

**THE LAST  
DECEPTION**  
A Leine Basso Thriller  
Excerpt

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*For Mark...the best partner a girl could have*

## CHAPTER 1

*Tripoli, Libya*

**T**he predawn call to prayer resonated through Tripoli's old city as Leine Basso raced along the whitewashed corridor of the medina. She was running out of time. The traffickers had continually changed Munira's location and finding verifiable intel had been sketchy. The latest report put the fifteen-year-old Yazidi girl at a residence in the labyrinthine maze of shops, apartments, and restaurants near the harbor, but even that information was several hours old.

"Leine, what's your position?" Lou Stokes's voice crackled in her earpiece.

"Five minutes out."

"Hamid?"

"The same," Hamid answered.

"Copy that," Lou said.

Minutes later, Leine turned the corner and entered a second corridor leading to the entrance of the trafficker's safe house. Slowing her pace, she raised a suppressed MP-5SD and followed the wall. Hamid emerged from the other direction through the predawn gloom with his gun drawn. They both paused near the arched doorway to listen. Hearing nothing, they entered the enclosure.

A dry fountain in the shape of an eight-pointed star stood at the center of the empty courtyard. Tiled steps to Leine's right led to a second-floor passageway bordered by an ornate metal handrail. Two closed doors could be seen at the top. Hamid continued through the lower level to clear it while Leine quietly ascended to the second floor.

She stopped at the first door to listen, heart thrumming in anticipation.

Nothing. When she tried the handle, the catch disengaged easily. She stepped to the side and pushed the door open.

Empty.

Leine backed away from the room and moved to the second door. This time muffled voices filtered through. She leaned over the railing and gestured to Hamid, who had finished clearing the first floor. He nodded and silently climbed the stairs, continuing along the passageway to check the rest of the structure. She removed a tiny fiber optic camera attached to a cable from the tactical vest she was wearing, and threaded the cable through the gap at the bottom of the door. The two-and-a-half-inch LED monitor flickered to life, showing a partially illuminated room with three occupants.

Two armed men were at a table on the left. The third person, a dark-haired female dressed in lingerie, sat on a mattress on the floor with her knees drawn up to her chin and her hands behind her back. A black plastic zip tie bound her ankles. She matched the photograph Lou had given her.

*Munira.*

Hamid returned and she showed him the screen before she removed the camera and put it back in her vest. They each took a position away from the direct line of fire and raised their weapons. Leine rocked back

and forth three times as Hamid grasped the door handle. On three, he disengaged the lock and she kicked the door open. Leine entered first, with Hamid close behind. The first man shouted to the other one and leaped to his feet, knocking the chair back as he raised his weapon. Leine fired a three-shot burst into him and he dropped to the floor. The other gunman tried to do the same but Hamid shot him twice in the head before he could fire.

While Hamid kept watch at the door, Leine lowered her weapon and turned toward the young woman, now cowering against the wall. Dark bruises covered her face and chest, and several angry red welts marked her arms and legs. *The bastards burned her with cigarettes.* Leine clenched her teeth and tamped down the anger rising in her chest.

Her captors were dead. It was a start.

“Don’t be afraid, Munira,” Leine said gently in Arabic. “We’re here to help you.”

Munira shook her head in confusion. “Who are you? What do you want?”

“We’re from SHEN, an organization that helps people like you.” Leine slid a tactical knife from her vest and bent to cut the tie binding her ankles. “Are you able to turn around so I can cut your hands free? We don’t have much time.”

Munira nodded and struggled to her knees. Leine reached behind her and slit the hard plastic tie, releasing the young woman’s wrists. Leine sheathed the knife as she straightened and held out her hand. The young woman grasped it and pulled herself to her feet. She was tall, though not as tall as Leine, with dark hair that fell to the middle of her back. Leine scanned the room for something to cover the fifteen-year-old.

“What did these men use to dress you?” Leine didn’t think the traffickers would risk taking her from place to place dressed in lingerie.

Munira nodded at the sheet covering the mattress. “This.” She picked up the pale blue fabric and began to wrap it around herself.

“This is taking too much time,” Hamid muttered from the doorway. “We must hurry.”

Leine helped her secure the ends of the makeshift abaya and led her toward the door, giving a wide berth to the dead gunmen. Hamid checked the passageway in both directions before giving the all clear and exiting the room. Leine and Munira followed him down the stairs to the first level.

