



Dead Ones

DAVID FAULKNER



An Afghani teenager, severely wounded when her father is killed by a suicide bomber, is air-lifted to the United States for treatment. While recovering in Bethesda, Md., she is recruited by the FBI to help uncover a terrorist plot led by a Muslim imam from a D.C. mosque.

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A novel by David Faulkner

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First Edition

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Street People

FAHEEM

Saturday, April 10, 2010
Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan

Faheem appeared again at the front window, glanced up and down the road, and hurried back to the kitchen.

“I still don’t see them, Mother.”

Kamili, Faheem's Mother, smiled. “Perhaps if you waited at the window until you *do* see them, it will be easier on both you and the carpet.”

Kamili's smile was radiant, and it frightened Faheem to think that, if the Taliban should return, that smile would disappear. Not merely concealed again beneath a *burqa*, but cease to exist amid the terror and dread.

The NATO military base at the edge of town gave some comfort to Faheem's family and their neighbors. However, the town fretted that when the Americans left Afghanistan the base would close, allowing the Taliban to once again inflict terror across the entire valley.

Faheem resumed her vigil at the window and was soon agonizing over her father’s tardiness. Certainly the town housed informers for the Taliban, who would gleefully report that Doctor Muhammad El Safi had displayed the American flag on the living room wall of his home.

When Kamili questioned her husband about the flag, he responded that displaying the American flag was intended as a gesture of welcome to their guests and not meant to anger the Taliban.

Tarin Kowt, a dusty town of about 10,000, is situated in a mostly desolate valley of Southern Afghanistan. For the five years leading up to 2001 the area was ruled by the dreaded Taliban. By then the town had its fill of the radical Islamists, and Faheem's father joined with other town leaders to oust the Taliban's regional governor from their valley.

That November, tribesmen led by future Afghan president Hamid Karzai, aided by U.S. air strikes, successfully defended the town from

an attack by 500 Taliban fighters. The Islamists were repulsed and had not returned.

In the following year, the town's tribal leaders elected Doctor El Safi to the post of district chief, which he accepted with resolve and humility. At the swearing-in, the elders begged his forgiveness that the only official vehicle the town could afford was an ancient Vespa moped freshly painted fire-engine red. It was indeed humble, but Muhammad El Safi accepted it gratefully. Thereafter, Faheem's father could be seen putt-putting about the town, proud of not missing a day of work, never failing those who counted on him.

Faheem and Kamili often wondered aloud at how El Safi managed to keep the ancient bike running.

Today, Tarin Kowt prepared to honor the arrival of Ms. Cerise Bevard, an honorary co-chair of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council. Bevard's visit was sanctioned by the U.S. State Department, which provided her with a security detail while she was in-country.

Kamili and her children had barely slept for four days since learning that this honored American woman would spend an entire day in their humble home.

Cerise Bevard was an importer of the beautiful Afghan carpets handmade by women and girls in their homes across Afghanistan. Weaving the carpets is a cottage industry requiring talent and skill, and relying on an organized system to get the raw materials to the artisans, and their finished creations to the world market.

On behalf of the U.S.- Afghan Women's Council, Bevard sought to expand the industry into Tarin Kowt. Kamili, and the other women, were excited at the prospect of meaningful work for them and steady income for their families.

While Faheem fidgeted, her older sisters Amina Din and Diiva Khanon scoured their home, cleaning it inside and out. A third sister, Tor Pikai, worked alongside Kamili to prepare today's feast for their guests. Tor Pikai washed the vegetables for the baunjaun, a dish of eggplant, tomatoes and potatoes, and the salaata, a fresh vegetable salad of tomatoes and cucumber.

Kamili finished kneading the sweetened dough for the naan, a native flatbread, and left it covered, in a bowl, to rise. Next, she wrapped the potato filling in the fried eggroll wrappers for the bolanee.

In addition to the traditional supply of hot tea for the guests, Kamili was serving dogh, a refreshing drink of homemade yogurt stirred into a glass of cold water, along with cucumber, salt and dried mint. For dessert, rote, an Afghan sweetbread, accompanied by a bowl of firnee, a pudding made of cornstarch boiled with milk, sugar, cardamom seeds and ground pistachio. Kamili was determined to honor the Afghan tradition that no guest could leave her home hungry.

Faheem raised a hand and began to wave vigorously at Tabana Maaki who peered between the filmy curtains from a window across the street. Their homes were identical along with all of the others in the area. Two-story walls of sun-dried mud and straw supported a flat roof of wooden poles coated with the same mixture. A neighborhood of these whitewashed structures evidenced a housing project implemented by some past government.

The curtains moved in a window of the house on Tabana's right, and Faheem made out the form of Hafez Khan, a slow-witted twenty-year-old boy who never left the safety of his house. He was easily identified by the galvanized water pail which he wore over his head as protection against missile and drone attacks.

Faheem's neighbors, equally excited by news of the American woman's visit, began to line the street in anticipation of her arrival.

Doctor El Safi's red moped turned the corner and Faheem stifled a shriek of joy. During the Taliban years, there were no joyous outbursts, only screams of fear and pain. Even today a scream would freeze Kamili's heart.

Instead of screaming, Faheem clapped her hands. "They're coming, Mother", she called.. "They're finally coming!"

Muhammad El Safi waved to those lining the street before him as a Humvee and two heavily reinforced Land Rovers, each painted in camouflage, paused at the corner some yards behind.

Bobby Heavens, team leader of the security detail, rode shotgun in the first Humvee. He gripped an AK-47 in his left hand and held up

the other hand in warning. "Hold up, Rich," he said. "Let's put a little more room between him and us."

As the moped slowed in front of Faheem's house, a bearded figure, clad in black, burst from the front door of the house of Hafez Kahn. Faheem, frozen with terror, watched as the hooded specter shoved his way through the onlookers.

Instinctively, Faheem began screaming as the menacing shape dashed into the street, wrapped Muhammad El Safi in a bear hug and shouted, "*Allahu Akbar*"!

The explosion shattered the windows of every house for two blocks.



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