

La Buoncostume

MILLENNIALS. THE NEW WORLD

Translation by Olivia Jung

© 2018 Mondadori Libri S.p.A., Milano

Prologue

Moh

“Wake up the sea, I’m coming. It’s an ocean of eyes, a hug embracing every point, your music carries me everywhere. Where are we now? You are dreaming, I see you, I can almost touch you. You have my father’s eyes, the wings of an angel, Rudy’s eyes. It’s not the world that’s turning, it’s us, or maybe it’s the world. I am the one who has to come to you.”

The recording ended after a deep sigh and a few more seconds of silence. Moh stared at the screen, motionless.

He listened to it over again. Three times. Then he reached for the keyboard and typed:
:O

She must have been waiting for his reply, because she immediately answered: *yeah I know*

Wait, Moh typed, and then proceeded to listen to it over again. It was a circular litany. Stella’s voice seemed incorporeal during her dive into that state of trance; that actually worried him more than those delirious sentences. He opened again the file with the heart monitor, but the audio file didn’t have a timecode; so he took his headphones off and, after remembering the words for it, he typed: *after how long did you start talking?*

Stella’s words appeared on the screen after a couple of minutes: *32 sec after the end of the charge.*

Moh wrote something down on his notebook, then went back to the keyboard: *how many times did you do it?*

Another seven times, all the recordings are like this one. But it’s the drugs’ effect. I need to lower the dosage to remember more, and if I remembered more I might have a better chance of deciphering this mess. an ocean of eyes :D !

Moh felt his heart pounding in his chest and quickly typed: *Don’t lower the dosage! It’s dangerous. You don’t know where you might end up! Pass me the schematics, I’ll give it a shot too.*

No answer for twenty seconds, then: *Did they write you again?*

Don't change the subject

Same goes for you. I'm worried

They didn't write. Moh lied. they gave up, everything's fine. Pass me the schematics.

Are you sure?

He answered with the gif of a panda nodding convincingly.

Alright, Stella replied. I need a day to prepare you a charge, let's catch up tomorrow.

Should I get another secure BOT line?

I'll get it

Ok, bye

He sent her one last green heart, after which he closed the chat, confirmed the immediate deletion of the entire exchange and the audio file with the recording of Stella's voice, and finally logged out from the terminal.

Then, Moh sank into his padded chair, placed his hands on his belly and, without the sound of the keyboard typing away, he was truly alone. The small room on the top floor of the Saf Saf Community sparkled with the lights coming from five modems and a big black server: it was a small sky of intermittent stars watching the larger sky outside the window.

He stretched his back, walked to the window and leaned out. The sound of the waves breaking on the shore frightened him. "Wake up the sea." All of La Marsa was either asleep or uninhabited for miles. There were no lights except for the LED triangle marking the entrance to the large white residence where the community lived.

For a second, Moh was tempted by the idea of going out, getting one of the dogs, and walking along the beach, but caution had the better of him. He locked the door to the computer apartment, left the keys under the vase, and went down the long hallway leading to the kitchen. He emptied two cans of tuna into a pita bread, opened a bottle of beer, and went up to the terrace.

It had been a hard day. They debated over the installation of a new generator fueled by palm oil until dinnertime, but it was worth it. The engineers would start working on it the next day. Moh would also do his part, of course; he was going to spend almost two-thousand syyn to get support from two Dutch communities.

He ate his pita sandwich and drank the beer sitting on the edge of the terrace, looking at a colony of seagulls twirling in the air over a cruise ship run aground. Vultures on the

carcass of a two-hundred-meter whale reclined on its side; its stern still in the water and the bow straddling the beach, with its nose hoisted up over the old Zephyr Mall.

The seagulls seemed alarmed. When the wind died down, he could hear their caws all the way from his terrace. He reached for the cellphone in his pocket, got on the Animal Board and asked: *There are some seagulls going crazy on the beach, but it's night. What could it be?* He confirmed the shout, placed a reward of two syyn to fast-track an answer, and got one before he even had time to finish his pita.

They are protecting their eggs from a predator, wrote someone in Chile.

Way to go seagulls, typed back Moh. He authorized the transfer of two syyn, finished his beer, took a few steps away from the ledge and laid down. There were no railings on the terrace, he was completely surrounded by the cosmic canopy stretching out from the hills of Old Tunis to the sea's horizon, where the sky was already getting lighter in anticipation of the incipient dawn. Somewhere below him, one of Saf Saf's four-hundred residents was still awake, listening to a sad song that made him think of Stella.

He daydreamed for a while about the day he would meet her, but the beer and the tiredness started to get the upper hand on the excitement from the chat. He almost dozed off when a noise jostled him back to a vigilant state: the wind was playing with something. He sat up and looked around just in time to see a shadow running toward him; he never really had quick reflexes and, next thing he knew, he was out of breath from fear and pinned to the ground with someone's knee on his chest.

"Don't speak," said the shadow in French. "Don't call for help. I closed the door to the stairs. Give me your passwords or I'll kill you."

"They made it here," thought Moh, "and this is the solution they came up with." He was nailed to the floor, his wrists bound by hands much stronger than his. He had asked himself several times what he would have done in a situation like this. And now he knew.

But the guy kneeling on top of him didn't seem like he was really going to kill him. He let go of one of his wrists to reach for something in his pocket and Moh took advantage his distraction to punch him, but the guy took the hits without making a sound and placed a canister in front of his mouth.

"He wants to put me to sleep," thought Moh. A new kind of fear took over him. Captured and tortured. He started kicking with a strength that surprised his attacker,

managing to free his other hand. He grabbed the beer bottle and broke it against the floor, forcing the guy to jump back.

“Help!” screamed Moh in the darkness, and the shadow answered by pointing something at him.

“I said I’ll kill you,” he repeated. “Give me your passwords!”

Moh realized it was a gun. He took a few steps back with one arm stretched forward while his other hand was brandishing the broken bottle to keep him away. That asshole had a gun: he could fire at any moment and he would die. A few passwords, was it really worth dying to protect her?

He would have thought about it a little longer, but then he stepped on the ledge with his back foot; his heel was already over it and his weight was shifting on that foot, without finding any support underneath it. If Moh had been more agile, he might have been able to keep his balance. But instead, he fell backward, plummeting toward Rue El Mekki and he thought that, even though he didn’t have a chance to make up his mind, dying was the right thing to do.