Leine protected the rear as they advanced to the arched doorway leading to the rest of the medina. Hamid scanned the outside corridor and motioned that it was safe to exit the courtyard. She turned, intending to follow them, when a man with an assault rifle slung over his shoulder appeared on the upper floor, headed for the room with the dead gunmen. His eyes met Leine’s and alarm swept across his face. He scrambled to raise his weapon.

“Eleven o’clock!” Leine yelled and pushed Munira behind her as she aimed the MP-5 at the trafficker. Hamid was faster and fired a prolonged burst, chewing up the tile near the gunman’s feet. The man dove for cover before returning fire.

“Go!” Hamid yelled, ejecting the spent magazine and jacking in another.

Leine grabbed Munira and propelled her through the archway into the maze of the medina. They raced down the corridor through the twists and turns of the old city, retracing the route Leine had memorized on the way in.

“What’s happening?” Lou’s voice came over the mic. “Leine? Hamid?”

“A third gunman,” Leine replied. “Hamid’s engaged, but he should be right behind us. I’ve got her, Lou. We’ll be at the square in under five.”

“Roger that.”

A short time later, the two women emerged from the medina into a small, empty square bookended by two large gates, one of which was open. The sound of tires on gravel filtered through the crisp morning air as an armored SUV screamed through the open gate, coming to an abrupt stop next to them. Dust enveloped the square as the back door opened, revealing Lou Stokes, the silver-haired director for Stop Human Enslavement Now.

“Get in.”

Heart hammering in her chest, she shepherded Munira into the back seat. The traumatized look on the young woman's face stabbed Leine in the heart. *No one should have to endure what she's been through.*

Lou barked into the mic. "Hamid, what's your ETA?"

There was no answer.

"Hamid?" he repeated.

Leine's stomach twisted as she checked her watch. *He should have been here by now.* Unease wound its way up her spine.

"I'm going back." She turned and started for the corridor.

"Almost there." Hamid's voice echoed in her earpiece.

Relief swept through her, and Leine let out the breath she'd been holding. She'd never been so happy to hear someone's voice. Hamid staggered through the archway, gripping his shoulder. Blood saturated his left arm.

Leine slid her knife free as she met him and cut the straps holding his pack. It fell to the ground.

"It's just a flesh wound," he quipped, but his pale face and the obvious blood loss told her otherwise. Shouldering the pack, she helped him into the cargo space of the SUV and climbed in beside him as the driver peeled out of the square.

"I've got a surgeon standing by at the safe house," Lou said.

Unzipping the front of the pack, she pulled out Hamid's medical kit. Alert for signs of shock, she applied a tourniquet to slow the bleeding and packed the wound with clotting agent and gauze. Munira peered over the back of the seat, her eyes wide.

"He'll be fine," Leine said, trying to put her at ease. She couldn't imagine the horror she'd been through. Not only had she been taken from her home in northern Iraq by the terrorist group Izz Al-Din and brutally abused by its fighters, when they'd tired of her she'd been sold to sex traffickers.

Satisfied the bleeding in Hamid's shoulder had stopped, Leine repacked the kit and stashed it inside his pack.

Lou studied Leine. "You okay?"

She nodded. "Yeah. No worries. I think I stopped the bleeding." She leaned over and placed a hand on Hamid's cheek. His skin was cool but not clammy, and his respiration was normal. Relieved that he appeared to be stable, she leaned back and smiled kindly at Munira, who was crying softly. "You're safe now. Everything's going to be fine."

But of course things wouldn't be fine. Yes, her body would heal, but would Munira be able to live a normal life? Or would she, like thousands before her, take her own life rather than live with the shame of what had been done to her?

Leine leaned her head back and closed her eyes. She'd been here before. The disturbing image of tears streaming down the young woman's bruised and battered face and the unfathomable desolation that had settled in her eyes would haunt Leine for years to come.

Fifteen minutes after the extraction, they reached the clinic where Hamid's surgical team waited. While they prepped him for surgery, Leine accompanied Munira to an examination room where a kindly nurse attended to the young woman's injuries and prescribed medication for a severe bladder infection. As soon as the nurse signed off allowing her to travel, Munira would be flown to another facility in Turkey, where she'd be reassessed and monitored, and would participate in a psychiatric evaluation that included individual and group sessions.

Leine had pushed for SHEN to include follow-up care for the victims they rescued. The first several months after the mission were critical for successful reentry into the women's family and culture. For a large percentage of rescued women, unacknowledged societal and emotional stressors often proved to be their undoing. With new tools in place to help them cope, tragedy could often be avoided.

