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Indonesia: Translation of Jihadist Book 'Wind From Paradise'

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[The book entitled "Wind From Paradise" is an anthology, styled a "jihad novel," consisting of four short stories: "Wind From Paradise," by Ummu Saad; "When the Sheaves of Rice Begin To Bend" and "I Settle it All in Chechnya" by Ummu Fauzi; and "The Fragrant Scent From Pattani" by Pakne Izza. It was published by Ar Rahmah Media, a company that is directed by Muhammad Jibril Abdul Rahman, son of senior Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI) figure Abu Jibril, and produces jihadist propaganda videos and books.]

Wind From Paradise

by Ummu Saad

"Wake up! Get up, lazybones, look at yourself -- a grown boy still needing his mother to wake him up!"

"I went to bed late, Mom. Give me some more time, okay," he said, pulling the covers over his head to block the light from the lamp. But from under the blanket, he couldn't go back to sleep, so he got up and sat on the edge of the mattress.

"Take a bath and get down here, or I'll call your father!"

Diraar thought for a while that why his father had not gone to work yet. Does this mean that mother won't have anything for them?

It was already 1100. People would certainly think him lazy and useless, only sleeping -- sleeping for half the day. But that wasn't quite right; he had gone to bed late, wrapped in thoughts and worries.

Slowly his eyes began to open; he yawned and forgot what his mother had just said.

"Diraar!" she cried in a sustained voice. He tossed up the blanket and ran to the bathroom, then came out quickly again.

"Yeah, just a minute."

He heard someone laughing from the bottom of the stairs, and he knew that his ruse had been seen through -- he hadn't bathed at all. He slowly sat in the chair. His hands combed through his tousled hair. Would his father tell him to cut his hair? What would he say? Nothing was clear, because it was hard for him to open his eyes. He looked at the bed with an air of regret. He'd intended to wake up early today, but last night, he'd had to finish his work until late at night and was late

getting up.

His mother entered. "What's going on? Why are you still sitting here?" She smiled. "You still haven't bathed yet, have you?"

"No, not yet!" He got up and grabbed a towel and some clean clothes.

He went downstairs feeling refreshed.

"Peace be upon you." His greeting was instantly answered by the rest of the family.

"Waking up early is much better than sleeping late, Diraar."

Diraar smiled, a smile without meaning, only because he wanted to smile. His father knew that Diraar had understood what he had just told him, but for Diraar, it wasn't easy to follow his father's advice, for reasons he found hard to explain.

"Are you going out, Son? You look well-dressed and ready to go."

"Yes, Mom, I'm going to that village about which you told me yesterday."

"Oh, I forgot about that," his mother said, feeling proud of her son's obedience.

Diraar gobbled down his food quickly, his mouth full.

"Be careful, you'll choke, dear!"

"I have to go now, Mom, so I can get home early, God willing."

He looked at his mother from the corner of his eyes and with his mouth still full of food.

"You want to come, Mom?"

"I would love to go just to give you company, but ..."

"Well, it's okay, I'll go by myself," he said taking a glass and drinking from it, standing up to help the food go down more quickly.

"May God...."

But without waiting to hear his mother's complete blessings, he left.

The car surpassed other cars several times, then, it was surpassed by others.

"You're still a young boy, aren't you?"

Diraar looked at the taxi driver and said, "No!"

He smiled emptily, not really friendly toward the driver, who shrugged his shoulders and said, "Where are you getting off?"

"In the village up ahead," he pointed out. "But it is difficult to drive there, so I'll walk. Let me get off near that bus stop there."

"Okay. You come from the city?"

"Yes. Actually, I'm from Pakistan."

"Oh, I see... And your grandfather lives in that village there?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"Many young people come to the city, and their grandfathers never find a place as nice as their home villages. That's always the reason."

"Yeah, the border's near that village, right?"

The taxi driver tried to catch his eye and said, "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it's nothing, I was just asking. But there is a border with Afghanistan, right?"

The taxi driver laughed. "Yes, but not near there. The border with Kashmir is actually closer."

His mentioning Kashmir seemed to imply a secret that both of them wanted to share through feelings only without directly mentioning it.

"Do you want to go there or what?"

Diraar didn't answer, caught up in his thoughts. He reconsidered what the taxi driver had asked him; the latter seemed to like letting conversations unfinished.

Diraar felt he didn't need to say what his heart had been keeping secret. Although there was no one else, it was risky to reveal one's innermost thoughts to a driver one had just met.

"What are you up to now?"

Diraar looked briefly at the taxi driver as if he had just come back from another world.

"I ... I'm a student at a university in Lahore."

"That's good. You'll get a good job, add to your family's income, and build a good home."

"With the grace of God. Where do you come from, Uncle?"

He realized that he had only been answering questions and hadn't tried to be as friendly as the driver had been from the beginning.

"I'm from Quetta, a small town on the border there."

Diraar's eyes implied honest enthusiasm hearing this.

"I hear there are many terrorists there. Is that why you left there, Uncle?"

The man's eyes changed and become serious and answered harshly.

"Yes, partly because of that. But they don't come from Afghanistan, almost all of them are local people and come from the police station!"

Diraar laughed quietly listening to this. But he didn't reply, as if the topic was too serious to be made light of.

"They arrested many people there. After having so many loved ones go missing, it became impossible to live there anymore."

Diraar stared gently at this man when the car's wheels hit a rock in the road. He was still smiling, as he said, "Uncle, have you ever met any mujahidin?"

The serious look of the man seemed to soften. He began to tell stories that truly pleased him, but those stories were off limits for various reasons.

"I was still young when the Soviets occupied Afghanistan. A student like you, my boy. We heard about the war, the Arabs, and the mujahidin -- those from abroad and the local ones. At one point, several friends decided to join them. There were many good people then. The headquarters of the Arab mujahidin was near our campus and influenced us a lot. We met many Arabs, those trying hard to speak Urdu and some trying to speak the local Pashto. We would laugh, and they would laugh in return. Many friends decided to join them, and I, too, thought, why not? Finally, I went. I participated in several battles and was sent home when I was badly injured. By the time I got home, the fierce war ended, and God blessed the mujahidin with victory, and I was myself cured of my injuries."

Diraar listened to the taxi driver's story. This man hadn't only met some mujahidin, he himself had been to the field of battle!

"Uncle, you don't sound so religious when you're talking of other things."

"You will learn how to do it when you need to avoid the inquisitive looks of people to get past them to your enemies!"

Suddenly, Diraar remembered the time when he was on a summer holiday at home ...

"Don't go anywhere, you naughty boy!" his mother had warned, always nagging and worrying about him as they walked on the narrow, chaotic path by the road.

"How, I wish, would he grow up faster," she said to her husband, who was walking along them after they had parked their car not far from that spot. Suddenly, she opened her purse, remembering something. "We forgot...."

Diraar, who had gone exploring around the house, came back to find his parents in a slight panic.

"Mother, father, what is it?"

"We left the house key at home, someone has to go home and get it. What are we going to do?"

"Does this mean we'll have to sleep outside?" Diraar asked.

"Quiet, foolish boy!" his mother scolded him with a bit of love mixed with anger, regretting her carelessness.

Diraar laughed loudly and asked if he could go with a group of kids who were playing football nearby. His father and mother had decided to go home to get the key and Diraar would stay behind. Maybe they'd be back by the time of afternoon prayers.

Diraar played football until he was tired. He played with an excess of energy, running here and there chasing and dribbling the ball. The call to prayer from the mosque could already be heard. His friends, actually his new, football friends, had all gone home. Diraar was left alone there. He felt a bit worried because the sun was beginning to set.

He walked slowly to their summer house and stopped at the door. What was that loud chattering sound coming from inside? Nothing, it must have been his imagination. But, then, he heard it again. He searched for a likely explanation but couldn't find one. He looked around him, but there was no one there but he. Why hadn't his parents come home yet?

Suddenly, he felt brave. He started looking around the house. He turned the door handle, but it wouldn't turn. How strange, since the door was open. The wind was forcing its way through. Had his parents already come home without calling for him? The lamps hadn't been lit, and the place seemed deserted. He took a few hesitant steps into the house as if he were intruding into someone else's house.

There was a blanket thrown down in the middle of the floor. Several pieces of paper were scattered about on the desk next to a kind of lantern, which, he knew, didn't belong to them, though he couldn't say with certainty.

He heard the soft sound of someone speaking approaching the house. It was almost dark outside, but the shadow of a person could be seen vaguely from the window. They were carrying a torch -- two men speaking in a low voice as if whispering. Why were they coming toward the house? Should he run away? But they were already at the door.

"Hey, Salman! There's someone in the house. The front door's open, I'm sure it was closed earlier."

"Doesn't matter, maybe the owners have come back. We'll apologize."

"Be careful, you're always in a hurry. Make sure they're not spies."

"No way," Salman laughed. "I don't think so. Look at this little visitor we have here."

Diraar looked inquisitively at them from head to toe. Two men, wearing long Arab-style shirts, with long beard and looking disheveled. One of them held the torch, jackets were slung across their shoulders and something was sticking up from behind their jackets.

"What are you doing here, boy?"

Diraar gathered his courage again.

"This is my house. What are you doing here?"

The two men laughed.

"Is that right? Where are your parents?"

"They forgot the key; they should be home any minute. We left the house for a while to go out. You must be thieves."

Diraar laughed.

"What's so funny, child?"

"Sorry, I just remembered a joke."

Diraar walked in a circle around the room. Both his hands were in his pockets, and he was thinking about the men in front of him now. He finally decided that the two men looked okay, so he sat down in a chair in the room. The lamps were turned on, and the two men quickly covered their belongings.

"Have you been in a battle...?" Diraar started to ask.

"Yes," Salman answered without turning around, straightening some papers in his hands. "But we've been fighting with rifles, not swords," he said laughing.

"I hope I can fight some day, too. It must be fun."

"Battles aren't fought for fun, boy. War is to evoke divine blessings, to uphold the religion of God."

Little Diraar didn't understand, but he nodded. Everything was just piling up in his brain.

"If you want, you can come with us!" one of the men offered. "We're going to"

Salman stepped on his friend's foot to keep him quiet.

"Look, we're going back to the battlefield."

Salman sat next to Diraar.

"Do you want to become a mujahidin and fight together with us?"

Diraar shook his head hesitantly.

"But just now you promised us you wanted to fight in a battle, didn't you?"

"Yes, but not now. Daddy and mummy will be angry if I go without telling them. They will be worried. I'll go later, I promise."

"You're a good boy. Grow up fast. We need people. We will tell them that that you will be coming soon."

"Really?"

Diraar was so enthusiastic that he jumped from his chair gleefully.

"I will come!" little Diraar shouted happily.

Salman's friend laughed quietly and looked at him. Salman looked at him lovingly. In another part of the world, far from there, his children were probably missing him. But his longing for God was stronger.

"We will wait outside until your parents come home, and then, we will leave."

Not long after, they heard the sound of his parents coming back. The two mujahidin hurriedly snuck away. But they had left behind a thought.... a new way of thinking. About battle, about the mujahidin, about the battlefield where the name of God was raised high and His holy religion defended. All this made Diraar nervous. It would take time for him to fulfill his promise and to fulfill his obligations to his religion.

It was, rather, boring staying at his grandfather's house. But his spirits were high. The village was quiet; the nature was simple; and there were little things that seemed to have no purpose. Why did he have to hurry back home? Though there weren't many things of special interest in the village, there was a person he loved who he could meet there. Although this could mean that he would encounter the same thing a hundred times in a hundred visits to the village. The person he meant was not a girl or a girlfriend but a friend -- a friend who wasn't just a friend. The one true friend he had in the world. For the two of them, ordinary things could be transformed into very special things.

After morning communal prayer at the mosque, he sat listening to the religious teacher instructing the students on reading the Koran. He smiled, remembering the two mujahidin at their summer house in the past. He had been about the age of these students when he had met the two mujahidin.

"Am I dreaming, or am I really seeing Diraar again?"

Diraar turned his head and stared with his eyes wide open.

"Oh, my God," he cried. "Is it you, Tariq?"

They shook hands.

"I still can't believe I'm meeting you here."

"Same here. But I remember well the guy who used to sit for ages in the mosque after prayers. You are dressed up like a city boy."

"No, 'country' [in English in original]," replied Diraar.

Tariq laughed. Meeting Diraar has always made him laugh. The two then walked around the village together and exchanged stories.

"So how are your studies?"

"Good. God willing, I will graduate next year."

"Same here, God willing."

"What'll you do after that?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure, but I hope I can do something that's more than just earning money for the family."

"I know. I also don't really have a specific plan. Everyone's telling me to look for a good job and a proper life. But what's in it for me? Earning a lot of money? But what for? Isn't there something more important? We're not going to be on this earth forever."

Tariq smiled in agreement.

They kept talking. Their conversation didn't come to any conclusion. Diraar talked about his plans to go back home so that he could quickly finish his work and studies and how he planned to come again at the next school vacation. They agreed to meet again later that night.

"This village is like a place to run away."

"Yeah, I find it so quiet. In the city....we feel we don't need to interact intimately with our neighbors. But here....everything seems different. Reality makes everyone more honest and peaceful."

It was, indeed, very quiet in the village. The sound made by animals could be clearly heard at night -- cows, dogs, sheep. Softly heard from afar was the sound of shepherds singing local songs. There was peace here, far from the city. That's why Tariq and Diraar called it "The Silence of the Village" [in English in original], apparently inspired by the film "The Silence of the Lambs."

That night, Tariq came to pick up Diraar from his grandfather's house and to invite him to stay at his house. This was something pleasant after not having met for so long. They could talk together for a long time after dinner.

"After I graduate, I want to own a big social charity."

Diraar laughed. They were talking about Africa and places that were at war. His laughter seemed to express how far from completion his wish was.

"So who'll go to the battlefield?"

Diraar's face suddenly became pale and serious; the laugh had disappeared.

"Diraar, have I offended you?"

"No. I'm not really offended."

"I was only joking."

"I know. It's hard to say this....but, in the end, it's just that it is difficult to make everything happen than we think."

Diraar got up and was silent. It was as if the sky had fallen. If he were to go....his mother, how could he leave her? His family, how could he explain to them? His father, ah....

"Diraar, wait! Diraar!"

Diraar went out as if swallowed up by the darkness of the night.

In that darkness, he saw a man. Who was this man? He looked like an angel. Not like someone they knew and not a man from the village. This man was unique and looked extraordinary, suddenly.

"Come here, come on, come over here ..."

Diraar got up and approached the man.

"Breathe deeply. Do you smell it?"

"What?"

"Breathe in, taste it. That fragrant scent....that faint breeze that's blowing."

Diraar shook his head. It was now summer, the air felt sharp, humid, and hot. But this angelic man smiled and pointed to the distance.

"Believe me, this is like the wind from paradise. It comes from there...."

The man pointed again to the distance -- where there were borders and beyond that the land watered by the blood of mujahidin. From that bloody battlefield, the souls of the mujahidin had ascended after a martyr's death. The doors of paradise had opened up to receive their souls. Maybe a bit of the winds of paradise had been blown farther than it should have....

They both stood at the bus stop, each silent in his thoughts until Diraar broke the silence.

"You have to believe me, there was a man in that darkness. There was a gust of wind that was not ordinary and an extraordinarily fragrant smell, too, last night."

Tariq smiled. "I believe you."

"That gust of wind was not normal."

"Yeah, I believe you, Diraar."

The two were again silent in their thoughts. The taxi they were waiting for still didn't come. Diraar wanted to say good-bye before going home.

"I hope we can meet again, God willing."

"Yes, God willing , there won't be any unforeseen obstacle." Tariq smiled again.

"There's a taxi. Quick!"

"Bye, Tariq, we'll meet again during the next summer vacation, God willing. Peace be upon you."

Nothing unusual happened on the way home. As soon as he reached there, he felt sad to see how happy his mother was to see him return safely. If his mother's love for him wasn't so great, he would certainly not feel so heavyhearted about leaving. But it seemed his parents were hiding something from him, some unwanted surprise. Looking at his mother's and father's faces, he searched for some reason why the two seemed so jolly.

"What's going on? Tell me."

His mother laughed for a while. She said his sister had come home and that had made them happy. But, certainly, it wasn't just that, he knew. His older sister would often come home, and usually, they weren't as overjoyed as this time. Failing to figure out what his family was hiding from him, Diraar went to his room. He threw himself on his bed and took in several deep breaths.

Everything became chaotic in his thoughts again. What would happen after a year from now? Would he be able to leave? His parents certainly wouldn't agree to let him go to wage jihad. Impossible! He raised his finger....as if to shoot at the wall. Thousands of people were weeping, pleading with someone to help them, to save them from tyranny. And those who should help them were so frightened to go because the people who loved them were crying for them, afraid of their death. But all people will die one day, and it's certainly better to die with self-respect than to die abased and for nothing.

There was much work to be done, but he was too lazy to get up. He was angry at himself. His head was full of contradictory thoughts, one after another without cease.

