

GUN ESCORT

HALF an hour later, Ahmet and Leigh shared hot chocolate in the very quiet front room. They sat side by side on the floor cushions, leaning back against the wall cushions. The only movement was Chegi using his funny little hop to cross the carpet from here to there, seemingly with no destination in his tiny mind.

“It was a good visit,” she said. “Not too long, not too short.”

“I miss them,” said Ahmet, surprising Leigh.

“What do you miss about them?”

“They were fun, really,” said Ahmet. “Mom is looking like you. Dad is feeling like you.”

“What feeling?”

“Comfortable.” He dropped his head sideways onto her shoulder and picked it up again.

“Oh, but it’s nice to be alone.” Leigh sighed and slouched more into the cushions and Ahmet’s side.

“Now we can work on the book,” said Ahmet.

“What’s to work on? We’re living it,” she said.

“Write more about the Organization.”

“Like what?”

“Tell about when we moved guns to the East.”

Leigh’s face was alarmed as she turned quickly to Ahmet, and he said hastily, “It was a small truck just and I was an escort just.”

“Uh huh.” Leigh was thinking that she didn’t really want to hear a story.

Ahmet creased his forehead and tapped an index finger on his bended knee. A *sigara* was already in his other hand, its smoke streaming straight up to the ceiling.

After a dramatic pause, he began. “There was one escort in front of our white truck with a radio to talk, and I was behind, in my car, with a radio also. There was a big plan, and we must leave Istanbul on exactly the time. The truck goes from Istanbul to Diyarbakir, but my part is only to Ankara. Then new escorts and like this all the way so we have local licence plates, you see?”

“Our car doesn’t have a local plate.”

“I did not drive our car.”

“How far behind did you drive?”

He shrugged. “Sometimes one or two cars, sometimes many.”

“Go on.”

“We also had someone far ahead in a car. He got to a toll, and he called us to tell he saw a long line of white trucks being searched.”

“How were the guns hidden?”

“I didn’t see, but they will be in boxes like food. You see they stop white trucks because they hear some thing.”

“A tip,” nodded Leigh.

“A spider.”

“A spy?”

He nodded. “Our car in front our truck went through the toll and stopped on other side to watch the truck.

The truck was send to the line of white trucks. They are searching one by one. The other trucks were going through, no problem. You see? When I come to there I see our truck moving to that line slowly slowly. I horn long like this.” He honked the air and spoke faster. “I push my gas a little, and I go here and there.” He turned an imaginary steering wheel sharply right then left. “I crash through the front gate, and I hit the cement in front of the little toll house.” He smacked his hands together and laughed. “Good, isn’t it?”

Leigh shook her head. “No one was hurt?”

“No, no. It looks bad and sound very bad with horn and crash. I open the door a little, and I fall out the car on the ground, and I look like going to sleep – what is it?”

“Unconscious.”

“*Hah!* They all come running to me. They check to the car. They try to understand. I wait. I don’t talk. I look very sick. I can see our truck didn’t go to the line. It went out with the regular trucks, colour trucks, and past the toll. It was a very big mix that I made, so everybody was confused. They go here and there. Cars everywhere and lines, and some go out of the lines.” He laughed.

Leigh was silent.

“Very good, isn’t it?” he asked.

Leigh didn’t answer but stood up and went quietly to a corner where she’d seen Chegi crawl under a sweater. She squatted and gently scooped him up into her arms.

“What did they charge you with?” she asked Chegi in her hushed bunny-voice.

Ahmet raised his eyebrows. “Charge?”

She sat back down beside him, Chegi warming the crook of her arm. “Court? A ticket?”

“No! I tell them it is problem with car. Sometimes the gas sticks on.”

“They let you go?”

“*Hah*. After two hours I feel better. They like me. I share American *sigaras*, good ones. We talk about many things.”

Leigh could believe it, but there was still a part of her that didn’t want to. “You drove away,” she said flatly.

“*Hah*.” He nodded his head vigorously.

“*VAllah?*” (Really by God?)

“*VAllah*.”

Ahmet drained his hot chocolate. “It is sweet too much.”

“Mmm, but you drank it.” Hers was long gone. “Did the guns arrive?”

He shrugged one shoulder. “I don’t know.” His forehead creased. “But put in the book, yes, they arrive.”

“Is that whole story true?” she asked.

“*VAllah*, I told you! This is the story of the struggle, the true story.”

She put the bunny down and stood up.

“My Angel, what do you think? I know what is true! This is true. I had a big blue on my elbow here,” he motioned, “and bump here on my head. Big one, and the car – it was crash a little in the front.”

Leigh gathered up the cups without further comment and carried them to the kitchen. She dropped them with a clatter into the sink and looked at the photo of Chegi she’d taped on the wall. Then she turned and gazed

out the window to the building next door. Its balconies faced her balcony, and they were filled with balcony accoutrements: hanging clothes and carpets, basins and jerry-cans, carpet-beaters and bags of loose coal. Leigh buttoned her cardigan and crossed her arms; she tilted her head to empty it of cars and checkpoints and guns. She thought of Canadian balconies with flowers and lawn chairs, people drinking coffee or wine. Red geraniums. Overfed cats licking their paws. Breakfast at cold glass tables: chilled milk in a bag, small boxes of cereal, only Frosted Flakes left.