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Product Code A0846-SP

The Harrow

A 10-Minute Drama

by

Ross Peter Nelson

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CHARACTERS

3M / 1 Either Gender

CAPT SEAN McKIMMON: *Army (retired), interrogator, male, 45.*

CORP KEMP: *Army, Guantanamo Bay, either gender, 20.*

SHABIR AKBARI: *Afghan male, 25.*

ENAM MAZAR: *Afghan boy, 17.*

SETTING

A flophouse in a large American city.

TIME

Present day.

The Harrow

by Ross Peter Nelson

(CAPT McKIMMON is lying on a cot in dirty fatigues, sleeping fitfully. The room is small, barely lit. There is a table with a gas burner and teapot. SHABIR stands in the shadows, almost invisible. He wears a long white kurta and pants. CORP KEMP appears in a t-shirt and shorts.)

CORP KEMP

God I love it when they piss themselves. Cap's a fucking genius with those dogs. He waits outside the cell and lets them bark and bark. Then bang, the door's open and the dogs are fucking inches from Abdul's throat. Then Cap snaps his fingers and they're back at his side panting like little puppy dogs and Abdul's lying in a puddle of piss. He'll do it to the same guy four times running and every time he'll piss himself. Cracks me up. Hey, what's wrong Abdul? You have an accident?

(CORP KEMP vanishes. SHABIR steps forward, goes to the table, lights the gas burner and puts a kettle of water on. We hear dogs, growling, then barking as if to attack. CAPT McKIMMON starts and sits up.)

CAPT McKIMMON

I thought I was in Delta camp.

SHABIR

It's closed.

CAPT McKIMMON

That's right. From "model prison" to "national disgrace" as soon as the Democrats were in.

SHABIR

It was always a disgrace.

CAPT McKIMMON

Who are you?

SHABIR

Sleep.

CAPT McKIMMON

I can't sleep. My dreams...they're full of people...people without faces.

SHABIR

Perhaps some tea.

CAPT McKIMMON

I can still smell it. Shit, baked into dust, mixed with blood and sweat and fear, and baked into dust again. ... What time is it?

SHABIR

What does fear smell like?

CAPT McKIMMON

Watered down death. Decay. Like a backed-up sewer.

SHABIR

Liquid.

CAPT McKIMMON

Yes.

SHABIR

It stains people. Soaks into their flesh. They're never rid of it.

CAPT McKIMMON

Cowards.

SHABIR

It is cowardice to fear for a wife and child? That was my father's fear. Not for himself, but for his family.

CAPT McKIMMON

Who are you?

SHABIR

My father's son.

CAPT McKIMMON

Did I know your father?

SHABIR

You shaved his beard; an insult to an elder of my clan.

CAPT McKIMMON

Delta camp?

SHABIR

Block four. Cell six.

CAPT McKIMMON

Cell six.

(The kettle whistles.)

SHABIR

You were his interrogator. But you never knew him.

(SHABIR turns to make tea.)

CAPT McKIMMON

There were four men in cell six.

SHABIR

Rabani Zahir. Daoud Akbari. Hamid Shah. Rasul Sayyaf.

CAPT McKIMMON

One sixty-two. Five ninety-one. Five-Forty. Six-oh-four.

SHABIR

(Handing him a cup of tea.)

Daoud Akbari. Five ninety-one.

CAPT McKIMMON

Fucking Al Qaida. Fucking Taliban.

(Tastes, spits.)

God that's awful.

SHABIR

The poppy is a bitter plant. It stirs up memories.

(CORP KEMP appears.)

CORP KEMP

I thought those pansy-ass FBI shits would never leave. I'd hate to be their kids. "What did you do in the war, daddy?" "I wrote memos, son." Whiny fucking memos. "Only eight percent of the prisoners have any connection to Al Qaida." For fuck's sake, haven't they been in a prison before? Everybody's fucking innocent.

(CORP KEMP vanishes.)

CAPT McKIMMON

I don't need any more memories, I have enough memories.

SHABIR

Countless are the handwritings which have inscribed themselves on the palimpsest of your brain, like the annual leaves or undissolving snow. Light falling on light. Endless strata, covered up; but by death, by fever, by the searchings of opium, all these can revive in strength. They are not dead, but sleeping.

CAPT McKIMMON

Are you death?

SHABIR

I am my father's son. Come to peel back the layers of your memory.