Suddenly, he smiled. That was really a wind from heaven, he was sure of it. He made a shooting motion with his finger again, as if in a movie. Several children were sobbing and women wailing under oppression, not far away but nearby -- in Kashmir and, not farther from there, Afghanistan. Yes, Afghanistan!

All mujahidin have to go for a battle. Why are they called warriors if they don't go to war? Fighting jihad from a soft seat? God loved holy war with a sword, not a rifle. No!...sword.... Once again, he cocked his finger like a gun. So.... He threw himself at his mattress again, with his eyes staring at the ceiling.

"I'll be going off, whether they like it or not! It's my duty. I will go." His willful words sent him off to sleep earlier than usual.

Coming back from the next day's afternoon prayer, he felt sad and foolish. A strange feeling overtook his heart. Why was he so coward? But now there was work to do and university courses that he couldn't just abandon.

He went straight upstairs to his room and turned on his laptop. But it didn't start.

"Mom!" he shouted downstairs. "Has the electricity gone off?"

"Yes, dear, it just happened."

"That means there's nothing I can do but sleep," he mumbled to himself.

He lay on the mattress, which had become a place of psychological torture for him. How happy he would be if he could go to wage jihad, not be cooped up like this. But he would go soon.

"Your sister will wake you up later."

"No need, Mom. I can get up myself."

After not hearing any sound for a while, his older sister took off her veil and went upstairs with a glass of water.

"Get up, it's already late morning!"

Diraar turned himself over, lying on his side facing the wall.

"Go there, find another job.... I.... will." Diraar was mumbling, half awake.

"Ok, here's a job for you." She threw the water from the glass at her brother's face.

"Mom!" Diraar cried out; His sister went down the stairs laughing.

"What?"

"Nothing, Mom. I threw some water in his face."

"You two are like little children. Wipe up his mattress for him!"

"Later, I'll take it out to dry when he's already up, Mom."

Diraar stood up holding a pillow in his hands. He threw the pillow in his sister's direction, and she wasn't able to avoid it.

"Naughty fellow!" his sister screamed. Diraar laughed happily as he went back up the stairs.

"What news have you brought for him?" her mother asked her while she prepared their lunch.

"A beautiful young girl...."

No long after, Diraar came down, looking neat and slightly different.

"O Lord, my brother has already grown up," his sister said from across the table.

"Where are Aysha and Abang?" asked Diraar.

"They didn't come along. Oh, yeah, Mom, I'm about to go shopping, is there anything you need?"

"No."

"You want to come, Diraar? I have to buy a few things."

"No. I don't have much time to go shopping with you."

"Come on, it's not forbidden!" his older sister sneered. Diraar felt he had to go along.

They went on foot, the streets seemed full of people.

"First, we'll go to the library, then, we'll go shopping."

Diraar was silent. Actually, he wanted to refuse but couldn't do so. It was very hot, with the sun blazing. His sister was quiet as she gathered her words. She wasn't sure how to start. When they reached the library, she seemed tongue-tied, aware of the quiet atmosphere.

They sat down facing each other. With great difficulty, his sister began to speak.

"I don't know where to begin, we have often talked of this matter."

Diraar wanted to get up, but his sister stopped him from across the table. Diraar sat down again.

"I've found a girl who I think is just right for you."

"Later, Sister, please. I'm not ready to marry yet."

"She's very cute.... very pious...."

"Come on, Sister. I have to graduate first, and then, I need to go away ..."

His sister caught his hand and urged him to go out. It was too quiet to whisper in the library. She didn't want others to stare at them.

"Let's go shopping now, I'll get a taxi."

"I'm tired. Let's just go home."

"Hey, you're angry, aren't you?" his sister egged him on.

"No. But let's just go home."

His sister gave in. They turned back for home. When they reached there, Diraar went straight up to his room. The sister he loved so much would certainly follow him up there, he thought.

A girl! Diraar smiled. What would become of him if he got married? Certainly, everything would be more complicated, and he'd have to give up the idea of becoming a mujahidin. He didn't believe that a woman could encourage her husband to leave without coming back. Was there a woman capable of such a thing?

He didn't dare to tell anyone that the girl he dreamed of would be brave enough to support him or even go along with him. He smiled again. There were many good girls but none of them from here, it would seem. Nor was he interested in anyone, Even his parents had not found any for him. That was the problem. Day by day, he was drowning in the life of the here-and-now. He had to flee.... He shook his head and went down stairs.

"Where's sis, Mom?"

"She's in her room. You made her mad, didn't you?"

Diraar laughed and listlessly headed toward his sister's room. She was on the edge of her bed and ignored his entry into the room.

"OK, now, tell me about that girl." Diraar's cheeks reddened when he said the word "girl." His elder sister laughed, and Diraar's cheeks became even redder.

"She's a terrorist!"

"What?" Diraar replied, his eyes wide with surprise.

"She's a pretty girl...." she said. "But you're not ready to marry."

"No! Tell me first!" He went over and sat in front of his sister, who laughed again.

"Stop laughing and tell me who she is."

"Hey, first you tell me if you're ready."

Diraar smiled shyly. "Hmm, maybe, if I meet her, I'll be ready."

"So, then, that's good."

"So who is she?"

"I met her in London. She's from a well-educated family. She's pious, pretty.... what else do you want to know?"

"What did you mean, she's a terrorist?"

"She's extremely religious."

Diraar understood what his sister meant. His interest fading, he stood up to go.

"Her uncle went away as a mujahidin ..."

Diraar stopped and sat down again. "What?"

"Yeah, her uncle died a holy death during a war in Afghanistan, and his family later moved to Pakistan."

"And how about her?"

"She's a good girl, easily moved by the tragedy that Muslims are suffering all over the world; she cries easily."

"Yes, I know," Diraar replied while getting up.

"Wait! Sit down." Diraar stopped, listening halfheartedly.

"There's another girl, but her father and mother are not really agreeable to it. She lives in Pakistan. She's very beautiful. I've never seen a girl as beautiful as she. They're from a middle-class family, and I know her older sister."

"Beautiful? And what else? True beauty comes from within."

"Yeah, I'm just telling you what I know. But a girl as pretty as that.... it's crazy! She studies in a religious school. In fact, she said to her little brother that if someone had reached the age of 14 and above, they should go away to wage jihad." He sister laughed.

"So...."

"She's still quite young, she could still change her way of thinking. Everyone likes her, though her ideas make everyone reluctant to accept her."

Diraar nodded to himself. An embarrassed smile full of mystery appeared on his face. Had he gone crazy too? He knew that he wouldn't be changing his ideas.

He went up to the roof of the house. The night was dark but the moon was full. As beautiful as a girl behind her veil. He had a laptop on his lap, and he was holding a digital camera. He was trying to record the moment with his camera and laptop. That was his hobby, capturing special moments in nature. He mopped his forehead and looked at the results. Good.

"Come down, Diraar!"

"OK, Mom, just a minute."

"What are you photographing?" His mother was making candy. Diraar went down and picked up a couple of candies.

"Mom. You make the best candy in the world."

His mother smiled and noticed the laptop.

"I was photographing the moon. In a minute, I'll show you on my computer."

"I'll look at it later. Your sister spoke to you about...."

"Oh, my teeth.... I'll brush them."

His mother shook her head watching him going back upstairs. He was escaping, as usual, to avoid her.

He went into his room and quickly locked the door as if a monster had been following him. He stood in front of the mirror and talked to himself: "What should I do? Everyone's pressing me. If I don't make a choice, they'll surely marry me with someone.... London or Pakistan?" He shook his head.

Slowly, he sat down on the edge of the bed. London or Pakistan? London or Pakistan? London was good, she was a pious girl, and his parents liked her. But Pakistan was also good, the girl was good, pious, though her parents didn't agree to the match.

But the girl would become his wife, his heart whispered to him. Yes, she would be his wife, but she would be a part of the family, too. He wanted his wife to be by his side in the future. Would she be willing to go along with him for jihad? Certainly, she would go. So he thought about someone who would agree with his ideas. Yes, he wanted that girl to be his wife, like the wife of a terrorist. A sweet picture. So which one was better?

Tomorrow, he would have to go back to the campus to finish his studies. But thoughts of the girl kept coming back. London or Pakistan? Pakistan was stronger; she had the enthusiasm for jihad, a value he wanted. London also had a history of jihad in her family. But it was for sure that the girl would agree with it. Pakistan ... London.... Two cities with two girls continued to occupy his thoughts until he fell asleep.

The next day he went back to Pakistan. He went back to the campus, a life busy and full of people. The new semester was about to begin, so he would have to get his program approved. Suddenly, he remembered Tariq and hoped he could meet him again by chance. But Tariq wasn't studying in Lahore, so probably this hope was a futile one. After his semester program application was submitted, he went for lunch. On the way he heard the sound of the afternoon call to prayer, so he turned to go to the mosque.

After praying, he looked at the activities going on in the mosque. It seemed there was a special religious meeting. A man dressed as a religious scholar was teaching a group of people who sat around him. It was unusual for Diraar to get involved in other people's business. But, before he left, he stood in the doorway and tried to get a good look at the sheikh who was teaching. Unconsciously, the sheikh stared back at him. When their eyes met, the sheikh smiled. Diraar was perturbed, nodded respectfully, and left. He felt really hungry.

He sat at a corner seat at the restaurant. Suddenly, a man sat down in front of him, and he recognized him ... he had just met him or at least just seen him.

"Why are you following me?"

"I'm not following you, Son. All seats have been taken, so is it all right if we share this table?"

"Of course. Why not? You're not a Pakistani, are you?"

"No, and you?"

"I'm from Kashmir. I'm studying here."

"Kashmir.... a beautiful place."

"Yes, though not very beautiful at the moment. Are you new here? This is the first time I've seen you here."

"If you come here often, why are we just meeting now? I've come here to eat many times."

"I just come back from vacation."

"Oh, I see. I used to come here but it's been a while now. The place has really changed."

Diraar didn't seem interested in pursuing the conversation. His eyes focused on his plate, and he ate quietly.

"My name is Bilal Abdul Aziz. What's yours?"

"Diraar."

"Just Diraar?" the man asked laughing.

"Yes, anything wrong?"

"No, of course not. What's the latest news of the Afghan war here?"

Diraar looked at the man. What did he mean by this question?

"It's been a while since I've heard about Afghanistan. There are many things to distract one's attention. Why are you so interested?"

"No, it's just sad to see what's happening there, many people in agony, and you Muslims who can offer help are so far away." The man looked away. It was as if an arrow had plunged into Diraar's heart. The man's words were so piercing. How should he reply?

He looked at a group of men who were approaching the restaurant. When they saw the sheikh sitting there, they stopped and waited outside the door, their gaze full of respect for him.

"There aren't that many chances for men here to help. There are many obstacles -- family, study."

"Yes, many want to help but are afraid, and maybe that moment of hesitation weakens their good intentions. But it's an obligation, even though it's difficult."

Diraar played with his spoon and fork on his plate. His face flushed with feelings of grief and guilt.

"Has something I said offended you, Son?"

"No, not at all. Excuse me, I have to go now."

"Finish your meal, it's not right to waste food. We can talk. Maybe I can help you, God willing."

Diraar drank quickly. "There are many people waiting for you outside." The sheikh turned and looked at the many young people standing outside.

"Okay, I'll be here next Sunday at the same time. Come! I think there's a lot for us to talk about." The sheikh smiled warmly and got up from his seat. "I have to leave the country after that, so next Sunday at the same time. Peace be upon you."

"And upon you, too."

Diraar sat now by himself and seemed lonely and sad. Was the sheikh an answer from God to his recent questions and hesitations? Or was he caught in a trap? But he was sure that the sheikh was not one to trap him. The gaze of his eyes was so honest and his words so touching. He shook his head. Let's see what happens tomorrow.

Bilal Abdul Azis. He vaguely remembered hearing that name before. He shook his head again. I have to go now. I mustn't be late.

"Sir!"

"Don't call me 'Sir'. Call me Brother."

Diraar smiled shyly and felt ashamed. "Okay. I want to join your study group."

"Come to this address. This is a special class for special people."

"Fine. Peace be upon you, Sheikh."

"And upon you, too."

Sheikh Bilal was an extraordinary person. It was a joy to meet him. On his way home, Diraar kept trying to remember where he had heard that name before. His thoughts were really fixed on the personality of this sheikh he had just met.

"Mom!"

"What are you yelling for?" his sister said approaching him.

"What happened? What are you doing here again?"

"Mother's not here, there's a visitor inside; come in and don't be so noisy."

Diraar squinted, and his sister smiled. She hurried going past him into the living room.

"Peace be upon you."

When he first looked at them, he didn't seem to recognize any of them. He smiled shyly and politely nodded. No! Why were they doing this without his permission? From behind the door he tried to eavesdrop.

"He's just come back from the university. He'll graduate next year. What about you, dear?"

He heard a girl's reply, but he couldn't hear clearly. Afraid of being found out, he went upstairs to his room. No doubt the girl was the one from Pakistan....

Every time he came home, that's all his family talked about. But for him, all his thoughts were concentrated on the figure of Sheikh Bilal.

"Good! That one was good. I'll keep practicing how to use it." Diraar smiled while trying a few times to shoot blanks.

"You like me a little lesser than you like this rifle, right?" Ibtisam asked, smiling.

"No...."

"But you really like it, right?"

"It's hard to say how I like it."

She looked at Diraar intimately. "Like you can't say how much you love me." She bent down to pick up the comb she had dropped. Her hair fell along her shoulders. Diraar looked at her without blinking. Ibtisam smiled in embarrassment and ran off.

"Hey, wait."

His wife had disappeared inside. He had promised that he would be what his wife wished for, God willing.

The first days of their marriage were so beautiful. But now she was feeling so weak, her body so powerless, her eyesight so dimmed, sometimes confused.

"Ibtisam, take a rest. I will call a doctor."

"I'm fine. Sit here a minute." Ibtisam opened her eyes slowly.

"I'll ask my mother to stay with you while I go to call a doctor."

"Why are you so worried? I know I'm well, so don't worry."

"Sshh. This is God's will. Don't talk like that."

"Oh, some day, I'll surely die, so there's no need to call a doctor."

"Don't make me angry. I didn't marry you to hear you talk like that."

"I'm sorry, darling. Don't be angry. You look much better when you're not angry."

Diraar smiled. "Foolish girl."

Ibtisam smiled weakly.

"Make me stronger. God will give you the chance," Ibtisam bowed her head and tried to close her eyes.

After he escorted the doctor, who was leaving, to the door, he returned to be with his wife.

"You see? The doctor said you'd be fine."

"Sometimes, I feel healthy, but, suddenly, become very weak."

"We'll go abroad to get treatment, God willing."

Ibtisam didn't answer. Getting treatment wasn't what she wanted. She wanted Diraar to go protect his fellow believers. She didn't know that Diraar too wanted the same. They were both silent, each not wanting to hurt the other.

"Don't you want to go somewhere else?"

Diraar stared at his wife. "What do you mean?"

Ibtisam looked aside.

"No, nothing. But isn't it that you're not really satisfied with yourself?"

"Yes, that's true."

"Then, what's stopping you?"

Diraar didn't answer.

"You're not answering me. But you're answering yourself. How long are you going to live like this?"

Diraar got up and left the room. Ibtisam sobbed. "No! He shouldn't stay just because of me. Oh, God, give me health so that I can help him!"

Night slowly began to envelop the forest, to cover the enemy in its camp and to hide the wounded in its darkness. He could hear the footsteps of the enemy crossing nearby. He had to hold his breath and pray in his heart every time they went past. It was as if they were deaf, dumb, and blind. He wasn't going to make a move. But suddenly he heard a sound. A bulldozer. Were they trying to clear the forest?

No. Why should he do? Running away was as impossible as staying put.

Oh, God. He tried to get up. "Come on, feet! You have to help.... I don't even have a gun. If only I had one, even a Kalashnikov...."

"Ibtisam!" He remembered his wife, remembered the beautiful memories that had gone by so quickly. He could clearly remember her smile. They had been apart now for six months. It seemed like just yesterday that he had been taking care of his wife. It was like yesterday that he sat in the study group of Sheikh Bilal. Family, campus, Pakistan, Kashmir, world.... now everything felt far away in the world of dreams and the imaginary. Everything felt like a mirage; he was a single man facing a thousand men, wounded, shot in the legs. Hidden in the grass behind a tree, he felt that God had created this hiding place in this stand of trees just for him.

He heard footsteps approaching. Oh, God. Don't let them find me here, I beg of you. He held his breath in the darkness. The feet, clad in boots, walked next to him. The rifle carried by one of the men almost bumped his nose. Another man walked quickly, as if afraid, and Diraar said silently to himself, "The coward!" His sight began to darken, pain from the wound in his thigh grabbed hold of him. His feet felt cold and stiff, and he couldn't move. "Come on, feet, move! We have to get out of here."