She said her goodbyes to Munira and promised to keep in touch. Exhausted from the mission, Leine hitched a ride with Lou to the safe house to get some rest. On the way, she gave her cell phone a cursory

glance and noticed a text from Janice, a friend who was working at a refugee camp near the Libyan-Egyptian border. Their unusual schedules made being on the same continent, much less the same country, a rare occurrence, and they'd been trying to figure out a way to get together for the last few days.

Too tired to think of a coherent reply, Leine put her phone away. She'd get back to her after she got some much-needed rest.

## CHAPTER 2

*Refugee camp, Libyan-Egyptian border*

**I**t was the screaming that woke her.

Janice had gotten used to the bombs, could sleep through the sporadic shelling that came within a mile of the camp. But not the screams. She fumbled for her glasses on the makeshift nightstand and lurched to her feet.

*Not again.*

Steadying herself, she groped to button her pants—she'd taken to wearing her clothes to bed since the last attack—then stepped into her boots. She didn't take the time to lace them. Amorphous shadows danced before her, forming grotesque figures on the walls of her tent.

*Fire.*

The screams speared her heart, making it hard to breathe. Who'd been hurt—or killed—this time? Grabbing a flashlight from underneath her cot, she tore out of the tent and raced toward the wall of flames to join the others as they scrambled to salvage what they could of the field hospital.

*They did it again. The bastards just bombed another refugee hospital.*

Dr. Richard Evans, still in his scrubs with a stethoscope dangling from his neck, motioned her over. The calm intensity of the young surgeon's expression belied the panic radiating off him.

"Two patients are recuperating in the triage area. We've got to get them out." Earlier that day they'd run out of space in the recovery unit hidden yards away beneath a still-intact tarp of desert camouflage and left the last two patients where they had room—the surgical unit.

*Please let them be all right.*

"Here—take this." The doctor handed her an empty fire extinguisher and started for the blazing structure.

"Wait—" Janice grasped his arm as fire billowed from beneath the tent roof. Sections of tarp were fast becoming skeletal remains of what had once been a serviceable operating room. Camp personnel edged closer with fire extinguishers and buckets of water, but the intensity of the flames held them back. Ordinarily shelling didn't produce so much fire. The bomb must have destroyed one of the oxygen units. Janice glanced toward the east. Eyes wide with fear, a group of refugees stood nearby, watching.

Just then, one of the patients staggered from the blaze and collapsed to all fours. Hacking and choking, his hospital gown slid off his shoulders to reveal his bare back. Two medics rushed to help him.

Dr. Evans broke from her grasp and raced toward the operating tent.

“No, Richard. The oxygen tanks—”

An explosion shook the ground and a plume of smoke rocketed skyward, blotting out the stars and illuminating the bleak landscape of row upon row of white tents, sand, and more sand.

“Correction,” the doctor replied, his tone bleak. “What oxygen tanks?” His shoulders sagged as he watched the voracious flames consume what was left of the structure.

Someone shouted as the burning effigy of a man appeared at the far end of the tent pushing a gurney holding one of the patients. He staggered a short distance before he collapsed to the ground. Janice sprinted to him as the doctor rushed to check on the patient. Someone handed her a blanket and she threw it over the man, rolling him in it to suffocate the fire.

“It’s Ahmed,” she said to the person beside her, her voice catching. Ahmed was the Egyptian liaison and translator who doubled as an administrative genie, dealing with the forms and red tape thrown at them by their host country. He was also Dr. Evans’s good friend.

“Jesus. Quick, take him to my tent,” Evans said. “I’ve got supplies. We can work on him there.” He nodded at two men dressed in scrubs standing nearby.

“Do you need me?” Janice had trained as an emergency medical responder and usually did triage.

The doctor nodded at the patient on the gurney. “He’s stable, but you need to get him to a safe area.” He turned to the two men, both senior trauma nurses. “Let’s go.” The three of them grasped the edges of the blanket and hoisted Ahmed, now mercifully unconscious, and carried him away.

Janice pushed the patient to the camouflaged recovery section and checked his vitals. He’d survive, as long as the shelling stopped. She alerted on-duty personnel that he was there before racing to help the others transfer buckets of brackish river water in an attempt to douse the raging inferno.