(He unbuttons and removes his shirt, exposing a chest and back covered with writing.)

CAPT McKIMMON

Those tattoos. I saw them –

SHABIR

My father.

CAPT McKIMMON

Five ninety-one did this? To you?

SHABIR

This is my mother's hand. But I did this. I forced her to copy every word, every syllable, every letter that was on his body before I would let her bury him.

CAPT McKIMMON

He's dead then.

(Pause.)

Kill me, if that's what you're here for.

SHABIR

More tea?

CAPT McKIMMON

I had no power to damn nor to save. An interrogator. A cog in the machinery of war.

SHABIR

Not a cog, but a harrow. A steel pen, carving away my father's life and writing lies in it's place.

CAPT McKIMMON

All I did was ask questions.

SHABIR

No. What you did was to rewrite him. For five years you whispered. For five years you shouted and swore. "You are Al Qaida. You are a terrorist. You are an assassin. You came from Kunar to kill Americans. You are working for the Taliban." Every day your stories became more real. Every day his memories of life outside became fainter. Obliterated by the monotony and petty violence of the camp.

*(CORP KEMP appears with large CD player blasting
Metallica's "Enter Sandman" at high volume. He leaves it on
the table and walking out, he screams.)*

CORP KEMP

Sleep tight, fuckers.

*(When CAPT McKIMMON can no longer stand it, he turns off
the music.)*

SHABIR

To save himself, he began to tattoo his life story onto his very skin to keep it from being obliterated.

CAPT McKIMMON

I always thought it was the Koran. That he was inscribing holy verses.

SHABIR

So they were. The holy verses of his memory. After he filled his chest, legs and arms, he dictated to his cell mates so that they could tattoo his back.

CAPT McKIMMON

We didn't approve of that sort of thing.

SHABIR

Nor did the Prophet. His curse lies on those who alter the creation of Allah. Yet my father insisted. They'd save fragments of broken glass, smash pencils to find splinters sharp enough to pierce flesh.

CAPT McKIMMON

He confessed, you know.

SHABIR

He repeated your lies.

CAPT McKIMMON

No. He gave us names, locations.

SHABIR

And you've been to those places and arrested those people?

(CAPT McKIMMON turns away.)

SHABIR

Is the memory of a falsehood any less strong than a memory of truth?

CAPT McKIMMON

It was my job to find the truth.

SHABIR

There is a man from my village who came by a fortune in those days. Perhaps in America, forty-thousand dollars is not a fortune, but when you work an entire month for forty dollars, it is significant.

CAPT McKIMMON

I know what you're going to say.

SHABIR

Because you heard him say it, over and over.

CAPT McKIMMON

Bounty hunters.

SHABIR

You had confirmation. The boy in cell five was turned in at the same time by the same man collecting another reward. You imprisoned a twelve-year old boy.

CAPT McKIMMON

They don't come with birth certificates.

SHABIR

What does it take to make a twelve-year old confess?

CAPT McKIMMON

We fed that boy better than he'd ever been fed in his life.

SHABIR

Dogs? Stereos howling for 48 hours at a stretch? Machines blasting icy air til his teeth wouldn't stop chattering?

CAPT McKIMMON

Where's that letter? Enam wrote me a letter from Afghanistan.

(CAPT McKIMMON searches the desk until he finds the letter. As he scans the letter, ENAM appears in dark pants and a ragged sweater, dribbling a basketball.)

ENAM

You will laugh, but sometimes I am dreaming of the hamburger. Once, my family traveled to Kandahar and I found a shop selling the hamburger. They were not like the ones in Guantanamo, but I ate them anyway. My father is angry. He thinks that I am a traitor, that with your gifts you turned my head from my people. He sold the Nikes to help buy kerosene for our family, but I still have the basketball. I practice every day, just like on the base. I know four languages now, Dari, Pashto, Arabic, and English. I think I would like to be a translator for the United Nations. Perhaps one day we will meet again.

(ENAM disappears.)

SHABIR

Even he you rewrote. Fattened him on deceit.

CAPT McKIMMON

The Taliban captured him at the market one day, gave him an AK-47, and forced him into the mountains where he was captured.

SHABIR

No. He was sold for bounty with my father.

CAPT McKIMMON

I gave him a story. Something believable but not dangerous. I coached him.

SHABIR

(Points to his chest.)

No. It. Is. Written.

CAPT McKIMMON

What difference does it make? Your story or mine? My story was more believable.

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