The worst thing was that he had no weapon. Actually he and Tariq would have found weapons at the next post, but a

tragedy happened, and now he was left behind. He thought hard. "I don't want to die like this. I'd rather die fighting them. Maybe I'll use a rock if I don't find something else. A rock! In the hands of someone with faith it could become a bomb."

His hands were shaking. The pain from the wound where he was shot whipped through him again. He tried to stand up. The footsteps of the enemy could be heard again. He tried as hard as he could to walk. He took refuge under a tree while he grabbed a large stone. It was silent until....

"Wait, wait! I just saw someone over there...."

"Maybe it was an animal."

"No, it wasn't, it was a person."

Diraar stood still as a statue. It was impossible to run away, he had to fight. "Oh, God, give me a holy martyr's death now! Death in battle!"

Someone approached. No, many others followed. There was no question of fighting back.

"Come out! We're not going to shoot you. We know you're alone, so just give up now!"

Suddenly, one of them went past the tree. Diraar struck him in the face with the large stone. He staggered. Diraar took the opportunity to grab his gun and shoot him. He fell. The score was 1-0. Diraar smiled.

Suddenly, his wounded leg began to shake, and he fell. A burst of shots came in his direction. One bullet hit his wounded foot and the other lodged in his shoulder.

Fresh blood poured from his mouth, and he fell forward. He dropped the rifle he had just grabbed. His ears were buzzing, and suddenly, he went deaf. The feeling of pain now seemed so very far away....

Ibtisam suddenly awoke and sat up on her bed. Diraar's mother, who was watching over her, was also awakened.

"What is it, dear?"

"No, it's nothing, mother." She got up to get a drink. The dream had been so frightening. She now felt her body shaking.

"Diraar! May God protect you and grant you one of the two victories. He would certainly be safe. He had gone on the path of God. So why am I so afraid? Certainly, I'm feverish again." She smiled, recalling beautiful memories with him.

"O God. Where am I? Am I dead?" Diraar heard a loud noise, but it wasn't a normal sound. It was the sound of Westerners. He'd been captured. Yes, he was now in the enemy's hands. When he had left, his goal had been to struggle, and now he was struggling.... to keep his mouth shut. How difficult it was.

He had suffered, round after round, torture. The enemy now in front of him was so bent on revenge for their fallen compatriots, but no matter how cruelly they interrogated and tortured him, Diraar kept quiet. He prayed silently -- "O God. Give me patience.... patience...." -- until he was no longer conscious.

When he opened his eyes....

"You're conscious again. Here, drink this. We have a long way to go."

Diraar looked angrily at the man wearing a long, loose shirt standing in front of him. The terrible pain from the gunshot in his shoulder made him unconscious. All he could make out was that he was in a car going on a rocky road. Where was he being taken? Why did he hear gunshots continually? Where were the mujahidin? How could he fight back?

He was carried to a building where he heard people talking and saw an open door.

"You got him back."

"He still thinks we're the enemy."

Diraar's eyes were still sealed shut. His head drooped on his shoulder, which was still bleeding.

"God is great! Are you my comrades?" Diraar asked without opening his eyes. A deadly smile came across his pale face.

"Yes. You will be okay, God willing. We would never leave a brother like you to be swallowed up in the battlefield of Afghanistan."

"Are you still in pain?"

Diraar shook his head. "What happened? Where am I?"

"You were wounded in battle and taken captive, a brother saved you and brought you to a camp. But because your wounds are so severe, they brought you to this hospital."

"This is a hospital?" Diraar looked around -- many curtained screens, but the place was filthy.

"No, it's really a Mujahidin Clinic. But we have doctors and good medicine," the nurse answered, smiling.

"It was a fierce battle. Many thought you wouldn't make it."

"Really?" Diraar laughed. "Why?"

"I knew you wouldn't give in just like that. Now it's time for you to rest, don't move too much. All the brethren are busy, so there's no one to stay with you now."

In a while, the woman who had spoken in that gentle, quiet voice came back.

"Here are some books in Urdu. I hope your days will be pleasant."

"Thank you."

Books -- after all this time.

Diraar hoped that someone would come to visit him, but everyone seemed busy. After a while, the nurse came back.

"Hi. Could you sleep?"

"I dreamed that I had gone home."

"That often happens if we're far from home. How many books have you read?"

"Only one. I keep falling asleep."

"I haven't read even one myself."

She smiled. "My husband is the one who likes to read."

"Really? Where's your husband now?"

"In the battlefield. Praise be to God!"

"I left my wife at home...." Diraar began to say, his voice trailing off.

"Is that what you wanted? She could have come here. In fact, she could have been very helpful here."

"But she's not well. So it's better for her to be with my mother."

"I see. Is there anything else you need? Drink this tea."

"May God reward you, Sister. Do you have any news from the battlefield?"

"All I know is that it's going on well. Many have died glorious deaths, but I don't know the details. Excuse me, someone's coming, maybe it's a seriously wounded patient."

She disappeared behind the door, and the room was silent again. Suddenly ...

"Diraar!"

"Oh, Tariq!"

"Praise be to God."

"God be praised. How are you?"

"I'm already bored," Diraar muttered. "What's the news from the front?"

"It's intense, very intense. We're in control of the field, but the air bombardment has been destroying everything."

"Oh, my shoulder."

"Okay, Brother. Rest! If your shoulder doesn't get better, how can you go back and fight again?"

"I'll fight without my shoulder."

Tariq replied, "The commander would never permit it."

"Any news of my wife? How is her treatment coming?"

"Good. I heard that she had had an operation, but I haven't heard the details. Later, I'll get more news for you."

Diraar was startled. Ibtisam, operation?

"Are you crying, Diraar?" Tariq said, approaching the bed to comfort his friend.

Diraar lay there still. He realized now many things: He realized that the woman who was taking care of him was the wife of a beloved friend; he realized that it was impossible for him to go home; he realized that his will to fight was still strong. But there was a strange sensation that came over him. There was sound of insects buzzing outside.

Two weeks went by. The doctors allowed him to practice walking, to go around the camp. That was a good opportunity for him to find people to talk and to get the latest news from the battlefield. From day to day he saw people become increasingly busy. It seemed that a big operation was being planned, and the situation was urgent.

A month went by, Diraar was still in the hospital. He was able to help as much as he could. But he would only really be happy in battle. What else could replace that for him? Here there was only one choice, something he longed for, to be part of a martyrs' maneuver.

"How are you now?"

Diraar turned to the man who spoke. It was he who had saved his life.

"You. It's so good to see you here."

"I'm here for a special reason." He came closer to Diraar. "Do you remember our promise?"

"Which one?"

"About telling each other where we were heading for?"

Diraar shook his head, and the man smiled. He could almost see the light of holy death on his face.

"Yes. I've signed up for a martyrs' mission, praise be to God."

Diraar was silent.

"Aren't you happy for me?"

"Yes, I'm happy for you. But if only I could go along, too!"

"You won't have long to wait."

"Tell me when you're about to leave."

He nodded. "Sure, I promise."

Diraar's heart felt heavy. The man excused himself and left.

"Peace be upon you."

"Diraar? Peace be upon you. What are you doing here so late at night?"

"I wanted...."

"Come in, it's cold outside."

"I only wanted to add my name to the martyrs' mission."

"That's why you have come here. The list will only be decided tomorrow." The commander spoke with a smile.

"I want to be the first to be added to the list."

"God willing. Pray for righteousness."

"God willing. So you will add my name then?"

"Yes, Go back, it's already late."

"Peace be upon you."

"And upon you, too."

Diraar returned to his room, slowly. "Do I have to wait for a few days more?" He had already waited for so long.

The happy news came finally, though.

"You can go to the battlefield tomorrow, you've been approved."

Finally, he could get of this tormenting prison, the prison of waiting. Diraar hated waiting. Finally, this phase would be over, and now he could do something real.

Operation Holy Death. This is what had filled his thoughts over the last few days. He was grateful that his wounds had healed so fast.

He began to pack his things when Tariq's wife, the nurse who had cared for him, saw him and came up to him.

"Oh, yeah, I almost forgot -- the books."

"I don't need them. You can keep them for a while if you want. I have already told you that I myself hadn't read them."

"Okay, but your husband...."

"Take good care of yourself."

She turned around and went out, leaving Diraar looking bewildered.

Diraar got warm greetings at the front. The first thing that the commander told him was about his comrade, Tariq, who was also part of the martyrs operation.

"Go quickly! The other front is waiting for you, nearby here." Diraar smiled sweetly. Tariq stared at him.

"That front," he said, "is open for me."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Near here, come on, hurry up."

Tariq quickly parked the motorcycle while looking at Diraar. There was a strange calm on his face.

They heard the sound of heavy artillery. "Come, let's go up there. Go, Tariq."

"Okay."

They began to crawl up the hill.

"Tariq!" Diraar said suddenly. "It's the wind.... the wind from paradise."

Tariq stood as still as a statue. The sound of the shelling became louder from the valley beyond; the morning air felt warm in the breeze. There was no sign that....

While they stood ready in position, a friend came to tell them that the clinic where the mujahidin were being treated had been bombed by the enemy. There was still no information about who had survived and who hadn't. Diraar grit his teeth as he tried to control his anger. He loaded his rifle in the open space.

"Don't go there....that area is unprotected!"

"You can see them from here."

Diraar shot, once, twice. There was a deep satisfaction in his heart.

"I got two. God is great!"

The magazine was empty. Diraar bent to fill it. Suddenly....

A volley of shots felled Diraar. His rifle fell from his grasp. "God is great!" All turned in his direction. The wind began to pick

up, carrying a fragrant perfume. A smile crossed his lips, his dream had come true.

So all dreamers enter their dreams, without end, dreams that have come true.

E N D

"When the Sheaves of Rice Begin to Bend"

by Ummu Fauzi

The sheaves of rice to the right and left of the dike on which I was walking had started to bend heavily and turn yellow. The golden-yellow rice sheaves seemed to be swollen with their contents. I smiled. These sheaves of rice for me were like crystal made from the rivers of our sweat over the last month. How we had bathed in sweat fighting for them, especially my mother. Two paddy fields separated by dikes were the focus of our hope, what my father had left behind for us. As usual, with almost all the other villagers, that was how we lived. Everything simple and everyone helping each other out. If we didn't have enough money to work the paddy, we would ask others to help us. Several neighbors helped my mother to plant, weed, or fertilize, in exchange my mother and I would help them on their rice paddies. It all felt like swimming downstream.

But actually something had changed in our village over the last few years. There were small ripples in the flowing stream that day by day seemed to get bigger. Maybe it was the influence of television soap operas or the influence of something else, I don't know. At first, the older women liked to talk about the soap operas they often watched on television. They actually didn't really understand the stories they were watching, because they didn't really understand Indonesian very well, let alone use it, for many had never been to school. But girls of my age liked to playact, so while watching the soap operas, they interacted with them. They were so impressed with the grand houses, the luxurious cars, the parties, and all the accessories of luxury that the soap operas offered. All the girls -- and the young men, too -- liked to dress up like the television soap opera stars, no matter how ridiculous it looked. Then, in the regency towns, there started to appear government labor recruiting centers called PJTKI or something like that. What I remember is that housewives started going off to work as maids in Malaysia, and young girls from the village were even going to Hong Kong to work. The young men in the village, too, were going off to work in Taiwan or Korea. Everything changed so fast. So many of my neighbors went overseas to try their luck. Some of my friends went to Hong Kong. They said they were going to be housemaids.

Something startled me. A frog had jumped on the dike right in front of my feet. I, then, went back to looking at the golden-yellow sheaves of rice starting to bend. I don't know why but each time I looked at the rice sheaves bending down, it was as if they were bearing down on the upheaval in my heart. Unlike the women and girls who wanted to pursue their dreams in other countries, I pinned my hopes on continuing my schooling. It was now almost a year since I'd graduated from high school, and I was drowning in my dreams to keep on studying. I wanted to go to college, even if only for a vocational degree. But it wasn't possible. Since my father had died two years ago, everything had become more difficult. My mother had to support me and my two younger siblings. Although I was a girl, I was the first child, so it was with me that my mother divided up the work. On top of that, the money to pay the hospital bill for my father, before he passed away, was still unpaid, and the amount was high, almost 3 million rupiah. We had borrowed money from my mother's distant cousin, and we had to pay it back in installments every harvest time.

I touched the sheaves of rice that were bending down and turning golden-yellow. Let's hope these sheaves of rice can quickly help us pay back my mother's debt. Let's hope these sheaves of rice can quickly help me fulfill my dreams. I want to go to college. I want to be like Fitri, the daughter of my high school teacher who had become the leader of a religious

study group at the school mosque. I was impressed by her diligence, her piety. I was impressed with the stories of religious preaching that she had carried out with other sisters of the faith at the campus mosque. I was impressed with the books about jihad that she would often lend me. Unfortunately, I only knew Fitri in my last year of high school. The religious study group at my high school only started when I was in my senior year and at about the time they finished building the school mosque. By the time my resolve to study Islam, to correct my understanding of my religion had grown strong, I had already graduated and had to leave behind my friends and the study group led by Fitri.

"Next week, we'll be harvesting, dear."

Again I was startled. Aunt Kamilah, our neighbor, addressed me from the parallel dike.

"Yes, God willing, Auntie. I hope the harvest will be good," I replied, smiling.

"Amen [May you be blessed]," said Aunt Kamilah, as she walked away, probably on her way home. I also started back for home. It was already late afternoon, and my mother would certainly be waiting for me. While walking home, I picked some chili peppers and some water spinach that we had planted by the hut at the side of the paddy. We always planted various kinds of vegetables and some chilies to keep down the amount we had to buy. That was one way of lessening the burden. We always thanked God for all his blessings.

I read the Koran after doing the late afternoon prayer. I read it slowly. I tried to study what it meant. I tried to find some comfort, something about the meaning of life. I was trying to learn to surrender to God. But unlike my younger siblings, who liked to watch soap operas, I preferred reading, sometimes just thinking and learning to write. Sometimes, I tried to write short stories, memoirs, or small notes about my life, as I called them, when something interesting would strike me. I described events in my life, trying to analyze them and draw lessons from them. All this calmed my heart after the hard work in the rice fields all day.

"Nadia, can I come in," my mother asked, knocking on my door.

"Of course, Mom."

My mother appeared from behind the door. Her face looked calm, as usual.

"There's something about which I want to talk to you. I have known for a long time that you really want to go to college as your father, too, had wished. Shortly, the new college year will begin. I think you should be able to start college this year," she said taking a long breath.

"But, Mom," I interrupted.

"I have a small piece of jewelry my grandmother had given me, may God bless her soul. I think it could be used to cover the entrance fee. Then, I'll add more from the sale of the harvest. You have the right to follow your dreams, dear. Let's work hard together." My mother embraced me, and I began to cry in her embrace.

I was carrying my black suitcase. That was my fortune -- a few long shirts, a headscarf, and some short stories and life notes that I had brought with me along with the minimal school things. I got on the intercity bus that would take me to

Surabaya. From there, I would change buses for Jember, where I would start college, in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Jember. I had arranged all this myself, to keep costs low. If my mother had to accompany me, it would have been hard for my two siblings left at home. After my father died, I grown used to doing things on my own, at first, because I had to, but eventually because I enjoyed it and was grateful for it. When I first went to Jember to register myself, I immediately set out to find a boarding house where I could stay. Through a high school friend of mine who had graduated earlier, I found a boarding house for girls on Java Street. The place was simple and quiet, with only six girls staying there. The most important thing was that I could afford the rent and that it wasn't coeducation, God forbid.

After the eight-hour journey, I was tired. More accurately, my emotions were tired. I took myself to the boarding house and rested there after doing my late afternoon prayers. I thought of my mother -- surely, her burden was now even heavier. Usually, I would be the one to help her do the backbreaking work in the rice fields; now she had to do it herself. I thought of my younger siblings. Who would remind Ahmad to do his daily prayers, when he was lazy and couldn't be dragged away from the television screen? Who would help Nida with her homework? For my mother couldn't do that, as she'd only been to elementary school herself.

The first year of college seemed very difficult. I knew that my mother was probably running around trying to cover the college tuition and pay back her loans. In the nights, I would often cry while praying, asking God to lighten my mother's burden. Thank God, when I was about to enter the third semester, I was accepted as a private tutor for junior high school girls. Twice a week, I would teach an Islamic play group. The salary I would get was enough to pay my boarding house rent and cover my daily needs. I was happy and grateful. At least my mother didn't have to send me money every month now. Now while my girlfriends at the boarding house were so delighted to get money transfers from their parents, I would be waiting for the second day of the month, when I would get my monthly salary. God's help was indeed around.

There were other things that made me even happier. Several of my pieces were accepted for publication in magazines and newspapers. The honoraria for these was also quite high, at least for my budget. Gradually, I was able to save. I wanted to be able to cover my college tuition costs each semester. My efforts were not in vain, and I spent part of my free time at the campus library. I always looked for sources for my articles in the library or just used the books there as an inspiration for my short stories. Although many of my articles and short stories were rejected by the publishers, quite a few were accepted, too. I saw all this as part of the process of learning to be a writer and appreciated the financial benefit, too, of course.