Half an hour later, nothing remained of the operating tent except the misshapen, blackened metal of what had once been a generator. Janice and the rest of the group watched in silence as the remaining structure gave way and collapsed into a smoldering pile of ashes.

“Why target us?” Marcy, fresh from an internship at a prestigious hospital in San Francisco and the camp’s new recruit, stood nearby with her arms crossed, a deep frown creasing her pretty features. Janice had been glad when Marcy joined the group—in a male-dominated organization such as this one another woman with whom to commiserate was a welcome change.

Janice shook her head. “I don’t know. I want to believe it was a mistake, that someone got the coordinates wrong, but after three years in this place I doubt it.” What earthly reason would either side in this endless, brutal conflict have to demolish a medical facility that only took care of refugees? In all the time she’d been with the group, they hadn’t helped anyone even remotely connected to the Libyan National Army or the terrorists. Not that they would have turned away someone who was injured, but treating them would have been the exception.

“Whatever happened to international law?” Marcy asked. “Don’t sick and wounded people have rights?”

“You mean the Geneva Conventions?” Janice scoffed. “They don’t mean shit in this part of the world.”

Janice was about ready to hang up her long-held dream of helping the victims of war. No matter how hard she tried to convince herself that she made a difference, the incessant doubts erased whatever positive feelings she garnered from doing the work. It was hard to stay upbeat and positive when three-quarters of patients treated at the hospital were sick and starving children, or amputees who’d been on the wrong side of an improvised explosive device.

“I’m going to check on Ahmed. See if Dr. Evans needs anything.” Marcy gave Janice a brief smile and started for the doctor’s quarters. Janice watched her leave and then turned to the smoking destruction in front of her. With a deep sigh she joined the others cleaning up.

A few hours later, after the last of the garbage had been taken to a holding area for pickup, Janice made her way back to her tent, hoping to grab a few hours of rest before her next shift. Everyone else not on night duty had retired to their respective quarters to do the same.

She stopped for a moment, admiring the clarity of the night, marveling over how wars, famine, death, and disease could rage on, yet the sky never changed. Every morning the sun rose, and every evening the moon and stars. Janice inhaled deeply before continuing on to her quarters. As she passed the mess tent, the sound of breaking glass made her stop.

*Probably a refugee looking for food. Better go and check.*

Janice reached the entrance and hesitated. The distinct silhouette of a man stood just inside the tent. With his back to Janice and dressed in the clothes of a local, she couldn’t be sure who it was. She cleared her throat, not wanting to startle him. The figure froze and slowly raised his hands in the air.

“I am unarmed,” the silhouette said in heavily accented English. His voice was raspy and undoubtedly Russian. He turned slowly to face her.

A black headscarf with white Arabic lettering framing a face with broad cheekbones and a thick beard set alarm bells off in her head. Dressed in a faded knit shirt, baggy black pants, and a pair of heavily used black boots, his attire resembled the uniform of the terrorists in the area, although the Russian accent threw her. Her gaze shifted to a Kalashnikov rifle propped against a table nearby. The man glanced at the gun and then back to her.

“I thought you said you were unarmed.” Blood rushed to her face and she stepped back.

His hands still in the air the man moved with great deliberation away from the gun. “I will not hurt you,” he said. The light from the glow of an outside security lamp revealed a dark stain on his shirt.

“You’re injured.” Janice started toward him but thought better of it and stilled. The man’s gaze followed her. He made no move.

“Yes.”

His respiration increased, evidenced by the rapid rise and fall of his chest. Sweat trickled down the sides of his face and his arms drooped, as though he found it a chore to hold them up. He winced and raised his hands higher.

“I can help you, but you must tell me who you are and what you’re doing here.”

“I am Mikhail.”

“You’re Russian?”

Mikhail nodded.

“Then why are you dressed like Izz Al-Din?” She glanced at his head covering. Although she hadn’t come into contact with a member of the terrorist group fighting the Libyans, she’d been through enough briefings to know they wore the same black headscarf to signify their solidarity with other jihadists.

Mikhail swayed slightly as he reached for the scarf and slid it off, letting it fall to the ground. “I am not...I cannot...”

His face contorted in pain and he lowered his hands. His eyelids fluttered and his legs buckled. He crashed into the table behind him, knocking it over as he slid to the ground. Janice rushed to his side. His eyes flickered open, then closed.

“Mikhail. How were you hurt? Stay with me now.”

He frowned and opened his eyes. "I wish to surrender. I—" He stopped, the words dying in his throat.

