator!” and “Need the medics.” Every once in a while the whole guard team stormed my cell, dragged me out, put me facing the wall, and threw out whatever was in my cell, shouting and cursing in order to humiliate me. It wasn’t much: I was deprived from all comfort items that a detainee needs except for a mattress and a small, thin, worn-out blanket. For the first weeks I also had no shower, no laundry, no brushing. I almost developed bugs. I hated my smell.

No sleep. Water diet. Every move behind my door made me stand up in a military-like position with my heart pounding like boiling water. My appetite was non-existent. I was waiting every minute on the next session of torture. I hoped I would die and go to heaven; no matter how sinful I am, these people can never be more merciful than God. Ultimately we all are going to face the Lord and beg for his mercy, admitting our weaknesses and our sinfulness. I could hardly remember any prayers, all I could say was, “Please, God, relieve my pain...”

I started to hallucinate and hear voices as clear as crystal. I heard my family in a casual familial conversation that I couldn’t join. I heard Koran readings in a heavenly voice. I heard music from my country. Later on the guards used these hallucinations and started talking with funny voices through the plumbing, encouraging me to hurt the guards and plot an escape. But I wasn’t misled by them, even though I played along.

“We heard somebody—maybe a genie!” they used to say.

“Yeah, but I ain’t listening to him,” I responded. I just realized I was on the edge of losing my mind. I started to talk to myself. Although I tried as hard as I could to convince myself that I was not in Mauritania, I was not near my family, so I could not possibly hear them speaking, I kept hearing the voices constantly, day and night.

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The torture was growing day by day. The guards on the block actively participated in the process. The (REDACTION) tell them what to do with the detainees when they came back to the block. I had guards banging on my cell to prevent me from sleeping. They cursed me for no reason. They repeatedly woke me, unless my interrogators decided to give me a break. I never complained to my interrogators about the issue because I knew they planned everything with the guards.

As promised, (REDACTION) pulled me early in the day. Lonely in my cell, I was terrified when I heard the guards carrying the heavy chains and shouting at my door “Reservation!” My heart started to pound heavily because I always expected the worst. But the fact that I wasn’t allowed to see the light made me “enjoy” the short trip between my freakin’ cold cell and the interrogation room. It was just a blessing when the warm GTMO sun hit me. I felt life sneaking back into every inch of my body. I would always get this fake happiness, though only for a very short time. It’s like taking narcotics.

“How you been?” said one of the Puerto Rican escorting guards in his weak English.

“I’m OK, thanks, and you?”

“No worry, you gonna back to your family,” he said. When he said that I couldn’t help breaking in (REDACTION).

Lately, I’d become so vulnerable. What was wrong with me? Just one soothing word in this ocean of agony was enough to make me cry. (REDACTION) we had a

complete Puerto Rican division. They were different than other Americans; they were not as vigilant and unfriendly. Sometimes, they took detainees to shower (REDACTION). Everybody liked them. But they got in trouble with those responsible for the camps because of their friendly and humane approach to detainees. I can't objectively speak about the people from Puerto Rico because I haven't met enough; however, if you ask me, Have you ever seen a bad Puerto Rican guy? My answer would be no.