"Nadia! Someone's looking for you, waiting in the living room," Ani shouted.

"Okay, just a minute," I said, hurrying to put on my head scarf and leave the room.

"God be praised, Ummu Fahim [literally, 'mother of Fahim'], how are you?" I said, embracing and greeting my guest.

"Thank God, I am fine. Since I was in the neighborhood, I decided to stop by. How are you, Nadia?"

"Well, Ummu, all is well. My college studies are going well. Next semester, God willing, I'll do my community service. I'm now seriously studying Madurese language to prepare for it."

"Let's hope you go to Bondowoso, yeah, so we can be close. Also, so your religious studies don't suffer either!"

"Amen. Pray for me, Ummu."

"Yes, I will. I have some good news for you," she said, with her face gleaming.

"What is it?" I asked impatiently.

"Ssh," she said moving closer to me. "Abu Fahim will be home soon, God willing, together with two other mujahidin from Bandung. They're trying to raise money here first, they said."

"God be praised. You must be very happy."

"I don't know, maybe Fahim has already forgotten his father's face. It's almost two years already. When he set off, the boy was just learning to walk."

We spent the afternoon chatting and discussing. Around the time for afternoon prayers, Ummu Fahim took her leave. I accompanied her to the end of the alley, and my beloved teacher turned to Java Street, in front of the Faculty of Letters. Ummu Fahim was a strong woman, her patience as great as the breadth of her vision. It was she who had helped me understand the true Sunni view of religion and to understand international politics and global jihad, too. Her understanding was of a piece with her actions. She did not object when Abu Fahim left for the jihad battlefield in Afghanistan, fulfilling the call of the Lord, almost two years ago. She had even said at that time that if she hadn't been born a woman, she would've liked to join in helping her coreligionists who were struggling against the barbarous aggressor, the Soviet Union.

To earn her living, Ummu Fahim taught at a Muslim elementary school in Jember. I never heard her complain or feel sorry for her life's difficulties or about anything else. Her enthusiasm was infectious, especially when she was in full flow talking about the writings or speeches of jihadist sheikhs, especially Sheikh Abdullah Azzam. From this strong woman, I really learned about all these things. That was why the news that her husband was about to come home also made me happy, too.

The office of my community service posting from the college was at the end of a small footpath. It was in a remote village in the Regency of Bondowoso, most of whose population spoke Madurese. I really felt isolated. Access to the intercity road was only by motorcycle taxi or a horse buggy for hire. Sometimes, I cancelled my trip to Jember for religious meetings because there was no horse-and-buggy around. I didn't like to go on the back of a motorcycle taxi -- I felt embarrassed, and it seemed sinful, and I don't know what else. So the two and a half months of community service were like a period of isolation for me. The only thing that entertained me was when the women of the community would make fun of me for mispronouncing words in Madurese. I was learning it from the books I had borrowed from the library.

The natural surrounding there were hilly, with only sidewalk to other villages at the edge of the village. These sidewalks were enough for a motorcycle to pass through, but they eventually became narrower and steeper. The hills were really almost arid and completely devoid of greenery. I had three times been up to the hills, together with villagers who were doing a reforestation project. The air was hot and the path rocky. Sitting on a large stone, I imagined the jihad in Afghanistan. The mujahidin would go along narrow, rocky paths in the mountains there and hide in caves in freezing air at the mountain summits in Bamir, Sulaiman, Torah Bora, or Kandahar. Following the Afghan mountains at each step carrying an AK-47, avoiding the missiles and bombs from the Soviet planes -- that's how I imagined the Afghan mujahidin. Some of them would have weapons to attack the enemy helicopters or planes, like rocket launchers.

"I want to go home now, Sister," said Mrs Amah in Madurese, gathering up neatly our things that had been scattered about. This middle-aged woman lived next door to our community service post. I nodded in agreement, got up from where I was sitting and started descending. Although the people in this village were pleasant and friendly, I still felt like an outsider. Especially knowing that Abu Fahim, as planned, would be home during January 1990. I wanted to meet him to

hear his stories. Too bad that, although I was near Jember, it was too hard for me to leave this place where I was doing community service, both because of the matter of the motorcycle taxis and because of the tight watch kept on us by our supervising professors.

Finally, I graduated, late than about one-third of the other students in my class. I asked my mother's permission to delay coming home. My mother didn't mind, as it wasn't really an added burden for her. Except for the first year of my college, I had almost never asked for money from her. I tried to fulfill all my myself from my salary as a teacher and from the money I earned from writing. I wanted to stay about another year in Jember. I wanted to find a position as a translator while continuing to deepen my understanding of Islam at the study group at Ummu Fahim's house.

I was about 24 years and felt there were many things I had done for myself, but that I hadn't done much for other people, especially for the global jihad that was going on in countries where the Muslim community was being oppressed. The articles I had written also seemed not having much impact on the Muslim community, except a few friends who were diligent enough to read magazines or newspapers. I wanted to do some concrete good, directly, or whatever it might be called -- to take part, although only in a small way, in spreading the faith and carrying out jihad. I wanted, if I could, to have a signature wound gained in the holy struggle on the path of God. But why did I often think that such a dream was aiming too high, too unrealistic? I couldn't find a way to reach that goal.

My dream to take some part in jihad and the content of some of the articles I had written often made my college classmates think me strange. None of them had ever seen me speak to or walk with a boy. They knew me as a strange and reserved girl. I preferred reading and writing. At my boarding house, it was different; I was everyone's favorite person to confide in, maybe because I could always keep their secrets, offer my advice as best as I could with the understanding of Islam, or because they believed that I wouldn't laugh at them. I never did! I considered them sisters, and I cared for them.

I don't know why suddenly my heart was pounding when I knocked on Ummu Fahim's door. That morning she had called me and invited me to her house. There was something that Abu Fahim wanted to discuss with me. What could it be? Had I written something incorrect, or what?

I sat in a chair in their front parlor, and my heart was pounding even harder, especially when Ummu Fahim just sat quietly holding my hand. Abu Fahim sat across the table holding his little boy.

"Nadia, I have already discussed something about which I want to talk to you. A friend of mine, Abdul Karim, wants to ask for your hand in marriage."

Boom! My blood was pounding, and then, suddenly, I felt like it had stopped. My heart was beating beyond control. If it were visible, my face behind my veil would surely have looked deathly pale. My feelings were chaotic. This was the first time anyone had ever courted me, something I had never really thought about. Although I had thought about getting married, I had never dared to imagine the figure of the man or of any man.

"Think about it carefully, Nadia. Talk it over with your mother. Karim is a mujahidin. Materially, he has nothing. Although he is capable of supporting you, he can't provide you with luxuries. For him, the call of jihad is the first priority of his life. He could leave any time, as when he went together with Abu Fahim to Afghanistan almost two years ago," Ummu Fahim explained holding my cold hand.

"This...." Abu Fahim sputtered, pushing two photographs toward me.

I shuddered when I took them. My lips were mute, and without looking at the photos, I kept them in my bag.

"When you have already made your decision, tell us. Don't take too long, though," Abu Fahim said while getting up from his chair and then going inside the house.

I was alone with Ummu Fahim.

"Don't worry, ask for guidance from God, and let's try to avoid any false accusations, in case you decide to reject him."

My teacher's advice was wise. I nodded in agreement and took his leave.

The way home turned out to be very long, even though I usually walked home from Ummu Fahim's house on Sumatra Street to my boarding house on Java Street. My heart was still beating fast, and my body felt alternately hot and cold. Marry? So suddenly? Now? I don't know....

I bolted the door of my room at the boarding house and threw myself on the bed. I took out the photos that Abu Fahim had given me from the bag. My hands were shaking. For the first time, I stared at the face in the photos. There was a young man with sideburns and a thick beard, something unusual for young men these days. Though it wasn't unusual for me, since I was used to seeing photos of men like this in books on jihad. Abdul Karim wore a long, light brown Arab-style shirt and was carrying an AK47, with barren, rocky mountains behind him. They must be the mountains of Afghanistan. Another photo showed him sitting, wearing a long, white shirt. I slipped the two photos between the books in my bag without getting up. I still had mixed feelings. I didn't know -- would I be happy? I was confused. Everything had happened so suddenly.

I got up, went to do my ablutions and to make a nonobligatory prayer. I drowned all my feelings by reading the Koran slowly. If I were to receive a sign from God and if I my heart were firm, then I must go home and discuss this with my mother. I slowly sat down in a chair and got a pen. I wrote a short note in my diary, a practice that I had been continuing until now. Maybe that's why I didn't like pouring out my feelings to others. I had noted every incident of my life in my notebook. I always tried to find some meaning in it. Sometimes, I wrote my notes after I would think about something, sometimes after a nonobligatory prayer, and sometimes after reading the Koran. After that, my feelings were calm. I'd never felt under pressure or unhappy for a long time. When my father was sick, when financial difficulties punished us, when my father died, when I graduated from school, when I was accepted in college -- even the smallest event that drew my attention or touched my feelings, I had recorded in my life notes. That was how I could enjoy the gifts God had given me and face all His tests.

I had now been married for four years to Abdul Karim. We lived in a small rented house near Ummu Fahim's house. The house had two bedrooms and was really small, but pleasant. I still taught and wrote and, sometimes, got translation work from a publisher or a request to summarize books in English. My husband worked as a technician at a small factory. He also did some freelance business through the Internet. From our salaries I was able to pay for the college tuition of my younger siblings and help support my mother-in-law, who lived in Bandung. I was grateful, overflowing with blessings, having been given a husband as good as mine. His vision was broad, and from him, I truly understood the oneness of God and jihad. He showed me sites on the Internet run by the mujahidin. He had shown me that our coreligionists really needed our help. How needy they were in Kashmir, next to Afghanistan, where the uncivilized aggressor India had

massacred Muslims and mujahidin! They asked for help from their fellow believers, but not many went to help them. The countries with Muslim communities in Central Asia, which mostly border Afghanistan, were still not free from the grip of Russia. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia was still acting like a barbarous aggressor. Under cover of a new "openness," they were now supported by the United States to tyrannize the lives of Muslims in Central Asian countries, such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and others. They silenced their Muslim opponents by arresting, torturing, and killing the mujahidin. Again, not many went there to help them. And not many even bothered to help the countries closer to Indonesia, such as the Muslim communities in Pattani, Thailand, or the Moros in the Philippines. Many other countries with Muslim communities had also been turned into battlefields.

All this news of jihad had slowly uprooted and made clearer my buried dreams. I wanted to acquire a signature wound of jihad. When I expressed this wish to my husband, he smiled calmly.

"God willing, dear, if there is a chance and enough resources, and with God's permission, we can go."

"Where?"

"Maybe Afghanistan or Kashmir or some other place, perhaps."

"Amen," I said hopefully.

The following days, my husband taught me many things -- about how to stand one's ground or how to retreat in an enemy attack. He showed me pictures of rifles, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, tanks, and many things related to jihad. He described the natural landscape of Afghanistan, made me study the map of Kashmir or the Central Asian countries from books he had bought. Although he still didn't know where we could go, he felt that there were many technical things that I needed to study first. We, sometimes, watched war films on video and discussed them. Another day, he bought me some medical books on first aid and on nursing patients. He said I could study to become a nurse. The mujahidin who were wounded in battle needed medical treatment and nursing. Another day, he joked after he had given me a Middle East cookbook.

"You could also work in the camp mess, helping to cook. The mujahidin also need to eat, you know!"

"Of course, of course. What's important is that we can go," I answered while turning over the pages of the cookbook.

I was tickled inside, but I did, in fact, read the book seriously.

"Dear, Azzam is hungry."

I kept the cookbook down. I carried my little boy, like a doll, toward the kitchen. Azzam was almost three years old. Actually, he had a little sister, but she died two days after birth. Azzam was a diligent little boy, quick to imitate anything. He once called me "dear" when he was only two years old, because he had heard his father calling me that. He also memorized things quickly. We had taught him several short verses of the Koran, and he was able to memorize them easily. He already could recognize Arabic and Roman letters. Oh, this jewel of my eye had really fulfilled our dreams of happiness.

We were then in early 1995, thus five full years since my husband had come back from Afghanistan in January 1990. During that time, he had once been about to leave, but the trip had been cancelled for various reasons. For one thing, there hadn't been enough money to pay for the transportation. I know how deeply disappointed he had been, but it didn't put a dent in his enthusiasm. His attention was always focused on jihad in Muslim countries. We also knew that, since the

summer of 1994, the jihad in Afghanistan had become more intense. Since the Soviet Union had given in and retreated from Afghanistan in 1989 and after the victories of the mujahidin there, the situation had seemed to be settling down. Many mujahidin who had come from outside Afghanistan, including my husband, returned to their home countries. When they came back around 1990, they still wanted to help each other, to share information, and, sometimes, even open up businesses together. And each of them still wanted at some time to wage jihad together again; they gathered money to enable their comrades to leave for jihad.

What we heard five years after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan was that the situation was heating up again. Under the leadership of Mullah Muhammad Omar, the Taliban mujahidin had returned to fight, this time facing the US and its allied forces. At the beginning, Mullah Muhammad Omar fought together with the mujahidin from Jemaah Islamiya in Kandahar Province against the Soviet Union, as did many mujahidin in Afghanistan then. When the mujahidin succeeded in getting the Soviets out in 1989, Mullah Omar continued his studies at a school in Sanj Ar in Kandahar Province. But corruption, crime, and outbreak of conflict that threatened the country forced Mullah Muhammad Omar to fight these evils, this time under the name of the "Taliban," which means "the students." Thereafter, the Taliban carried out jihad against all those disobedient to God's word and continued the fight against the aggressor United States, which had tried to occupy the country after the Soviet period. Now it was almost one year since Mullah Omar had started the struggle of the Taliban in the summer of 1994.

After discussion and thinking it over thoroughly, my husband decided to go to Afghanistan to help the Taliban mujahidin. He chose Afghanistan because we knew that the Taliban mujahidin needed our help and also my husband had been there before. We hoped that we could enter Afghanistan more easily because we knew beforehand how to penetrate the border. We prepared everything beforehand, including gathering funds from donors, which we would use to buy arms once we were in Afghanistan. My husband knew someone who sold weapons there.

In the lead-up to our departure, I deliberately stopped teaching and writing. I tried to increase my recitation of prayers and reading of the Koran. As much as possible I avoided conversation or gatherings with our neighbors. I didn't want any distraction to make me change my opinion, because I still felt worried and even sometimes frightened. I was anxious that someone would find out our plan and try to foil it. Honestly, too, there was a feeling of fear in my heart, because this would be my first time to fly in a plane, the first time to go to a foreign country, and the first time to go to the field of battle.

I left Azzam with my mother. I explained to my mother about jihad and how to deal with questions from her neighbors. I didn't think this would be a big problem, since so many women in our village were leaving their children behind -- even their infants -- to earn ringgit in Malaysia or dollars in Hong Kong. Probably, the neighbors would think that I had gone to Malaysia to become a foreign worker there.

"Just tell them that I've gone abroad," I added.

"I'll tell them that you went to Saudi Arabia," my mother said, making me laugh.

"You don't have to lie, Mom," I advised, while organizing Azzam's clothes and toys.

In the middle of 1995 we left for Pakistan first because our travel documents were for that country. From Pakistan we continued our trip over land. A friend in Pakistan, also a mujahidin, lent us a car and took us toward Quetta, then to Ghaman, a Pakistani area bordering Kandahar, Afghanistan. After a nerve-racking struggle, we were grateful to be finally able to enter the Afghan territory, the land of the martyrs.

Five of us had gone there -- my husband and I, two male comrades from Jakarta, and the wife of one of the comrades. We only met each other just before our departure. But we all knew that our goals were the same, and we would watch out for each other -- watch out for each other in a country that, for me, was very foreign.

With difficulty, we found a training camp in Kandahar. My husband's command of Pashto, though still broken, came in very handy, and for that reason, we made him the leader of our traveling unit. For, among us all, only he had been to Afghanistan before. After meeting the commander of the training camp and explaining our intentions and desires to him, we were allowed to join the camp.

In the rows of buildings in the mujahidin training camp, there was a mess hall in the rearmost row. Nisa and I joined four other Muslim sisters in taking charge of the kitchen as well as the building housing the infirmary for the wounded, which was across from the kitchen. The four Muslim sisters were from Kandahar, and like most natives in the area, they joined shoulder-to-shoulder in helping the Taliban mujahidin. They told us that many local people were helping supply food and lending weapons.

Although originally, I felt awkward because I had only had the time to study a little bit of Pashto from my husband, eventually the feeling of sisterhood among us made the atmosphere easy and relaxed. Because one of the women was fluent in English, we quickly became good friends, and many misunderstandings were avoided because she became our interpreter. I was extremely grateful for the ease with which God had provided us, as ever.

