

Don't do crime boy

I had one thing to do that day. One single thing. To get ready to go to the beach for three days with Ian the English and Rafa the Spanish. To fish, play volleyball, swim, and chill. Respectively in that order. But from preparation to leaving, I was engaged in a series of crimes I couldn't forgive myself for.

Before I tell you about that though, let me tell you about this. Ian and Rafa picked the best time of year to visit me. I live in a small town on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, just above the Sahara Desert. No week of year where conditions assemble for an incredible time on the beach better than the second week of August. It was warm for one week already. Windless and bright, and cicadas out crepitating relentlessly throughout the day. A natural cycle of things unfolding and had no one questioning them. Not a foetus in its mother's womb would have contested the delicacy of the arrangement outside. From day to night and from dawn to dusk. The dawn fresh and trouble free. The morning clear, white, and sweatless. Soon afternoon heat reaching the skies and sun rays strike down on the emptying, quieting streets lovingly — that if it was love, then nothing other than a mother's to her first-born son. Fervid, hard to understand. Better hide. Find a tree, anything that looks like a shadow. About three hours before sunset streets cooling down and it starts to feel like a tropical forest, minus the humid greeneries. The night falls and temperatures not so much.

Now, whether you're a firm believer in what constitutes a purely criminal act and what doesn't I don't know. I wouldn't say I am. Either way, here's how it went down

that day: first I went to the garage to make sure my fishing rod was in good shape. It was covered in dust, but in good shape it was. Then I walked out to the grocery store, Abdul's groceries from across the street. But pretty soon I lost track of why I wanted to go to Abdul's groceries. A girl was crossing the street from the opposite side caught my attention when she suddenly stood in front of two bearded men and asked them, "where is the new Sushi place?" A Sushi place in an essentially Arab-Muslim village, yeah. And? Sure enough somebody opened a Sushi place in the village and she meant to go there.

"Ammm." — One of the men was looking at her, trying to make out what the hell she was asking, and the other gandering left and right far in distance, I'd say he was mostly thinking, where could the Sushi place be.

The girl's voice resonated in a slight nasal tone, and had a very soft vibration to it. I was walking slowly across the street. In fact, I think I was walking so slow, time stopped. I drew a mental map locating the new Sushi place. I knew precisely where it was — not more than five minutes walk from where we stood . But I didn't tell the girl any of it. Neither the map I had going on, nor the thing about time stopping. Her t-shirt light grey, casual, sleeves opening to just under her shoulders. Her hair black, curly, short, to just about her earlobes. Her breasts sort of, there, and yet her stomach was plane flat and so her t-shirt ridged under. She was neither too thin, nor extra weight. She had jeans on, slightly loose, pleating on her crotch. Her Chelsea boots black, cheap, or rather, no, they were absolutely and fundamentally used! She didn't have a smart phone, but she was gripping a piece of Motorola in her left hand

—you know, like a mason in his morning shift clutching that very first brick. If her phone couldn't help her, neither could I. I bet she was called Amina or something.

I entered Abdul's groceries. "Salamu Alaikum." Said I. "Three eggs, one baguette, a tuna can, one small harissa tube, and a medium sized watermelon. Oh, and a pack of Marlboro, light, please." I finished my sentence but Abdul still didn't get up and look at me. He was moving up from his seat toward the counter, but did not lift his eyes from his phone. I think he was watching a Turkish soap opera. Those were popular at the time. Sentimental as hell, melodramatically correct, and teeming with good looking men and women. Abdul finally put the phone down and said "Salam brother. How can I help?" "Eggs..." and the other stuff. Serviced as pleased, I turned to the door, plucking a pendent sack of baklava on the way, while Abdul fell gently back on his chair — didn't even ask for money. *Maybe another time he will?* I thought, and hoped not. At home I fixed a tuna sandwich, with over-cooked omelette. I hate it when the omelette is overcooked! But my phone was ringing and then one alert tone after another kept me from making a good omelette. Ian and Rafa will be in their way in half an hour. It will take them fifteen minutes to come from the hotel.

In my bedroom clothes scattered on the floor. A green backpack lying empty next to them. I was wearing slippers in my feet. I took them off and tossed them in the backpack. The floor of the house was cool under my feet. White tiles dotted in black, fantastic under my feet. On the way back to the kitchen I slowed my pace, picked my phone, stood right there in the hallway between vacant white walls and stared at the screen. I scrolled down a new Instagram profile I came across. It was suggested to me, by Instagram. It was of another girl. She dances a lot in her profile, she's not a

professional dancer or anything, yeah. She just dances. She shows herself putting make-up as well. And recommends, or disrecommends this, or that make-up. I never thought I was into make-up. Am I?!

Twenty-five seconds was probably the time I spent scrolling through that profile. I loaded Facebook. I have no notifications. I scrolled down; news about this, and news about that, and did you know this, and did you know that. I refreshed the app. I scrolled once, then twice, I refreshed again, and left. I touched Signal, nobody says anything. Nobody sends anything. I swiped my home screen left, then right. Then left again, then I touched Instagram. I scrolled down a little bit more. Back to home screen. I touched YouTube. The touch felt sort of heavier this time. “How to make Sushi at home in five minutes.” — *Hein?*

I finally slipped the phone in my pocket and entered the kitchen and sat at the table in front of my open laptop. I checked my Inbox. Fifty-one thousand, nine hundred and two, was the number of unopened emails. Yes. I had forty pages open in one browser. So afraid to click any of them out of the limbo. The fear bugs, or some disease oozing out of them is real. I turned on Spotify. What can I play? Is it Summer Jazz? Is it Acid Techno? Is it Blues? Is it Arab Groove? Is it French Rap? Is it... well, I played Sade, “Feel No Pain”. *Boy, is she good!* My eyes complied and closed thereafter. But then opened again as the doorbell rang, and the music, it stopped. Ian and Rafa were finally here.

At some point on our way to the beach the road changed to sandy —not white yet but it was dense with sand. Ian and Rafa understood we were getting closer to the

beach. We could no longer see people or houses around. And the vegetation growing thicker and more olive trees surging from the small farm lands. We were increasingly spirited and chatty. Gentle rubbing of the shoulders was now ok. Rafa grabbed Ian's waist and finally kissed him on the lips. Vigorously, like when a man kisses another for the very first time, with feelings. But feelings here can either get you crazy, or killed. We threaded through pathways encroached by ever growing wild blackberries, spider nets and other suspicious plants no body took to a laboratory for examination yet. The sand was sucking our feet down slow. Every now and then I lagged behind to pick a berry or two. When suddenly Ian yelled that he can see the band of blue! The water! Rising above the land surface in distance.

Damn, man! He shouted. It is gorgeous. And gorgeous it really was. We couldn't ask for more. I couldn't ask for more. I didn't need anything else. A fishing rod, a book, food, water, and two good friends was what I could ever needed in the second week of August. But how, do you think it would have been possible for me to stop the phone in my pocket from ringing? How? Hein? N-O-W-A-Y! It was my mother. God bless her. I picked up, "hello, mom." I said. "God damn why didn't you pay Abdul his money? What with you I told you not do crime boy!!!" She said, in one single breath.