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*The Old Town, Fredrikstad, Norway*  
*Four months ago*

The Range Rover made the turn onto the final road, a long stretch of gravel ending at what looked like a moat surrounding a fortified town. In front of the water, two men in uniform stood next to a fire barrel, compact assault rifles slung over their shoulders, hands hovering above the barrel to ward off the chill. The driver slowed instinctively. The passenger said, “Keep going. Don’t give them any reason to suspect anything.”

The driver huffed slightly, strangely giddy at the turn his life had taken.

*Suspect? Right. I’m sure they won’t wonder why an American in a business suit is traveling with an Arab wearing ratty jeans. Or why I’m sweating like a whore in church in the middle of winter.*

The American continued at reduced speed, using the melted snow on the roadway as an excuse, doing whatever he could to slow the inevitable showdown. The Arab said, “Easy. Very, very easy. You get us through this, and you’re free. Remember that.”

“Okay, okay. What do you want me to say? Should I tell them who I am?”

The American prayed the man with the gun would say yes, because he was sure there was a massive manhunt for

him involving security agencies from at least two countries.

The Arab said, "No. Of course not. We are tourists like everyone else coming down this road."

The Arab caught the disappointment on the driver's face and smiled. "Remember, only one of us inside this vehicle is afraid to die."

The American nodded, wiping the sweat off his upper lip. He pulled into the checkpoint and lowered the window. One officer approached while the other began a sweep of the undercarriage with a mirror on a shaft. The American gave a nervous smile and waited.

The policeman said something in Norwegian. The American said, "I'm sorry. English?"

With a heavy accent, the policeman said, "Business here?"

"We're just visiting. We wanted to see the fortifications of the old town. Maybe go to the museum."

"Okay. But the museum is closed."

The American knew that. What was going on in the museum was the primary reason the man to his right held a gun. He felt nauseated and overwhelmed. Beads of perspiration rolled down his face despite the freezing air, a direct result of being squeezed between two armed men, one using subterfuge and the other standing out in the cold precisely to penetrate the charade. He had nothing to do with either, but that would matter little when the bullets began to fly.

He stammered, "C-can we just see the old town, then? Surely the square isn't closed."

The officer studied him for a moment, then said, "Car registration, please."

The American felt the panic blossom. He had no idea if the vehicle even had valid registration, or where it

would be stored. But the Arab did. Right hand held low, hiding the pistol, he used his left to dig through the glove box, pulling out a leatherette envelope and passing it through the window.

The policeman took it, saying to the American, "Are you all right?"

He wiped his upper lip again and said, "Yes, fine. A bit of a cold, I think."

The policeman said nothing, studying the forms inside the envelope. Still looking down, he said, "What is your name?"

The American knew whatever he said, it wouldn't match the forms the policeman held. The Arab knew it as well. The American stammered for an answer and caught movement in his peripheral vision. His brain recognized the nightmare a millisecond before the pistol went off right next to his face, the explosion consuming the inside of the vehicle, splitting his eardrums apart.

The policeman's head snapped back, blood spouting out, and his body crumpled. The American screamed, crouching down and covering his head. The Arab turned to find the other policeman. He was outside the passenger window, frantically attempting to bring his rifle to bear, the mirror dropped to his feet. The Arab fired through the window, shattering the glass and hitting the policeman in the chest, the bullet sending up a small puff of goose down from his jacket, belying the destruction wrought beneath.

The policeman whirled in a half circle, then fell to the ground, crawling toward a ditch and clawing at the rifle on his back. The Arab exited the vehicle and stalked over to him, putting a boot into his back, pinning him in place. He yanked the man's head up by the hair, placed

the barrel of his gun against the back of the policeman's skull, and pulled the trigger. A plug of gore exited the man's open mouth and stained the snow underneath.

The American sagged against his seat, the absolute violence destroying any vestige of hope he might have had for self-defense. The Arab calmly returned to the car, walking around to the driver's side. He said, "Get in the passenger seat."

The American did so, numb. The Arab slid behind the wheel and rolled up the window. He locked the doors, then began digging beneath the driver's seat. He pulled out a small box the size of a cigarette pack with a thin wire snaking back under the seat.