So, finally, we came to carry out our daily tasks in the training camp. We learned that the Taliban mujahidin were already moving to take the cities and provinces in the direction of Ghazni and Kabul. Because my husband had done military training when he went to fight jihad against the Soviet Union, he went ahead to join up with the Taliban mujahidin in the area of Ghazni, whereas the two male comrades, Nisa, and I stayed behind at the training camp. I had no objections whatsoever, because this was the whole purpose of our being there. If I was needed to stay behind, I would stay put. If we had to move to another place, I would willingly do so.

Many fierce battles took place in Ghazni. The Hekmatyar troops started attacking and wouldn't surrender to the Taliban. But, finally, they were controlled by the mujahidin, even though sporadic fighting was still taking place. Then, too, there were battles that the mujahidin had to fight against the Christian United States, which wanted to control and dominate Afghanistan.

I heard that many mujahidin were wounded at Ghazni. So I proposed to go there to help. The camp commander agreed, and I went together with Ummu Salma, a Muslim sister who I had only recently come to know, who was also transferred to Ghazni. We went to Ghazni in a car carrying medical supplies -- a contribution from who I don't know. This was a long and exhausting trip. We went through areas that had only recently been at war. The history of the long and intense war in Afghanistan had left many traces of damage and destruction. There were burned-out cars along the road, dented, piled-up tanks; I even saw an Apache AH 64 helicopter that was now a carcass having been shot down by a Taliban antiaircraft rocket. Then, there were the destroyed buildings. All along the roads, I saw buildings or houses split into pieces, maybe by bombs, or missiles or at least by gunfire.

I was very sleepy and had hardly slept when we were surprised by a round of shooting. My reflex was to protect my head with my hands and to bow when various bullets smashed the side mirror in our car. Suddenly, I felt a pain shoot through my left hand. Whatever God wills.... My right thumb had been broken. I guess a bullet had glanced against it and broken it. Our driver sped up our car, and Ummu Salma efficiently dealt with my wound.

She had me take a painkiller and some antibiotics after she had bandaged it. Slowly, the pain in my hand decreased. I leaned my head against something and closed my eyes. I calmed my emotion of shock by saying my prayers silently.

The driver told us, as far as I could understand, that surprise attacks like this often happened on the roads. There were many bands of thieves and bandits who took advantage of the situation; there were the cars and tanks of the Americans patrolling, and there were troops of the puppet government who tried to defend their authority. All of these things were very likely events.

When we arrived at Ghazni, we straightaway met the other Muslim sisters at the clinic and mess hall there. Although my hand was still in pain, I tried to help as much as I could. I chose to help in the kitchen, because my medical knowledge was quite poor, unlike that of Ummu Salma, since she had earlier studied medicine.

In Ghazni, I was able to meet my husband again. Thank God, he looked healthy and full of spirit.

"You don't regret that you came here, do you, dear?"

"Not at all. I'm happy even though I can't join in carrying a weapon. My dream of acquiring a signature wound in the struggle of jihad turns out to have been granted by God. Even if God hadn't meant this wound to be my holy wound, I'd still be happy, though, being wounded here in the land of jihad."

"Is the wound dry or not?" he asked.

"According to Ummu Salma, in a little while, it will dry out, so that it won't get infected."

"Thank God for that."

That was the last time we met and talked. I went together with the group of mujahidin northward toward Kabul, and we had to part. I was busy in the kitchen preparing the ration, and my husband went off to battle with the mujahidin.

When we reached the edge of the city of Kabul, there was an intense battle. Although the religious leaders were having a large meeting, the battle outside the meeting went on. Such is the battlefield of jihad. But there was big and encouraging news after the meeting had taken place between 31 March and 4 April 1996. Mullah Muhammad Omar had been officially chosen as the leader of the Taliban movement and given the honorific title, "Amirul Mukminin," commander of the faithful. This good news spread fast and caused joy and increased the enthusiasm of the mujahidin and Muslims throughout the world, including us. This joy truly added to our fighting spirit.

That afternoon Ummu Salma was changing the bandage on my thumb. This was the last bandage, as the wound had already dried up. I smiled looking at my funny-looking thumb -- short, cut off, without a nail. We were talking in English when one of the comrades ran up to me.

"Peace be upon you, Ummu Azzam [literally, mother of Azzam]. There is news for you. Abu Azzam [father of Azzam] ... "

He stopped to catch his breath.

"What's wrong with Abu Azzam?" I asked impatiently.

"Abu Azzam has died a martyr's death, God willing. He was shot by the enemy in an attack that we were making. ..."

Boom! My heart pounded violently. I could hear my blood coursing and felt as if it had stopped suddenly. My feelings were indefinable. There was a feeling of sadness to be parted from my husband, but a feeling of joy mixed with it. Sadness

because I had parted from him, but joy because he had obtained what he had always longed for. I sat quietly, slowly taking a deep breath. My tears fell although I tried to control them as much as I could. Ummu Salma embraced my shoulders, trying to give me strength.

After my husband's burial, I decided to go home to Indonesia and let his body be buried here in the land of jihad, I thought. It's better than bringing the body all the way back home. It would be difficult to do that and dangerous to our safety. Also, the cost would be very high. If I had been able to ask him, he certainly would have chosen to be buried there in the land of jihad where the air smells of the scent of paradise.

I'm standing like a statue between the rice paddy fields, where the rice is beginning to turn golden-yellow and to bend over heavily. I had gone to Afghanistan almost a year earlier. Now I've decided to go back to my mother's house with Azzam, the light of my life. I need to pacify my emotions, so that I can explain to the little fellow why his father hasn't accompanied his mother. I ignore the gossip of several neighbors who have seen me coming home without lots of ringgit. My mother doesn't get upset when there are those who ask whether I failed as a foreign worker or whether I was abused by my boss there because I couldn't iron well enough. Such are the stories of female foreign workers who have failed when they come home to the village. Sometimes, I am tickled when I think of things like that. Let such things be the flowers that decorate the lives of our spirits.

Azzam runs to meet me.

"Mom, help me fly my kite, okay?"

"Who bought you this kite?"

"Uncle Ahmad!" he shouts happily while pulling on the kite string.

In a moment, he has rejoined the neighbors' children who are flying their kites at the hut next to the paddy field.

My child, the inheritor of my husband's lineage, I want you to be like your father one day, to bend against the desires of the world to fulfill the call of your faith. And I want to bend in surrender with all certainty of God above me. Once more I see the sheaves of golden-yellow rice beginning to bend down heavily. Yes... the sheaves of golden-yellow rice are moving, blown by the wind.

E N D

"The Fragrant Scent From Pattani"

by Pakne Izza

I got an e-mail this morning from a sender named "My Cute Rabbit." Really not an ordinary e-mail. But because I couldn't restrain my curiosity, I clicked on it and a secret message appeared. Boom, my heart started beating fast, I could feel the adrenaline coursing. The e-mail was from my friend, Ghazi. Here's what it said.

"Peace be upon you. Thank God, Brother. Today, I made my move for Pattani Darussalam. This is extremely good news --

how could it not be? After 10 days of waiting in Johor, finally, today, the weather is clear. Before yesterday, I was extremely pessimistic, was even going to return to Indonesia, and had planned to go to Ambon. But it turned out that I was too impatient in my wait. So I take back what I had said before, and I apologize to the Pattani media for my earlier incorrect estimate, since, finally, I was able to achieve what I wanted and leave today.

"So, I think, Brother, you should hurry up and go to Pattani Darussalam. All our presumptions or suspicions, thank God, are not true. The proof is, I will leave tonight and the brethren from Pattani will meet me.

"So you and other brothers, who are moved to carry out jihad in Pattani and are ready to set off, please hurry. May God always provide you with help and support on your journey.

"I guess I'll cut it short here. God willing, I will wait for you here in Pattani Darussalam.

"May God watch over you."

"Your brother, Ghazi."

I remained stiffly bent over for a while, not able to move or speak. I thought over each sentence in the e-mail, which seemed to pass by as on the screen of life. Ghazi's face, with his thin smile, played on my eyelids, his hands waving as if calling me to him.

Finally, my friend was fulfilling his dream -- to carry out jihad in the land of Pattani Darussalam. So he must have met Ainul Mardiyah, the angel with ravishing eyes who he always talked about, with his face full of enthusiasm and his eyes beaming. So now he was defending his Muslim brothers who had been so cruelly oppressed in Pattani. And what about me? Should I follow him there, as I had promised when we were together at the top of Mount Rinjani?

Pattani Darussalam. This was our choice for jihad. Ghazi and I were so enthusiastic when we talked about that land in southern Thailand. Of course, Pattani, whose people were mostly Muslim, had been unjustly treated by the regime of unbelievers in Thailand since long. Fear continually enveloped the Muslim community there. The infidel regime in Thailand, abetted by the big Satan, the commander of the crusaders, the United States, had tarnished the holy religion of Islam that the majority in Pattani followed.

The infidel Army of Thailand, which was usually called "Tok Na," frequently oppressed the Muslims of Pattani with various forms of cruelty. Bomb attacks, destruction of mosques, murders of local Muslims without discrimination between men, women, children added to the suffering of the Muslims of Pattani Darussalam.

During the time when Prime Minister Thaksin was in power, the infidel Thai Army even slaughtered the Muslims by shooting them en masse. The infidel regime also arrested Muslim activists and mujahidin for the "crime" of wanting to liberate the Muslim land of Pattani and apply Shari'ah there. It was since that time that struggle and jihad by the oppressed classes in Thailand had begun. The call to jihad echoed, especially in Pattani Darussalam, and urged every youth whose heart was moved to defend the Islamic faith and support their brethren.

"But how can we manage to get there?" I asked Ghazi.

Ghazi and I had a serious discussion while drinking hot tea in the afternoon on the porch of Ghazi's house a month before he left.

"God willing, it will be easy. Where there is a will, there is a way," Ghazi replied confidently. "You must remember the message of Sheikh Uyairi in that e-book I sent you, brother?"

"Oh, that. *The Practical Guide to Being a Mujahidin*." I answered.

"Yeah, that's it," said Ghazi. "Didn't he say, 'actually many Muslims, nowadays, have come to accept completely that jihad is an obligatory law for Muslims, because our enemies are attacking us everywhere? They have also accepted fully that the mujahidin and the Muslim community generally desperately need men, young and old, to defend the faith, and to defend the blood and dignity of Muslims. But their openness to accepting these facts has still not been followed up by actual deeds by most of the Muslim community, for example, by waging jihad. Their openness collapses when met with questions: what is the path to the world of jihad? How can we get there? But to answer these questions, most Muslims don't keep looking for the path but put their hands in their laps, stop looking, and fool themselves into thinking that this is an insuperable obstacle before God.'"

I cut Ghazi off, who had so fluently been able to quote from the Saudi mujahidin sheikh.

"Yeah, I remember that quote, and this has made me unable to sleep for days thinking about it."

"So, you remember, right? But that's not the point. Think of what he goes on to say," Ghazi said demanding my attention again.

"On this basis, if you really have a wish to wage jihad, then do not ever stop at the level of desire only, because that is not enough for you to present as an excuse to God for not waging jihad, as long as you are able to come and go or are able to carry out a deed that has a chance of succeeding. Thus, try and follow the path to jihad. And know that actually the people who have reached the world of jihad are not people who possess some magic, but those who are striving. It is to them that God gives help by turning away others' view from them, so that they can reach the field of jihad."

"Glory be to God," I spontaneously uttered. "Of course, that's right, that's how it should be. So we have to actively seek the path to Pattani. But there's still a problem for us getting there. From where to get the money?" I asked Ghazi.

In many things, such as my understanding of religion, I really depended on my friend. Ghazi often read the e-book on jihad and the Muslim community, which he had downloaded on his computer. He was also very active in the various jihadist web forums and visited Islamic websites, especially the ones about jihad and with information about the global Muslim community.

"It's easy, if, God willing, we can get His help soon. I'm writing to various comrades, who, God willing, will support us to get to Pattani Darussalam. What's important is that we have to keep our will strong, have to be willing to accept God's will and seek His blessing. Other than that, all we can do is leave everything to God. Let's hope we can quickly get financial support to be able to leave. Don't forget that we have to contribute any money you or I have saved to jihad. Agreed?"

"God willing. Agreed. I'm ready. All I have to do is to tell my parents and get everything ready, then we can go. Let's hope God will ease our steps," I replied.

"Amen. God's will be done," answered Ghazi. "Come on, let's go to pray, it's already time for evening prayers."

We set off for the mosque across the road from Ghazi's house. The last rays of the sun were leaving their traces on the western horizon. Meanwhile, my spirits billowed, imagining a journey that I had so often thought about before. My journey

to Pattani Darussalam!

In the middle of the night my cell phone rang. It was a text message. I opened it and found a short message from Ghazi. "Brother, come quickly to my house. There's an important piece of news. Peace be upon you." I hurriedly wore my jacket, started my motorcycle, and raced toward Ghazi's house, about 5 kms from mine.

On my way, I thought about the "important news" that Ghazi had mentioned. My guess was that it must be about Pattani. A few days before we had actually got around to dividing up our tasks, Ghazi had looked for the information he could get about Pattani, surefire ways to get in and also who would help us when we were about to leave. Meanwhile, I was in charge of getting the funds and contacting whoever might be willing to donate for jihad on the path of God. Thank God, I was able to gather about 30 million rupiah from the donors who understood how important this money was for us and understood, too, the reward from God that they would receive at the end of time. According to my calculations, this money, in addition to our resources, would be more than enough for both of us to depart.

Not long afterward, I stopped my motorcycle and parked it in Ghazi's old garage. I could already see him waiting impatiently, and he quickly pulled me into his room. There, I saw his computer was switched on. On the screen was a jihad forum site, and Ghazi made me sit down to look at the message on the screen.

On the screen was written a jihad message released by Abu Usamah, one of the leaders of the Jihad Pattani Group, which represented a group of foreign mujahidin who were fighting in Pattani Darussalam. Pattani Media, the official media of the Pattani mujahidin, had interviewed him, and in the interview, he explained in detail about the rise of jihad in Thailand and urged all Muslim youths to go to Pattani for jihad there. No wonder Ghazi was quite excited.

"So, Brother, do you see? Did you read it? Shall we go there, too?"

Ghazi peppered me with questions. Without answering, I quickly read the message from the leader of the foreign jihad warriors in Pattani:

"It all started at the end of 2004 after the Mujahidin Pattani Darussalam issued their historic declaration of war on 4 January 2004 and after the tragic massacre at the Krisik [Krue Se] Mosque and the Tak Bai incident. Abu Ukkasyah al-Arabi, who at that time was in transit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, went on to Pattani Darussalam. Ukkasyah went there accompanied by Imam Waqqas, Abu Abdillah, and me. We are members of the Council of Mujahidin [Majlis As-Syura al-Mujahidin]. We disguised ourselves as members of a group of religious teachers and made contact with the mujahidin there. At the beginning, it was too difficult to make contacts with the mujahidin from Pattani Darussalam because of the high level of secrecy that the mujahidin maintained. But, with the grace of God, all was made easier.

"At the first session with the mujahidin, who are more usually called 'fighters' there, they stressed that their struggle was not the same as the struggle that had occurred pre-2004. Before 2004, there had been fighters who had still been infected with the poison of nationalism. But, in their current struggle, they were fighting fully this time led by groups of religious teachers -- ustadz and ulema -- and thus, they were fighting purely for their faith. They had never wanted to stop their holy struggle only because Pattani Darussalam was free from the domination of the Buddhists, who were helped with arms and support from the United States. In fact, what they wanted was to continue their struggle until the whole country surrendered to God alone."

I took a deep breath. So dramatic and so enthusiastic. I didn't see Ghazi at my side, but I heard the sound of a spoon being stirred in a glass from the kitchen of his house. Probably, he was making ginger tea with milk, our favorite drink.

Impatiently, I continued reading the message from Abu Usama, leader of the foreign mujahidin in Pattani Darussalam. He wrote:

"Jihad in Pattani Darussalam is a religious obligation for all Muslims there. They also believe that the holy struggle in Pattani Darussalam was free from all stains of polytheism. This has been strengthened by the various fulfilled dreams that have been experienced by Abu Ukkasyah al-Arabi, for instance, his dream of meeting the Prophet. The determination of Abu Ukkasyah has grown stronger and stronger. Then, Abu Ukkasyah al-Arabi continued with various other sessions and meetings. This time he will see how far the joy of the holy struggle in Pattani Darussalam can be borne together by the faithful in all corners of this country."

The fragrant of the ginger tea struck my nose. With his characteristic smile, Ghazi placed the glass in front of me with a cake to fill my stomach on a night like this. I immediately took a sip, ate a piece of cake, and sat to continue reading.

"So what do you think? Glory be to God, right?" asked Ghazi impatiently.

"Yes, whatever is God's will. But I'm not finished yet. I still haven't seen the way we can get ourselves over there," I answered while continuing to stare at the computer screen that was still on.

This was what I was waiting for, the sheikh's answer to anyone who wanted to make the pilgrimage there.