"Here. Let's take a look at that."

He watched her through slits as she carefully raised his shirt to reveal a gunshot wound to his left side. Gently, she felt around his torso, searching for the exit point. The hole in his back was larger and slightly lower than where the bullet entered. Blood seeped from the wound. She climbed to her feet.

The man's gaze tracked her as she crossed the room to the kitchen. She returned with two towels, which she folded into fourths and pressed to each wound.

"Can you hold these in place?"

He nodded. She guided his hands, showing him how much pressure to use. "Is that the only place you were shot?"

"I think so."

Janice checked his pulse. It was fast, but steady. "You need a doctor."

"No, no doctors—"

"You're not in a position to argue," she said. "We've got QuikClot in the supply room but I need to go get it. Will you be okay if I leave you for a minute?"

He nodded. Pain obvious on his face, he shifted slightly before rearranging his hands for a better grip on the towels. She rose to leave but he seized her arm in a surprisingly firm grip. The towel he'd been holding slid from the wound. She picked it up and repositioned it, guiding his hand to hold it in place before she leaned closer to hear him.

"I am not terrorist," he insisted. "I am Russian soldier. My superiors ordered me to join Izz Al-Din."

"You're working undercover?"

The corners of Mikhail's mouth pulled downward in a grimace. "At first, yes. Now I am *helping* terrorists."

Janice narrowed her eyes. "But your government is backing Libya against them. How—"

He shook his head. "This is ruse. My country fights America's allies through Izz Al-Din."

Startled, Janice slid her hand free of his. "You aren't serious." Izz Al-Din's brutal tactics and inhumane treatment of prisoners and civilians was well documented. No sane government would ask its soldiers to willingly fight alongside such butchers.

"*Da*. As you people say, serious as heart attack." A deep, racking cough punctuated his words, and pain arched across his face. Janice got to her feet.

"But—that makes no sense. Egypt and Libya are working against the terrorists, not each other."

"*Maskirovka*. You understand this word?" When Janice shook her head, Mikhail explained. "*Maskirovka* is deception. In beginning, Russia supplied my unit with false information to give terrorists. Izz Al-Din acted on this false information and we win."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Is different now. My superiors now give correct information on United States allied movement. All so US will commit ground troops." Mikhail winced as he tried to get more comfortable.

"But that puts Izz Al-Din in a stronger position. US-backed allies would be decimated."

Mikhail leaned his head back, holding her gaze. "This is why I am no longer interested in helping my country." Another cough seized him and he squeezed his eyes closed against the pain. "Do you think I will die?" he asked.

"Not if I get that clotting agent, you won't."

“I must get message to my father. Information is there.” He dipped his chin toward a medallion he wore around his neck.

Janice touched the bronze figurine of a saint. “This?”

He nodded. “*Da*. Is flash drive. Please to send message to him? His contact information is there. Anatoly Sakharov. Tell him I am alive.”

“Of course.” She pulled the necklace over his head and studied the medallion. The two ends came apart, revealing a USB connector. She snapped it closed and put it in her pocket. “I’ll do it later this morning. We’ll have satellite hookup then.”

“If I am alive in morning, please to give back?”

“Of course.” Janice straightened and started for the door. “The QuikClot is in the supply unit. I’ll be right back.”

Mikhail closed his eyes, pain evident in the white, straight line of his mouth, the pinched eyes, the deep V of his brows. Janice slung the Kalashnikov over her shoulder and hurried from the tent, headed for Dr. Evans’s quarters. It didn’t matter if the man was Russian or Izz Al-Din, he needed a doctor, now.

## CHAPTER 3

*SHEN safe house, Tripoli*

**L**eine finished packing her carry-on bag and checked the spacious, well-appointed room one last time for anything she might have missed. The house would be considered luxurious by anyone's standards, but especially when compared to SHEN's usual base of operations. The Libyan businessman who offered his residence as their base for rescuing Munira would be returning the next day, and she wanted to be long gone before then. The fewer people that recognized her, the better. With the increase in sex trafficking they'd been seeing, she had a feeling she'd be back in the region before long.

Hamid's surgery had gone well. Now stable and resting in a hotel room a few kilometers away, the SHEN operative would be transferred to a medical facility in Spain for the remainder of his convalescence. The prognosis for recovering the use of his left arm and shoulder was good, although it would take considerable time and therapy. Lou suggested an extended beach vacation, assuring him that relaxation would be the best thing for him.