He flipped a switch on the box and a tiny light turned green. The American said, "What is that thing?"

The Arab bared his teeth and said, "Your ticket to paradise."

He put the Range Rover into gear and drove across the small moat, entering the ancient fortress.

For all of his fear and naïveté, the American was not a stupid man. He knew what the little container represented. The Arab's intentions had become painfully clear. *This isn't a hostage situation. They never wanted me.*

He was riding in a homemade cruise missile. A mobile bomb directed by a thinking, breathing human being. And he was going to die. None of the power of his position would alter that.

The vehicle made a left turn as soon as it crossed the moat, the Arab with one hand on the wheel and one holding the weapon aimed at the American. As if he could do anything now. He was close to catatonic, rocking forward and back in the passenger seat. Begging for a miracle.

The vehicle picked up speed, racing down the asphalt

lane, the brick and stone buildings constructed centuries ago a blur outside the window. The American heard the Arab curse and opened his eyes. He saw the Arab staring into the rearview mirror. The American rotated around and caught sight of a man on a motorcycle right behind them. A rider on a BMW, closing in on the bumper, no helmet, long hair blowing in the wind.

A man the American thought he recognized, but that would be impossible. Even so, he began to hope.

The driver began chanting in Arabic, stoically reciting something over and over. A brick wall, protection for a courtyard built long ago, appeared outside the passenger window. *The museum.*

They reached the end of the lane and the Arab whipped the Range Rover around the turn, tracking the brick wall. The American saw the entrance to the museum about two hundred meters ahead, a gaggle of men in suits walking to cars parked outside.

And another BMW motorcycle headed right toward them.

The bike raced by the entrance, security men shouting as it passed, brandishing weapons way too late.

The motorcycle grew larger, playing an insane game of chicken. To their left was an ancient berm; to the right, the brick wall of the museum. There was no way to avoid each other. The Arab dropped the weapon and put both hands on the wheel, then floored the accelerator. The American shrieked, jamming his foot against a non-existent brake pedal in the passenger footwell.

The motorcycle kept coming, the rider helmetless, his jaw clenched and teeth bared.

And the American recognized him as well, but couldn't believe it. There was no way that man was here.

They closed within fifty feet and the biker yanked his

handlebars, diving off as the motorcycle went into a slide, spraying gravel as it sliced into the ground.

The Arab screamed, jerking the wheel and slamming the vehicle into the berm. The world tumbled into a kaleidoscope of images. Sky, tearing metal, ground, shattered glass. The American slammed into the door, then the roof, coming to rest upside down on the seat of the Range Rover, the vehicle sliding to a stop on the passenger side. He heard nothing but the ticking of the engine.

The Arab to his right began to stir, slowly rising up and searching for the box, and the American realized he had seconds to alter his destiny. He slapped his hands on the man's wrist, and the Arab punched him straight in the mouth, knocking him back. He rose up, the siren call of self-preservation pushing him forward, and he heard multiple cracks, the Arab's face popping open as if someone had driven in fishhooks and then ripped them out.

The Arab toppled over in the seat, the box held in his hands.

The American sat still for a moment, stunned, the steam rising from the engine, one wheel still grinding as it rotated freely. He looked out the windshield and saw his savior. The man from the rear motorcycle, a huge grin on his face, holding a smoking gun.

The American sagged against the seat, unbelieving. After two hours of hell, he was alive. He floundered in the seat for a second, getting his feet underneath him, then began the climb toward the driver's door above him, a smile plastered on his face. He jerked the door handle, found it unable to open, but the window above him was shattered and clear. He clawed his way over the body of the Arab, struggling to escape through the sliver of daylight, hearing shouting from the front.

He looked through the stars in the windshield and

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saw his savior screaming at him to stop. Confused, he simply grinned, and continued on. The man shouted again, now frantically waving his arms. The American paused, wondering what was causing the concern. He looked down, and saw his foot on the small box. An innocuous thing, held in the hand of the dead Arab. He lifted his foot, and the box fell out, a long, long drop to the other side of the vehicle.

The last thing he experienced in his mortal life was a flash of light. No heat, although his body was consumed by fire a millisecond later.