"With the permission of God, this is something that deserves to be emphasized. Pattani Darussalam is surrounded by sea, thick jungle, an area of villages and an area for tourists, both foreign and local. The border is very long, and the infidel's army will never be able to guard it completely. Thus, it is not hard to enter there.

"If we look fairly at the situation, the Muslim community in Pattani Darussalam first needs to be defended. Their faith is gravely threatened by the continual proselytizing of the Buddhist colonizer that dominates them. This group of idol worshippers dominates them and does not stop in its efforts to lead astray the beliefs of the Muslim community. Murder, arrest, and torture take place freely and are an everyday occurrence. The enemies the Muslims face are exceedingly cruel and tyrannical, and their army even gets support straight from the United States and its allies. In other words, fighting the Thai Army is like fighting the US Army itself."

Ghazi and I were silent. I had just finished reading the message and call to jihad of Abu Usamah, foreign leader of jihad in Pattani Darussalam. Everything was enough clear. Ghazi already had in his possession the more detailed route to get to this land of jihad in Southeast Asia. He'd gotten it following correspondence with one of the heads of Pattani Media. Meanwhile, I had already given to Ghazi the money I had successfully raised, and this made him even more enthusiastic and eager to bring forward our departure schedule. What else was there to wait for?

"Brother, have you told your parents yet?" I began the conversation.

Ghazi replied: "Yes, I have, I didn't explain the full meaning of it to them. I told them I want to continue my university studies in Malaysia. I was sure that, if I told them the true reason, they wouldn't give me permission. But, in fact, we do not need to seek their permission. What do you think?"

"Yeah, well it's tough, isn't it? As for me, thank God, they have already blessed my trip. They even prayed for me to receive one of two blessings -- to live gloriously or to die gloriously by waging jihad. But the thing for me is....oh, forget it."

I was tongue-tied and stopped speaking suddenly. Ghazi didn't seem surprised, but smiled and looked at me meaningfully.

"Yeah, I know. There's someone waiting for you in another city. It all comes back to you, Brother; you know what's best and what you must do."

Ghazi was trying to let me have my space.

"Yeah, a sister is waiting for me. I already have asked for her hand, Brother, and I promised that not after too long, I will proceed with the wedding. Until now, I haven't been able to explain my plans and wishes to her about making the pilgrimage to Pattani. I still can't decide, Brother."

I bowed my head listlessly and imagined the faith of my promised girl, my sister in faith, who was active preaching at the campus mosque and had a strong commitment to Islamic struggle. I was sure that she would accept my reason for leaving for Pattani, but I wasn't ready to break the news to her yet. I feared that piece of news would hurt and disappoint her.

"We'll have to leave this problem to God, Brother. Come on, let's pray for guidance and ask God to give strength to our hearts to choose what is best. I am firm in my decision to leave, even if my parents try to stop me. Because I'm sure that this is the best thing to do, and this can save me and my family, too, from the fire of hell," Ghazi continued full of fervor.

As usual he quoted from a saying of the Prophet that explained that the nobility of someone struggling for jihad could bring an intercession from the Prophet on behalf of God to 70 members of his family, God be praised: "Someone who dies during jihad can bring the intercession of the Prophet on behalf of God to 70 members of his family."

I faced my house from afar for the last time. My resolve to follow Ghazi to Pattani was firm. As I had thought, the sister-in-faith I was leaving behind had not balked at all when I explained to her my desire to wage jihad in Pattani. In fact, she had supported it wholeheartedly and joined me in praying that I could reach Pattani successfully. She also asked me to take her along, which, of course, I couldn't permit. But I promised that, if God allowed, I would bring her to the land of jihad in Pattani later after we were already married. I left her with the instruction to always approach God and keep a close watch on the news of the mujahidin and Muslims throughout the world. Fortunately, she would stay in university and finish her studies and would have enough time to browse the Internet.

I got on the intercity bus that would take me to Medan. I didn't take much with me, only a backpack on my back. This was at Ghazi's suggestion in his letter that I only bring minimum of clothes to make it easier to move around.

The certainty that Ghazi had succeeded in getting into Pattani strengthened my resolve to follow him. I further promised him when we were making our last preparations at Rinjani that Ghazi would leave first, find information, and establish that our comrades from Pattani media could show us the way. Thus, he would be the one to open the way for the rest of us. If he succeeded, then he would inform me and I would follow.

I divided the money equally with Ghazi, and he suggested that I take the safest and most natural way, that is, by land first to Medan and then cross over to Malaysia and finally to Johor. In Johor, according to Ghazi, there would be a brother ready to meet me.

The bus to Medan started off. I repeated a prayer for my departure and silently strengthened my determination to do everything only for God, not for any other reason. I didn't want this suspenseful journey, so full of sacrifice, to be useless in His eyes. I wanted the journey to have the value of a religious act, in fact, the highest religious act in Islam, jihad. Wasn't it true that when we undertake a journey for jihad on the path of God and when we meet obstacles and tests along the way, even if we die before reaching the field of battle, we are considered to have died a holy death? The lines of advice from

Sheikh Uyairi struck me again in my daydreams as I looked out of the bus window at the arid landscape along the Trans-Sumatra Highway.

I remembered the sayings of the Prophet that God ensures that those on His path have no other goal but to fight for Him. Because of one's faith in God and one's trust in His Prophet, they are assured by God that He will allow them to enter paradise or He will return them to their homes with rewards and merits.

I reached Medan two days later. Although my body was still exhausted, I had to straightaway continue my journey to Tanjung Balai, Asahan. There, I stayed for one night at a relative's house while waiting for a visa and making preparations for my departure. Thank God, everything went on smoothly. I told my relatives there that I was going to Malaysia to continue my studies; they believed me and fully helped me so that I could cross over to Malaysia.

The next day I was already onboard a speedboat that went quickly across the Strait of Malacca. The sounds of a Malay song typical of Malaysia lulled over the passenger compartment, which was full of people seeking work in the neighboring country. I sneaked out and stood at the front of the boat along with others who just wanted to get a bit of air. The strong sea wind of the Strait of Malacca struck my face as if to greet me as a young fighter. Prepare yourself for a grand mission full of struggle. From afar, the harbor of Port Klang became visible after about an hour and a half of travel. My heart began to beat faster. I hung up my life jacket and breathed in the fresh air of the harbor. Welcome to Malaysia!

Everything went on smoothly as we entered the Malaysian territory. There was only a cursory inspection at the harbor. My travel documents were in order, and the things my relatives had given me and the money in my pocket were more than sufficient. I exchanged some of the money that I was carrying into Malaysian ringgit. The rest were left in rupiah. I didn't know why but I had an apprehension that I would need rupiah in the near future.

I continued my journey from the harbor at Port Klang to Johor, since it was there that I had been promised that someone from Pattani Media would meet to take me to Pattani. This wasn't actually the normal path for someone wanting to go to Pattani. Usually one would fly straight to Bangkok, then go to Hat Yai, a town known as the gateway to southern Thailand, and only then enter the area of Pattani. But this wouldn't necessarily go smoothly, because the army of infidels in Thailand would certainly carry out checks at security checkpoints every 2 kms along the way. This I learned from the information on Pattani that Ghazi had accumulated. Thus, I followed Ghazi's suggestions to reach Pattani.

I got up, startled. The driver of the Johor bus woke me up and asked whether I wanted to keep going. I said I wanted to go to the Jamie Mosque in Taman Kota, Johor. He suggested that I take a taxi because it was far, and it would be safer by taxi, for it was still nighttime. I hurried off the bus, wearing my backpack and gulping some mineral water left over from the earlier part of my travel.

"To the Jamie Mosque, please," I told the taxi driver, who looked neat and polite.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

The taxi then headed through the dark night of Johor. The air was quite cold, so I asked the driver to turn off the air conditioner.

"No problem, sir. Lately, it's been quite cold in Johor," he said.

We engaged in some small talk. The driver turned out to be from Indonesia -- from East Java -- and had immigrated to Malaysia about 10 years earlier and had raised a family of several children in Johor. It's a small world, I thought to myself.

The sound of the dawn call to prayer reverberated softly from a medium-sized mosque, which looked beautiful and very clean. Divine rays radiated from each corner of its space, calling the servants of God to bow down and reflect on the holy presence. I paid the taxi driver according to the meter and gave him a tip for his helpfulness and friendliness. I invited him to stop to perform the morning prayer together, but he refused and said he had to go home first to bathe and cleanse himself. I sent him on his way with thanks.

After morning prayers, I found a place on the right side of the mosque, took my copy of the Holy Koran, and began to read it slowly. I thought there was enough time to wait near the almost empty mosque and that the person sent to meet me would find me. I was dressed in black, in modest clothes, as Ghazi had advised me, so that I could be easily recognized. That was the message he gave me.

After about 10 minutes, I closed the Koran, straightened up my backpack, and put it to my left. I began to sense the peace in the mosque. There were only a few sleepy people, their mouths softly muttering something -- zikir [remembrance of God] prayers, I thought. Suddenly, from behind, two young people with Arabic long shirts, clean but rumpled, walked over and approached me. I immediately remembered what I was supposed to do and the secret code that I was to utter.

"Sorry, I haven't eaten for two days. Can you please tell me where I can find a cheap and clean food stall?" This coded sentence that I had been memorizing for days during my trip finally came out of my mouth. I felt relieved. Now I would wait to see if the answer these two gave would be what Ghazi had specified.

"Sorry, for the last three days, the food stall near here has been closed and isn't selling any more. Please come and rest at my house," one of them, who appeared the younger one, answered to my coded question.

Thank God, their answer was the agreed-on one. They were the brethren who would accompany me to the land of jihad, I screamed to myself.

They then introduced themselves as Ustman and Amrullah. They took my backpack, and I followed them to the verandah of the mosque. They had me rest first at the mosque, in an inner room, while waiting for other comrades who would take me to Perlis in northern Malaysia. From there, the brethren from Pattani would meet me to take me to the land of jihad, Pattani Darussalam. Not long after, Ustman came and brought some rice and vegetables and drinking water. I ate hungrily and then rested. I fell asleep after a few minutes.

The sun had just set in Pattani. Almost in disbelief, I thanked God repeatedly that finally my feet were now touching the land of jihad, Pattani Darussalam. The Muslim feel of the place was obvious from the sight of several mosques on both sides of the street, and several women with head scarves walking along. Old and young were coming and going, on foot or on motorbikes, not wearing helmets, or on public transport. There was no sign of the idol-worshipping Buddhist religion; what was felt strongly was the Muslim feeling of the place.

There were also no signs that this area was under the domination and tyranny of the Thai infidel regime. But, make no mistake, we had already met several impediments and difficult tests on our way. Two days and two nights I had traveled with the two comrades from Pattani, starting from Johor to Perlis at the northern tip of Malaysia, and finally, we had crossed the border into Pattani. It was true what Abu Usamah, the leader of the foreign mujahidin in Pattani, had said the

place was surrounded by sea, thick jungle, village areas, and areas for local and foreign tourists. The three of us disguised ourselves as tourists who had come to have a good time in Pattani.

Just barely reaching the ear was the sound of the evening call to prayer from a mosque. We quickened our steps toward that mosque, a particularly beautiful one. It wasn't very big, its architecture was simple but natural. A white tower rose up high exactly behind it.

"It's called the Kerisik [Krue Se] Mosque or the Hang Tuah Mosque," Sabil, one of the two Pattani brethren, explained to me, as I appeared to look unsuccessfully for a sign with the mosque's name.

"Oh, I see," I said, impressed and surprised to see this classic-style and simple mosque. From the tower, the sound of the call to prayer echoed sweetly, calling the servants of God to bow down to declare His greatness. The area in front of the mosque seemed to have been left empty, planted with grass, which only added to the beauty of the scene.

"This mosque is the symbol of the struggle and victory of Islam in this country, Brother. In fact, in the past, Shari'ah was implemented from this mosque. That is what made the idol worshipping kingdom of Siam envious, so that they determined to build a Buddhist temple right across the mosque. Of course, we opposed this," one of the brethren explained.

I nodded, trying to understand. We did our ablutions. The fresh and clear water washed away the sweat and fatigue from our long journey.

"Don't forget, we'll combine the late afternoon and evening prayers. After that we'll go straight to the headquarters, God willing," Sabil reminded me.

I agreed. My heart began to beat quickly again. My steps were leading me closer and closer to my goal. Ghazi's face suddenly appeared to me, including his smile. My feelings were a jumble, a mix of great joy to be able to see Ghazi again and of worry and fear remembering that this would be my first experience of going to the field of battle. I tried to calm these mixed feelings and resolved to immerse myself in the ritual prayer. Maybe this would be my last prayer, only God knows for sure!

I stood as still as a statue. I didn't sense the tears falling....the thunder of my chest....my tongue unable to speak, except to say, "God is great! God is great! God is great!" Last night, the two brethren from Pattani had brought me to the camp or headquarters of the Pattani Darussalam Mujahidin, leaving me awash in feelings that they, too, had probably felt before. Enthusiasm and glory filled my soul when I saw other mujahidin carrying weapons of all kinds to guard the victory of Islam and of all Muslims. I saw others training under the command of a field commander. Once a slogan "God is great" reverberated, which was followed by a round of bullets from their AK47s, the favorite weapon of the mujahidin. God be feared. I remembered the following sayings of the Prophet: "Indeed, the journey to war of a man in the morning or evening on the path of God is better than the world and all its contents" and "For my followers to struggle in the path of God is truly for them to go off in pleasure."

I continued my steps to enter the area of the camp. The two Pattani brethren continued to accompany me and explain whatever seemed to surprise or impress me. My first impression in entering the camp was that it was truly extraordinary and beyond words. There were feelings of pleasure, pride, enthusiasm, and a promise of something great. It was a rare sight, a sight that would never be found except in the fields of jihad. It was a sight that contrasted totally with people who had forgotten their obligations to defend the glory of Islam and the blood of Muslims. It felt like a dream, but, certainly, this was something real happening to me. I again thanked God for His great blessing on me. Thank God.

We walked toward the largest building and what seemed to me the main one. In my opinion, this camp was very strategically placed and unique. It had been built in the foothills and was bounded by mountains, reaching which would be extremely difficult for the enemy. Not far from here, the rush of a river could be heard; this would fulfill the needs of the mujahidin while simultaneously hindering the infidel troops from approaching the camp too closely. This was an apt spot for headquarters.

I was invited to sit in a large but simple waiting room. The two Pattani brethren who had accompanied me in my journey asked permission to call for someone and asked me to wait. Not long thereafter from the floor above I could see someone coming down the stairs. A man with a clean face, a thick beard and a sturdy body approached me. He greeted me, smiling and opening his arms wide. I greeted him in return, also smiling, and accepted his strong hug. He embraced me and slapped me in the back.

"God be praised. Hello, how are you brother?" he said, as if he'd known me for years, even though I was certain this was the first time I had seen him.

They were so friendly, sympathetic, and respectful to every guest, especially guests from the ranks of the mujahidin who were to become involved in defending the land of Muslims from the domination of the infidel armies.

"Thank God, I am fine, thank you," I answered, touched and impressed by his extraordinary reception of me.

He, then, asked me to sit and began to speak.

"Thank God, the all merciful. I have received several pieces of news about you from our brother Ghazi, may God have mercy on him."

My heart began to beat quickly. The blood rushed quickly. I began to feel uncomfortable. Why had he added "May God have mercy on him" after mentioning my friend Ghazi's name? Had he already.... Ah, I quickly dispelled all doubts and suspicions that had suddenly gripped me. I observed closely this man, who looked like a field commander, and it seemed that he understood my curiosity.

"It's best that you rest first, Brother. Later, I will tell you everything. Please, brother...."

He hurriedly picked up his things and took me to the back of the building, which was very spacious. I was in disarray. I began to guess what had happened to Ghazi, for with my arrival he would certainly have emerged and greeted me happily. But why hadn't he appeared?

After the evening prayer, I returned to the main building, which turned out to be the communication center of the Pattani Darussalam Mujahidin. From there, the activities and propaganda of Pattani Media were disseminated. I heard an endless hum of activity in the building. I was promised to meet Abu Ubaidillah, who was the field commander for the Pattani Darrusalam field of jihad as well as a member of the Supreme Council of Pattani Mujahidin. My curiosity about Ghazi had already lessened. I was ready to receive any sort of news, even of Ghazi's holy death in the battle. Wouldn't that be good news? Wasn't this one of his wishes? Ghazi had often read his favorite saying of the Prophet about the female angels who would greet the souls of those who had died a martyr's death: "Indeed, the first drops of blood of one among you will wash away of sins by God, as God causes the leaves to fall from the trees, and two female angels will hurry up to embrace him and to wipe away the dust from his brow, as they say, 'Welcome.' And he will answer, 'Welcome to you both.'"

Sheikh Abu Ubaidillah walked up to me and greeted me. In his hand was a small box. Carefully, he carried it and put it on the table. I answered his greeting. I tried not to be distracted by what he had brought and be strong to hear the news about Ghazi.