Leine grabbed her bag to leave, but then remembered she hadn't replied to Janice's message from the day before, and set it back on the bed. She thought she might be able to get away to see her old friend, but that was before she learned that she could snag a seat on military transport due out of Libya that afternoon. The thought of going home had won out over sticking around in the hot desert.

*Hey there, she wrote. Much as I'd love to see you, I've got a ride out of here that I can't refuse. Let me know when you're back in Vancouver and I'll come visit for a few days. We'll talk smack about old boyfriends, go hiking, and drink wine. Leine.*

Leine had met Janice during the early days of the US war in Afghanistan—Leine had been on a job, and Janice had been working for a non-governmental organization that provided emergency medical care to civilians. Over the years they'd kept in touch, but because of their wildly divergent schedules had only managed one face-to-face meeting.

She pressed send as memories of Afghanistan came flooding back. Considered the agency's premier operative, Leine had been sent to eliminate one of the country's most ruthless warlords with strong ties to the Taliban.

The operation went as planned until she arrived at the extraction point. Someone had tipped off the local Taliban sympathizers and they captured her translator who'd gone ahead to secure the site. They tortured him until he broke, and then dragged his body through the streets behind a dilapidated pickup truck as a warning to others. Dressed in a burqa, Leine was able to elude the

gunmen that surrounded the safe house and then get a message to Eric, her boss. But not before she'd seen what they'd done.

Though she didn't know it at the time, that job had been the beginning of the end for Leine. Over the next few years each mission would cost her more and more emotionally, leading to her decision to leave. Her last job for the agency involved a betrayal so deep, the nightmares still haunted her.

An hour later, at an airstrip outside Tripoli, Leine stood in line waiting to be processed to leave when her phone vibrated. She checked the screen. It was a message from Janice. The time stamp told her she'd sent it several hours ago. A message lost in cyberspace, again. Leine figured with the spotty reception she'd encountered in country that she'd been lucky to send and receive messages at all.

*I'm sorry we weren't able to meet this time, Janice wrote. The idea of leaving Libya sounds really good right now and I can't blame you for going. Things here are sketchy. Although the camp has recovered from an "accidental" bombing that occurred several months ago, the hospital is still vulnerable to attack. Dr. Evans refuses to move the facilities to a safer location. His reasoning is that the people won't have as far to go to receive treatment. But what if those people are killed? All I can do is hope and do my work. Safe travels, J*

Leine stared at the screen for a moment. Janice's tone had changed from upbeat to bleak in the course of twenty-four hours. Had something happened to make her outlook change so drastically? The line began to move forward to the last checkpoint. She lifted her bag and moved along with the others. *I should find out what's bothering her.*

*That sounds pretty bleak, she typed. What's going on? Something I can do?* She pressed send and glanced at the phone of the guy standing next to her. Breaking news on one of the 24-hour news outlets showed images of a recent bombing.

"Where is that?" she asked him, nodding at the screen.

"The border, near Egypt," he answered. "Looks like the assholes shelled a refugee camp."

She stiffened. "What news site are you on?"

"BBC."

Leine brought up the story on her phone. Less than an hour before, the terrorist group Izz Al-Din had shelled Janice's refugee camp, destroying their field hospital. There were no reports of casualties. Yet.

Leine looked up from her phone to see that the line had moved on without her. She switched to a dial pad and tapped in the number for Lou's burner phone. Still in country, he'd keep the same number until he left.

"Lou Stokes."

"Lou. It's Leine. I'm taking a detour. I need to get to the Egyptian border."

"What the hell are you talking about? I thought you were going home."

"Izz Al-Din just shelled a refugee camp where a friend of mine is working. I've got to make sure she's all right."

"Jesus. And you want to go there? Do I need to remind you that you just finished an operation for SHEN? You've got to be exhausted." Lou sighed. "How many casualties?"

"None reported yet. We were supposed to meet somewhere between Tripoli and the camp, but I opted to head home."

"Which is the sensible thing to do."

Leine rolled her eyes. "I just called to let you know that I won't be on the flight this afternoon." She scanned the room for a likely contact to hire her own transportation.

He sighed again. "Give me half an hour. I should be able to find you something."

"You're a peach, Lou." Leine ended the call and texted Janice.

*Heard about the bombing. Are you all right? Am working on finding transpo there. Stay safe.*

She slipped the phone into her pocket. It was going to be a long wait.