

## **Lawless Extract:**

### **Prologue:**

Court is in session on the Spanish island of Mallorca. I'm sitting with my client, a young British man accused of selling drugs on the neighbouring island of Ibiza, when my phone vibrates in my pocket. I quietly slide it out and read the message sent by another client, Laila, who was recently kidnapped from Vienna to Afghanistan.

"I don't know if they have guns," the message says.

I scan the courtroom. It's not good form for lawyers to send text messages while the court is in session, but Laila needs a quick reply. I begin to type, casually, trying not to draw any attention to myself.

"Are you wearing the black clothes?" I hit send and get an instant response.

"Yes."

"When you get in the car, we have a burqa for you. Put it on."

"Okay."

I think back to the first time I saw a burqa in 2008 when I arrived in Afghanistan. I had found the ghoulis blue head-to-toe coverings both terrifying and maddening; a visible sign of the oppressive culture of misogyny that was rife in the country. Ironic, then, that I'm now using the burqa to try to free Laila.

I listen as our witness is being questioned by the prosecutor. If found guilty, my client is facing nine years in a Spanish jail and a lifetime stain on his record as a convicted drug dealer. I turn to him and offer a reassuring smile.

He listens nervously as the prosecution continues their cross-examination.

"Relax," I whisper.

I watch the prosecutor as he works our witness. Our witness is consistent, assured, confident. Good man, I think to myself. He's answering all the aggressive questions perfectly. Just as I would answer if I were in his position. I try to concentrate, but my mind keeps darting back to Laila. What is she doing? I wonder.

Keeping my phone out of the sight of the judges, I check it again. Nothing at first, but then it vibrates in my hand, almost making me jump. I open the text. It's from one of my guys; they're outside the house in Afghanistan where Laila has been imprisoned for months. The coast was as clear as it was going to get.

I text Laila again.

"The gate is unlocked. The car is outside. Get in it."

I send the message. I can feel my heart rate rising.

Another text.

“I’m scared.”

“I know. Get in the car Laila.”

One of the judges from the three-judge tribunal eyes me disapprovingly from the bench. I smile back and return my focus to the witness. My phone buzzes again.

“I can’t,” texts Laila.

Fuck.

Like many trafficked victims whom I’ve rescued over the years, Laila is showing signs of psychological confinement. She has a small opportunity to escape, but fear has taken over. Frozen in Afghanistan, she was terrified to make a move. I have an idea.

“Do you have the headphones with you?”

“Yes.”

“In two minutes go to the bathroom. Put the headphones on. I’ll send you a voice note.”

I had had a sleepless week, what with locating Laila, setting up her rescue and preparing for the trial in Mallorca. And now, for the first time in six days, when we only have a few precious minutes to rescue this young woman, she’s lost her nerve. If we don’t act now, she’ll disappear to Pakistan and we may not find her again. It’s now or never.

Back in the courtroom the prosecutor droned on with her cross-examination. I start coughing. I cough as hard as I can until the whole court has stopped what it’s doing and everyone is looking at me. I hold up my hand as I cough harder. A little concerned, the judge who stared at me earlier raises an eyebrow as if to say, “Are you okay?”

“We are going to take a quick break,” she says, eyeing me suspiciously, but also probably hoping I’m not going to cough up a lung.

I nod to her, wait for the judges to leave the court, then run out of the courtroom to the bathroom, locking the door behind me.

“Laila,” I say, into the phone, “listen to me very carefully. You have five minutes to get in the fucking car. If you don’t, we will be gone forever. I will not look for you in Pakistan. I will not help you anymore. I will never answer your calls. Five. Minutes.”

In the ten years I’ve been based in Afghanistan, I’ve represented multiple clients from different countries with vastly different backgrounds, who have had challenging legal issues, many in intensely dangerous situations. I know this territory now like the back of my hand, and although for me it has become just another day’s work, I know that for Laila every second could be the difference between life and death.

My phone vibrates.

“Ms Motley, please don’t leave.” Laila texts. I text back.

“Four minutes.”