"Brother," he began slowly. "As you know, in this eastern land, the truth of the oneness of God is, thank God, victorious and the sounds of jihad are echoing in the ears of the enemies and pleasing the hearts of the Muslim faithful," he continued.

Meanwhile, I listened carefully to every word that he uttered.

"Since we have intensified our struggle, integrated ourselves with other mujahidin, improved our tactics and strategy for jihad, thank God, God has made our work easier and many victories have been ours. Furthermore, the tactics and strategy that we have applied have blinded the troops of the Thai infidels, and they don't even know actually with whom they are fighting. Our shock attacks have made their field apparatus and intelligence men accuse each other and fight each other over who is really behind our attacks. Thank God, our system of cells is working well, and we can keep our secrets effectively," Sheikh Abu Ubaidillah continued to explain.

Two brethren brought over some drinks and snacks to us. He continued his story.

"In our jihad, this time, we have applied a strategy that is still new here, that is, blowing up military vehicles that are passing by. Usually, we assign a small group of soldiers, five or seven, to launch these attacks. Thank God, this has succeeded and has made the infidel soldiers afraid of patrolling the area near the border."

The sheikh took a deep breath. He then invited me to have some of the food. He, too, joined in drinking before continuing his story.

"Two weeks ago, I gave a task to an assault unit of six men, including Ghazi. I considered Ghazi proficient enough in his training while he was in the camp, and I thought he was ready to join an assault unit. So I drew up a strategy for them and assigned one of them to be the field leader. The operation was actually to attack an infidel unit that had lately been actively patrolling. The position of the mujahidin was strategically behind a hill, below which ran a stream. When the enemy soldiers proceeded in the direction of the mujahidin, they weren't aware of the trap that had been set for them and that the area had become a web of the mujahidin. When the enemy troops had entered the 'killing zone' [in English in original], our commando unit, under a single field commander, launched a fearsome attack in the direction of the Thai platoon. Because their position was so precarious, the infidel troops were almost completely wiped out. That's what the mujahidin unit thought, so your friend, Ghazi, went forward to ensure that the area was clear and that there were no survivors. Ghazi bravely went to examine the situation and determined that all infidel troops had been killed, and there were none left. From this victory, the mujahidin succeeded in gathering many guns and ammunition and various other war booty from the dead enemy soldiers. But, without the knowledge of the mujahidin who were gathering this booty, there was a platoon of Thai Rangers that had carried out an unexpected maneuver and crept in and attacked the mujahidin unit from behind, where they were unprotected. Another battle ensued, and this time, the position of the mujahidin was on the defensive. With valiance and bravery, the mujahidin countered the attack, and finally, they managed to beat the infidel troops that had so suddenly appeared. It was at that moment that your friend Ghazi was out in the open and was hit by one of the Thai Rangers' bullets. According to his surviving comrades, when he was hit by the bullet, Ghazi was still able to retaliate and killed his attacker. But he couldn't be saved, and he breathed his last when he was brought back to the camp. At the end of his life, before he recited the confession of faith, he asked his fellow mujahidin to give the shawl that he had worn in battle to his family back home, through his friend who, he said, was on his way to follow him to Pattani. God willing, he died a holy death, and one of the pieces of evidence in this regard is this."

Sheikh Abu Ubaidillah finished his story by handing to me the wooden box that had been lying on the table since we first sat down.

I realized that my cheeks were wet. I had been crying, but I had held my tears back so as not to break out sobbing. I picked up the wooden box and opened it. When it was open, a fragrant scent was released, like the nonalcoholic perfume that Ghazi would use to spray in his room. I was shaking, thanking God while feeling terribly moved. The red shawl that Ghazi had often worn everywhere he went looked a bit wrinkled. The fragrance that pervaded it had still not disappeared, but actually was even stronger when I kissed it. Suddenly, Ghazi's smiling face floated past. My friend seemed so happy that he had succeeded in fulfilling his promise to the Creator, may his name be praised.

Sheikh Abu Ubaidillah left me for a moment wrapped in memories of my friend who had died a hero's death in the battlefield of jihad, Pattani Darussalam. His was a death that no ordinary person could achieve, even though he had struggled for years on the battlefield to achieve it. But Ghazi, my friend, had just set foot in Pattani, and a martyr's death had embraced him. How lucky you have been, my friend! Good-bye and be happy, remember me forever, and don't forget me. Pray that I will follow you. As the Prophet's saying goes, "Indeed the souls of those who die a holy death are in the bodies of green birds that eat the fruits and leaves of the trees of heaven."

The strong wind of the Strait of Malacca struck my face again. The strings of the Malay song were quietly heard in the front of the speed boat I had taken to go back to Indonesia. I had to quickly go home and meet the family of the holy warrior, Ghazi, my friend. For, that was the last wish that Ghazi had conveyed just before he died. With me I had the small wooden box, with Ghazi's favorite red shawl. The shawl was still fragrant, and its scent was a divine sign of Ghazi's jihad. Maybe Ghazi's parents, especially his brother, had already had a foreboding and had smelled the wind of paradise blowing softly from Pattani. I put on a lifejacket, which helped cut the cold wind of [the Straits](#). The sun would soon be setting. They would soon be nearing the harbor. Good-bye, my friend Ghazi. Wait for my return to Pattani.

E N D

"I Settle It All in Chechnya"

by Ummu Fauzi

I looked at my wristwatch; it was about 1108. I hurried toward the school gate, mixing with other students who were coming out. That Friday, I had decided to do my Friday prayers in the area of Kramat Raya. To save time, I decided not to go home first but to go ahead on foot. It wasn't too far from my school, at the intersection of Salemba and Kramat Raya Streets. Last Friday, I had prayed at the Arif Rahman Hakim mosque at UI. Today, I have decided to go to the mosque at Kramat Raya Street.

I don't remember exactly when this habit of mine began. Maybe about a year ago. It's a habit that is perhaps unusual for a high school student like me. In the beginning, a friend of my older brother came to the house -- Arif was his name. Because my brother, Rahman, was taking a bath, I went out to keep Arif company on the terrace. I saw he was carrying several books, which he laid on the table between the chairs on the terrace where we were sitting.

"New books, Arif?"

"No, I just picked them from a friend. They're old."

"Can I see them?" I asked.

Arif pushed the books toward me. I went through the books one by one for a while. I had never seen books like these, let alone read them. They were books of Syekh Abdullah Azzam, Syekh Sayyid Qutb, and Syekh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisiy.

"If you're interested, Rasyid, you can borrow them."

I asked him, "Really? Until when?"

"When I come back here again, I'll pick them up."

I took the books with me to my room. Rahman had dressed neatly and was taking his motorcycle out. In a while, I heard the sound of my brother's motorcycle taking off. My brother, these days, was rarely at home. And if he was at home, he'd be engrossed in front of the computer rather than talking, playing around, or watching television with the rest of us. There seemed to be a change in my brother -- less joking around and more serious. He'd let his beard and sideburns grow. I'd noticed, too, that when he walked, he focused on one spot, not raising or lowering his head. Before, among us five siblings, he was usually the most raucous. Although he was the oldest, he was the one who couldn't keep still. He was always up to some practical joke -- hiding one of my sneakers and making me look all over for it or mixing up the socks that I'd arranged neatly or putting some lizard-shaped toys in my younger sister's book, which would make her scream hysterically, as girls do. But, recently, he had changed. Not only not cutting up, but not even joking at all in the slightest. The friends that Rahman brought to the house were also different. While his old friends would come to the house with guitars and wore tattoos, now all his new friends wore neat clothes, spoke very politely and quietly, and wore beards. They carried books with them, and sheaves of paper -- lecture notes or activity plans, it wasn't clear to me. What I knew, though, was that Rahman had changed.

At one point, after mid-afternoon prayers, he corrected my way of praying. He showed me how the position of my feet should be during rukuk [the step when we are praying to Allah], how to focus one's vision, how to recite the prayers properly. I'd never paid attention to all these details -- typical for a high school boy, at least that's what I thought. And he was angry at me when he saw me and my friends joking around while doing our school work together on the terrace. After my pals had gone home, he called me. Even though he spoke in a soft voice, there was a tone of anger that was unmistakable. He said I behaved improperly. According to Islam, the relation between a man and a woman was regulated strictly and in great detail, mainly to respect women. That was why there were rules about lowering one's gaze, prohibitions against improper acts between unmarried people, or against women exposing the parts of their bodies that should be covered.

"Look at you! Lying around comfortably, touching girls with your fingers, playing around with girls as you please!" I was dumbfounded. I thought what we'd been doing was normal for teenagers joking around, high school students. Hah, at least that was my opinion.

After that incident, Rahman advised me to join a religious group at school. First, I wasn't interested but then because my mother also pressed me into joining, I agreed to join their activities. In the beginning, it was just sitting around reading from the Koran, later, I became more active asking questions and joining the discussions. In other words, after a while, I began to change. The study group made me better understand proper Muslim behavior, ways to improve my habits of worshipping, and how to read the Koran.

Although I thought I'd changed for the better, still, there were shortcomings. There were still things I hadn't discovered yet. Silently stuck on a single way of thinking.... no, that wasn't the way. The right way was to ask questions. One question started after I had read some books my older brother's friend Arif had lent me. I only learned from the book *The Missing Torch* by Sheikh Abdullah Azzam that the power of the Islamic caliphate had collapsed in 1924. I learned to angrily blame Mustafa Kamal Attaturk for the destruction that he had unleashed on the Muslim community after he overthrew the Uthman caliphate. Until then, I had only known that Indonesia was a republic with all the stuff that went along with it. More than that, I never cared about anything. It turned out that Sheikh Maqdisy explained the errors of democracy, the errors in the governmental form and system that was applied in all Muslim countries these days. Until then, all that I knew was democracy was ideal, because everything stemmed from the people, since sovereignty was in people's hands. And the most interesting thing among the new things that were now attracting my attention was a book called *Jihad in the Modern Age* by Sheikh Abdullah Azzam. Previously, I thought that the one thing that would improve one's religious practice was going on hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. I often dreamed that I would later go on hajj -- but when I was older, there being no need to rush. But I was surprised to learn that there was another very glorious obligation that not all Muslims understood about, let alone carried it out. The book explained the definition of jihad, the resolve and goal of jihad, the path to jihad -- all this touched my soul. I read the book three times, in fact, before I returned it to my brother's friend.

Suddenly, I wanted to know where I could find out more about these things. Although I had already been active in the student religious group for several months, I still hadn't seen any sign that I would find the understanding of things as they were in the book that Arif had lent me. So I began to look at other Koranic reading groups and study groups; still, I didn't find what I was looking for. My pursuit then led me to various Friday sermons. I performed my Friday prayers at different mosques, going from one to another. If I had some money, on my way home from school, I would board a bus, and after changing buses and minibuses several times, I would alight from the bus and perform my Friday prayers at any mosque that was around.

I had various funny experiences along the way of my search. I was reprimanded by a ta'mir at a mosque in the Rawasari area. This was a large mosque in a grand style and appeared very quiet when I arrived. But why wasn't I allowed to pray there? Later, a friend told me that mosques like that were for certain classes only and closed to people from outside. Weird! That's what I thought, anyway. Another time I entered a mosque when the sermon was almost over, since it was so far away, and I found it out late. I ended up walking to home because I'd forgotten to figure out correctly the amount of transportation money I would need to get there. Luckily, near Senen, I met a neighbor who gave me a ride home.

Unfortunately, in my search, I didn't find any signs of what I was looking for. Even if I found a preacher who was fiery in his denunciation of religious disobedience, still his point wasn't jihad as I had been looking for.

A school friend of mine, Adi, cried out running after me, "Rasyid! Where are you going?"

"To the mosque; want to go together?" I asked.

"Are you crazy? You're really into religion, aren't you? Don't you want to go home first or eat or hang out first?" Adi said, sneering.

"I have already eaten during the break period, so I want to hang out at the mosque. It'll save me transportation money, too."

"Are you broke, too?" he teased.

I nodded sourly.

After I talked him into it, he went along with me to the mosque. We walked slowly while talking all along Salemba Raya Street and then headed for Kramat Raya Street. We crossed under the bridge and entered the front yard of the mosque. It still wasn't very crowded, and we went straight to wash and join the communal prayers. I listened carefully to everything the preacher said throughout his sermon. I still hadn't found what I was looking for.

I looked for almost a year and must have gone to tens of mosques, most in the central part of Jakarta, but I still didn't find any success. Where should I look? Is there something wrong with my search? Who can help me?

By the time all these questions emerged, one after another, my search was over, and I had succeeded. Previously, I had thought -- even taken for granted -- that my search would end with a preacher whose sermon would be full of fire and enthusiasm or with a distinguished religious teacher at a public prayer assembly, but that was wrong. My search ended when I bumped into a man accidentally in a book shop!

This man was in his early thirties or so, I guessed. That afternoon, I had gone to a bookstore in the Kwitang area, intending to buy a small Koran and several books, if I could afford them. The little Koran with a black cover that I chose was miniature but attractive. I still had enough money to buy two or three other books. So I became engrossed in choosing books. Suddenly, though, I realized that it was almost time for afternoon prayer, so I made the payment at the cash counter and quickly went out. As I was going through the doorway, I bumped into a man, who also seemed in a hurry. The book he was carrying in a plastic bag was knocked to the floor.

"Excuse me, I'm so sorry, Sir. I didn't mean to.... I was in a hurry."

I was sincerely sorry. The man smiled honestly. I was much relieved.

"Don't worry. Where are you up to?"

The man readjusted his glasses.

"I'm on my way to pray at the mosque; then, I'll go home from there."

"Let's go together," he invited.

I followed him as he went out to the road in front of the book store, then took a turn. At first I thought he was going to take me to pray at a mosque near the book store.

"I live near here," he said, breaking the silence.

Oh, so that was the reason.

After praying, I sat on the terrace of the mosque. Several of the worshippers were seen making their way home. Suddenly, the man from the bookstore sat down beside me. The look in his eyes was friendly.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Near the Government Printing Office."

Suddenly, the mood was familiar, at least that's what I thought, and we fell into relaxed conversation. When I showed him the books I had bought, he seemed surprised. I had bought the books of Sheikh Abdullah Azzam and Sayyid Quthb. Although some of them I had read before when I borrowed them from Arif, I still wanted to have my copies, so I had decided to buy them. When I explained to him about my search in the mosques over the last year, he seemed to listen carefully. While I thought he might laugh at me or at least smile, he didn't. He was listening so carefully to what I was saying that it appeared as if he didn't want to miss a single detail.

"You really are sincerely looking for something, aren't you? A year is no short time to be looking around. Maybe I can help you."

He wrote something on a piece of paper and handed it over to me.

"Come to this address next week. Sunday, after late morning prayers."

I took the piece of paper and bid good-bye. I still didn't really understand what he meant by "help me." In fact, he hadn't really made any comment on what I had told him. But I would try to go to the address next week and see just how he could help me.

The house, the address of which he'd given me, was easy to find. It was in a small alley near the mosque where I had prayed last week. When I knocked on the door and uttered my greeting, the man who I had bumped into at the bookstore opened it. I was surprised, but his smile quickly neutralized my surprise.

"Come in, please."

This was the first time I visited his house, the house of Ustadz Umar, as I later came to call him. The following Sundays I went regularly to his house with several other friends of my age. At Ustadz Umar's house, I truly found what I had been looking for all that time. From him I learned to study the true theology, the theology of the Sunni tradition, and I came to understand jihad and everything related to it. Sometimes someone who I thought was of a higher class would fill the spot as leader of the study group, usually once a month. His name was Ustadz Hamzah.

Life's tests have to be faced by every human being. Each stage has its trials, which reveal who is patient and who is not, who places his trust in God and who does not. And my trial came from the Creator to find out how strong was my faith.

That afternoon I had a stomach ache, with bad cramps. I had been running to the bathroom repeatedly, already three or four times. I had taken some medicine I had bought at the little stall out front, but the symptoms still hadn't gone away. While I gripped my stomach, which was still aching, I sat on the terrace.

"Rasyid, pick me up at Nina's house, will you, I have homework to do. Don't forget, okay?" my younger sister, Rahmi, asked, opening the gate at the front of the house.

"No, no, I've got a bad stomach ache. Do your homework together here," I said grimacing, while holding my stomach in my pain.

"No, I can't. I've promised already. After afternoon prayer, okay? Please? Bye, peace be upon you."

"And upon you, too," I answered weakly.

After afternoon prayer I was lying on the sofa, still feeling weak, although the stomach cramps had eased a bit. Inadvertently, I fell asleep and didn't know for how long. My mother woke me up for dinner.

"May God have mercy! What time is it now, Mom?"

"A few minutes past 2000."

"Oh, no. I forgot to pick up Rahmi."

I was confused. I put my jacket on, grabbed the keys to my father's motorcycle from a hook, and rushed to get the motorcycle -- all in a great hurry.

"Be careful, Rasyid. Don't speed."

"Peace be upon you."

"And upon you, too," my mother replied, shutting the door.

All along the road I saw people going past; I was looking for Rahmi, just in case. Suddenly, I felt very nervous. My heart began to beat rapidly and irregularly. It felt a terrible foreboding come over me. I shuddered. I had never felt so worried, and I didn't know why. I sped up the motorcycle, turning at Matraman Street. When I turned off the engine in front of the house of Nina, Rahmi's friend, the house looked closed up and quiet. I was even more worried.

From Nina I learned that Rahmi had gone home at last after everyone else had. Because she waited for me so long, she decided to go home alone. Actually, Nina and her mother tried to prevent her from going on her own, but she said it wasn't far, so they let her go. With my heart pounding even more, I tracked the road home and turned around going by way of Pramuka Street, thinking she might have gone that way. In front of the Kramat railway station, I called home and asked if Rahmi had returned yet, but my mother said no, she hadn't. My heart began to beat even faster.

When I reached home, everyone was in a panic. I called some of the friends who had been doing homework with Nina earlier, but none of them knew anything. They said they had all gone home before Rahmi. Yes, I knew now -- this was all because I was so panicked that I didn't know what to do.

That night we kept looking, helped by the local police and our neighbors. We scoured for trace all the roads that she could have taken home.

Around dawn, the search bore results -- a result that knocked me off my feet and caused my mother to faint. My sister was dead. She lay covered with blood in an empty garden. There were two knife wounds in her stomach. Blood covered her shirt and her head scarf. I was so shocked, my body shook. Why had this happened? My sister, my poor sister....

A week later, the two scoundrels who did it were caught. From their own mouths came the story that that night they had

seen my sister walking alone. The road was empty and dark. The urgings of a Satanic spirit entered these human devils. They gagged and dragged my sister to an empty garden with an intention to rape her. Because my sister kept struggling and kicking to get free, the two were overwhelmed. Afraid of being caught by someone walking along the sideway next to the empty garden, one of them stabbed her. And two stabs were enough to end my sister's struggle.

Feelings of intense fury and hatred gripped my heart. My teeth chattered, and I grit them to restrain my anger. Unfortunately, every time I wanted to hit, kick, or strike out in any way at the two scoundrels, my hand was always grabbed tightly by the police. Imagine how the tiny body of my sister had struggled in the grip of these two scoundrels, how hard my sister had fought for her honor. Imagine my sister drenched in blood, alone, breathing her last. A terrible feeling of guilt overcame me, like a razor blade slashing at my heart. If only I had gone to pick her up on time, if only I hadn't fallen asleep -- a thousand times "if only" crammed together to intensify my feelings of guilt. In fact, they plague me even now....

No one else blamed me for what had happened, neither my mother nor my father. They had already come to accept this tragedy as the will of God and to understand that my sister was taken away by her Creator. But I couldn't accept this. The more I tried to accept the truth, the greater was the feeling of guilt that overpowered me.

It was the day when national exams were over. My high school years were almost over. I didn't feel anything really different; everything was steady, but empty. Although all the talks of graduating, grade-point averages, or the lists for entering college were heard buzzing in everyone's ears, I wasn't interested. Many of my friends were breathless awaiting news of their graduation, many engrossed in choosing where they would go to college.

"Hey, pal! Where're you going, which college?" Adi asked, sitting next to me at the side of the school field.

"Afghanistan," I answered seriously.

"You crazy or something? No where else to go?"

"Yeah, Chechnya." Again, I was serious.

"Where's that? On earth or the afterlife?"

"On earth. But it can help us get to the glory and joy of afterlife."

"Ah, you've got the bug again, huh? It wasn't long ago you became sane again after searching for mosques. Now...." He put his hand on my forehead.

"What the problem," I said pushing away his hand.

"No, you don't have fever." He sneered at me, "Yuck!" This guy was really nasty, but he was my good friend.

Now it was already June 1995. At the beginning of the next month, my school life would be finished. I had to decide where I would go. There was a friend who was going to Afghanistan with Ustadz Hamzah. They would go for jihad to help the Taliban warriors. Another ustadz suggested to me a place called Chechnya, and two friends of mine from the same Koranic study group had already signed up.

A couple of days ago, I asked for permission from my mother to go for jihad. I explained to her why jihad, and why I had to

go. From the look in her eyes and from her body language, I knew that my mother could understand my explanation. But she remained silent, leaning on a chair, and then tears began to flow down her cheeks. I didn't force the issue, but I didn't give up either.

Chechnya is a country far away, news of which hardly ever reaches the ears of the Muslim community. Chechnya is a country far away, far from the view of Muslims here. But now, in the middle of 1995, it had been a half year since the Chechen mujahidin -- the populace of Chechnya -- had taken up arms. On 11 December 1994, the infidel Russia Army had invaded and attacked Chechnya to prevent it from seceding from the Russian Federation. In early 1995, Russia succeeded in occupying the city of Grozny after breaking the resistance of the Chechen mujahidin in a protracted and bloody war.

Chechnya and the countries of Central Asia that are under the fist of the Russian Federation had long struggled to free themselves. The people of these countries are mostly Muslims. Chechnya and other Central Asian countries, such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and others around it, have over 50 percent Muslim population, some with Muslim population over 70 percent. They are fertile countries. They have mineral resources that for a long time have fallen under the Russian hegemony. Their fields and orchards are overflowing with crops. In addition to these natural riches, there are several military installations that the local Muslims have been using to liberate themselves to become free from the oppression of socialist, communist Russia. That is what was then happening in Chechnya, as jihad earlier had taken place in Tajikistan.

I was truly in a state of major indecision. This was the most difficult decision I had ever had to make by myself. I, at the age of 18, was a mature man with Islamic point of view. The burden of the law was on my shoulders. Sin and reward were in my control. Whatever I chose, I had to make an effort. The Muslim community, far across the seas from where I live and breathe freely, was asking for help from their Muslim brethren. Among the hundreds of millions of Muslims who didn't even know where Chechnya was on the map, I was the only one who knew. I learned from the explanations of the ustadz that Russia was, in fact, occupying Grozny, which was, at least, considered the capital of the country. The Russian troops with tanks and fighter planes had forced the civilian population to flee. They carried out sweeps of the male population wherever they found them and then arrested, tortured, or even murdered them.

Why wasn't this reality enough to help me come to a decision? Because of my mother's tears? Or because I didn't want my parents to lose yet another child? Or because I was afraid of losing my future? But wasn't my true future the will of God in haven? I shuddered in fear. What was really making me afraid? Why was I afraid? Wasn't it true that death could come any time? For my sister, death had come so suddenly and violently. So why didn't I go? For, I knew my brothers were now fighting a holy war and asking for help, were hungry in their refugee tents; many of their women were crying for help because they'd been raped. Raped! Suddenly my chest felt tight, I gasped for breath. Why didn't I help? Why did I have to feel the torture of guilt again?

"Brother Hisyam, please give this letter to my mother. I can't bear to see her tears when she sees me about to leave. In a month, bring this letter to her. I think by that time I'll be already at a Chechen mujahidin training camp, God willing."

I handed over the letter to my friend at the Koranic study group. I wasn't willing to directly take leave of my parents.

"Pray that I can quickly follow you," he said, embracing me.

"God willing."

That day I left with Ustadz Umar, a friend was able to arrange for our travel documents as tourists to Turkey. We were only two because we were concerned that it would look odd if we went in a larger group. From Turkey, a go-between would take us to Georgia. He was a mujahidin who had just returned from waging jihad in Tajikistan. He would take us to Chechnya through a land route from Georgia. According to his calculations, that route would be the most feasible, even though it would take more time.

A feeling of throbbing fear kept haunting me all along our journey. For the first time in my life, I had made a major decision and gone this far on my own. Although I tried as hard as I could to suppress it, I still had a feeling of worry. Not to mention that we had to transit in Turkey first before arranging for our departure for Georgia. Staying two weeks in Turkey felt too long and began to oppress me. Then, we were detained in Georgia for several days, too. Our faces made us stand out among the local people, so our guide had to be extra careful to organize our journey, especially near the borders. If Chechnya were a country that attracted tourists, it would have been possible for all sorts of faces to come and go freely, but it wasn't: it was a battlefield, where death laid waiting at every breath.

We were thus incredibly relieved when we were finally received at a camp outside the city of Grozny. Our guide quickly found the camp commander and explained our why we were there and our goal, or at least that is what I gleaned from my limited knowledge of Arabic.

The camp consisted of a kind of field or open area in front. There was a lot of military training equipment, as I had seen in a video when I was in Jakarta. To the side, there were panels held up with wooden posts, which, I assumed, were for target shooting practice. Several barracks were erected in the rear of the field, with beds for the mujahidin like us. I couldn't count them all precisely, but I would say about 60 cadres lived there. Maybe the exact number could never be stated, since there were many cadres who were ready to go into battle and left the camp, and new cadres like us were always arriving. To the side of the barracks, there was a library, next to which was a center for caring for the wounded mujahidin -- a kind of small clinic, but too small to be called a hospital. A relatively large building was behind the row of the barracks. This functioned as a mosque. In the row farthest from the field, near the open grass, was a warehouse for small arms, a small laboratory, and a long building that served as the main kitchen and mess hall. The simple latrines stood next to the mess hall.

I went through the details of the training with dedication. My body was smaller than most of the Chechen youths, and this forced me to try even harder in every physical exercise if I wanted to achieve the same results. But as for aiming for a goal, I didn't need to feel discouraged. A comrade even praised me, which at least added to my enthusiasm and killed any impatience I had been waiting for the time I could go to the field of jihad itself.

With a trainer, I studied the various kinds of weapons. He was a veteran mujahidin who had fought in Afghanistan. First, we studied different kinds of handguns and rifles. We studied the names of the weapons, the kinds of ammunition they required, ways to safely handle them, their specifications and how to clean them. We had to study all this before we were allowed to learn how to fire them.

I listened carefully to every detail and was quick to memorize everything. After that, we learned how to use bigger and heavier weapons. There was the Uzi submachine gun, which was designed by Uziel Gal in 1948, a Soviet-era light machine gun called Degtyarev DP, a light machine gun usually carried like a sash over the back called an RPD, and, of course, the legendary favorite Kalashnikov AK-47, which was named after its creator, Mikhail Kalashnikov. There were automatic weapons called PK and PKM. We also spent days studying a weapon often mounted on Russian Army tanks, called the Dushka. There were two kinds of Dushka, DShk and DShkM 12.7; the latter was very large and heavy.

After various pistols, rifles, and machine guns, we moved on to rocket-propelled grenade launchers: the RPG-7, RPG-181, and RPG-22 were very sophisticated. And finally, we studied explosives, mines, and various attack techniques. We had to study all of this carefully and as fast as we could, for the jihad battlefield awaited us.

"Boom!" The sound was deafening and was followed by many other loud explosions. Two Russian tanks blew up and caught fire, while the row of accompanying vehicles behind them quickly turned around.

"God is great!" We breathed sighs of relief. For some time, we had waited behind some trees quietly, as if frozen, for the moment when our operation would succeed. We had planted PTD, programmed time delay, explosives when we learned the Russian convoy was about to pass by. We then waited from our hiding places several hundred meters from the curve in the road where we had planted the PTDs. This was one of our most successful means of attack.

Half hour later, we inspected the site of the explosions and found almost nothing left. There were the shattered bodies of four or five Russian soldiers, so smashed to pieces that we had trouble in determining how many were there. There was no war booty to take away; all that remained was ash. We went straight back to the camp because we knew that they would certainly return with more tanks to carry the bodies of their comrades.

I lay on the thin mattress as soon as we returned to the camp, trying to regain some strength before we had to report to the commander. I described to myself again everything that we had done that day, looking for mistakes and shortcomings. This would be useful for developing a new attack plan and receiving further orders from the commander of our unit.

From day to day, the fighting grew more and more intense. The Russian troops became more and more vicious. They frequently attacked a village or area by surprise, captured all men, raped the women and girls, shot wildly and left the area in smoke and ruins. From day to day, the waves of civilian refugees, women, children, and old men grew larger. These refugees only carried what they could and had only limited resources. They were often already starving, in fact, before they reached the refugee camps. From day to day, more and more villages were burned to the ground and buildings destroyed. But, from day to day, too, the spirit of the mujahidin grew, and a large number of the mujahidin arrived to help.

I saw in the training camp many youth from Dagestan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and surrounding areas who had come to train. Among them were many who I guessed were only about 14 or 15 years old. Although they were tall, their posture was more like children than adult men. But their gaze was sharp and full of spirit. Earnestness emerged from their every movement and speech. They studied everything very quickly and really impressed me.

Today, we were going to intercept a convoy of Russian troops carrying supplies of food and ammunition in their large trucks. We still didn't know how many vehicles there would be in the convoy, but a mujahidin informant had identified the route they would likely follow. We weren't using the buried explosives this time, because we hoped to get food from them and, more importantly, ammunition. We had planned everything quickly, but carefully.

We were carrying AK-47s, two Dushkas, and several PKMs. At a sharp descending bend in the road that is bound on two sides by hills, we were hiding behind tall grass and trees. If the AK-47s and PKMs were not enough to bring down the convoy, at the place on the road where it descended, we had positioned Dushkas on either side of the road. That was our plan, and we were waiting.

From afar, we could see the convoy of cars and trucks. One car in front, three trucks behind it, and then an open-back personnel carrier with Russian troops. A feeling of tension rushed through my whole body; I closed my eyes for a few seconds and recited "bismillah" [in the name of God]. All was ready, and everyone was in position.

A surprise attack would certainly take the wind out of their sails. I was sure the drivers, especially those driving the supply trucks, would be concentrating on the sharply descending turn in the road. Still, they were highly trained national troops, so they would certainly reply with a fierce counterattack. Our position from above, though, was in our favor. After various minutes of firing back and forth, I saw a huge explosion in the personnel carrier with the open back, and the men in it were flung and scattered in every direction. The explosion must have come from our Dushka. The firing continued for several more minutes until we had completely paralyzed the convoy. We picked up two of our comrades who had died a holy death, God willing, and two more who had been wounded in the firing. We took over a car and two trucks full of food, a truck with ammunition and weapons, and that was our war booty today. Not a bad haul.

These last few days, I haven't been involved in any of our attack operations. I've used the time to restudy attack strategies from the manual and the techniques of escaping from enemy arrest. Unexpectedly, the deputy commander of our camp comes to speak to me. He urges me to change clothes into gray. He then gives me a letter that I have to deliver to the commander of another mujahidin camp about two miles from ours. He gives me a pistol, which I stick to my waistband. I take a jacket from where it's hanging and wear it as neatly as possible. After receiving instructions and the secret code that I must use later, I take their leave. Although my heart is beating in anticipation, I am proud that I have been given this mission.

Returning from the mission, I take a different road. I want to avoid someone recognizing and following me. I choose a road that goes through a village that has been abandoned by most of its inhabitants, who had fled. There were still some inhabitants left, though, as I see smoke coming out of several chimneys in the houses as I pass by. Suddenly, I hear the suppressed screams of a woman. Someone must be trying to gag her, as the sounds are alternately heard and then muffled, as if someone were covering her mouth from behind. I try to find the source of the sound. In the distance I see a Russian soldier pushing along a Chechen girl, who couldn't be more than 16 or 17 years old. Her arms have been tied behind her back. One soldier has his arms around her shoulders and is pushing her forward. Another soldier is guarding them from behind with a weapon he points left and right.

I am suddenly overtaken with anger. My blood boils, and my teeth start chattering. I see in the two Russian brutes the two scoundrels who had tried to rape my little sister. I shuddered. But to my eyes the Russian brutes truly have the same faces as the two scoundrels I'd seen in the police station. I am drawn to follow them from afar. They turn and enter a house that I assume is empty, having been left by its owners when they fled. After several minutes, I follow to the side of the house.

From inside I hear the brutes screaming at the girl and threatening her. The girl is crying and pleading. I grope for my gun under my shirt, pull it out, and cock it. With the cocked pistol, I push in the door, which turns out to be unlocked. The two scoundrels are really frightened. One lifts his rifle at me, and I shoot him in the forehead, quicker than him by a matter of seconds, I think. Meanwhile, the other, who is half naked, hurriedly looks for his pistol. I shoot him in the chest. Two shots are enough to make him fall to the floor.

With a signal, I tell the girl to quickly leave. It won't be safe to stay there for long. If there is a Russian patrol, it can be dangerous. Still pale with fear and shaking, the girl thanks me over and over again, then she leaves. I close the door of the house and sneak in between the houses. My feelings are a mix of fear and relief. I also have the feeling that the guilt that has plagued me all this time has now been uprooted. I suddenly feel as if I have killed the two scoundrels who had tried to rape my sister.

So a feeling of happiness and relief runs through my whole body. In the land of Chechnya, all my burdens have been lifted, have vanished. The burden that had, for so long, pressed me is gone here in the land of Chechnya. Then, suddenly,

"Boom!" An explosion goes off in my chest. Hot blood flows out.... I see from far away two Russian soldiers grinning. I grope for the pistol in my jacket and another explosion hits my stomach. "God!" I fall. All is now finished for me.

E N D

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