

From the Shadows to the Sun

Written by

B. Jack Azadi

bjackazadi@gmail.com

No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell.

Carl Jung

OVER BLACK

A songbird WARBLER.

EXT. LOWLANDS, SYRIA - MIDDAY

Rolling hills of bleached pastures bordered by drystone walls. Filled with the TRILL of insects.

Fat-tailed SHEEP take shelter from the oppressive sun under ancient olive trees.

A scene unchanged for millennia: Timeless... Biblical...

In the heat-hazed distance a dark FIGURE appears, rippling with distortion.

Drawing closer the blurred figure becomes three:

A WOMAN and two small CHILDREN emerge from the shimmer and make their way up a dirt track...

EXT. HILL, LOWLANDS - DAY

FEET crunch cracked earth. Parched BREATHS. All three are covered in dust like they've been on the road for a while.

The woman, cloaked in a black abaya and niqab, has a SLENDER ROPE looped over her torso. She clasps the hand of a scruffy 4-year-old GIRL, who keeps looking behind.

WOMAN

Move.

The rope trails from the woman to the girl's twin, a BOY: Hands bound. Mouth gagged.

He trips and falls. The rope goes TAUT, digging into the woman's waist--

She sucks air and pulls the rope away.

BLOOD smears her hand.

WOMAN (cont'd)

Up!... Get up!

The boy struggles but rises defiant: eyes burn with hate.

The woman tugs at the girl and trudges on.

WOMAN (cont'd)
Bastard child.

The little girl's chin wobbles as she looks from the boy to the woman.

WOMAN (cont'd)
Quit staring, or I'll drop him in the next fucking well.

The girl quietly snivels.

MOMENTS LATER

They make the top of the hill and catch their breath, silhouetted against the sky.

The woman scans the semi-arid landscape, undaunted, driven:

Her EYES fix on some distant marker.

PRE-LAP: ROAR of a fighter-jet.

EXT. CLIFFTOP, BAGHUZ, SYRIA - DAY (ONE WEEK EARLIER)

An F-16 VIPER tears overhead, drowning out distant SHELLING and machine-gun FIRE.

ROZA, 20s, cradles an old AK47 and stares down from her vantage point, eyes glazed, red-lined. A faded scar snakes over her lips. Worn-in fatigues and battered sneakers are capped by a florid scarf with tassels:

The signature uniform of the YPJ, an all female army.

Roza's focus lies on a patchwork of fertile flats stretching out from the cliffs to the wide waters of the Euphrates.

Nestled within is a hamlet of farmhouses engulfed by an ISIS encampment: A wretched collection of TENTS and VEHICLES clustered together like an apocalyptic evacuation.

Coils of white smoke clutch the still air, ready to shroud the dead.

SUPER: The last stand of ISIS - BAGHUZ, SYRIA, 2019.

ADELA, 18, rises from a steep track. Flushed. Breathy.

ADELA
Roza. Zilan wants you at the C-P.

Roza holds on the war. Distant.

ADELA (cont'd)
Roza?

ROZA
I heard.

Adela looks over the devastation.

ADELA
Looks like they don't have much fight
left.

Roza starts down the trail.

Several columns of black smoke spring from the battleground:
tires set ablaze to cover ISIS movement.

Adela jogs to catch up.

EXT. CLIFF-FACE, BAGHUZ OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Roza and Adela descend a steep trail of worn rock, passing a
strung-out line of defeated ISIS: MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN
struggle upwards. Dazed. Demoralized.

Roza glares at a young Kurdish SOLDIER carrying a
malnourished BOY.

EXT. COMMAND POST, BAGHUZ - DAY

Roza and Adela approach a half finished cinder-block
building, hosting a temporary HQ. Weathered Kurdish FLAGS
hang from the second-story windows.

Parked out front are several TECHNICALS: Bastardized
pickups, usually mounted with a heavy machine-gun, utilized
as a modern-day light cavalry.

Roza's YPJ SQUAD huddle around a small fire. Battle streaked
faces warmed by cigarettes and glasses of tea.

A couple of them acknowledge Roza with respectful nods as
she heads in. Adela takes a drink proffered by a stocky
woman.

ADELA
(re: Roza)
No change.

The stocky woman shares a concerned look from another soldier and pokes the fire, rustling up a flame.

INT. COMMAND POST, BAGHUZ - DAY

Makeshift operations room. ZILAN, 30s, a YPJ commander with warm eyes and a firm backhand, pushes through tiredness. She studies a crusty black and white map, cross-referencing it with an electronic TABLET.

A RADIO OPERATOR presses her headset and logs a message. The drab green radio-set is old and bulky: American made with Arabic writing.

Roza casually enters and pours black tea into a small glass, loaded with sugar, and grabs a piece of stale flatbread.

RADIO OPERATOR
 (into mic)
 Sun-dance, acknowledged.
 (to Zilan)
 Helen's at the F-U-P. All okay.

Zilan checks the time.

ZILAN
 (to Roza)
 Well?

ROZA
 (chewing)
 The north's holding. Civilians and injured evacuating.

ZILAN
 Fighters?

ROZA
 Gone to ground. Most likely a tunnel network to the southeast.

ZILAN
 (points to map)
 Mortars have pinned residual elements at the crossroads here and... here, to the south. Helen and her team are going in.

ROZA
 We'll sweep from our end... We can link up, there, at the farmhouse.

Zilan gauges Roza's worn appearance.

ZILAN
Take it slow. If you need air, call.

ROZA
Sure.

Roza swiftly downs the steaming tea.

ZILAN
Still got that asbestos mouth.

ROZA
(heading out)
Got to grab it while you can.

ZILAN
Roza. We're at the finish line. No
unnecessary risks.

Roza nods and exits.

EXT. ISIS CAMP, BAGHUZ - DAY

Roza leads her squad in a loose arrow formation, weaving through a mess of garbage, tents, and abandoned vehicles.

An eerie silence unfolds. Up ahead a layer of noxious black smoke hangs dormant, seemingly impenetrable, ominous.

Young Adela's tense. Scanning. She whips to an aim--

Relaxes...

A mangy DOG pulls and chews the leg of a DEAD WOMAN.

Roza passes a listless ISIS BANNER, eyeing a filthy TARPAULIN on the ground... hands-signs a halt.

She scrutinizes the immediate area, gestures Adela forward. The squad take a knee.

Adela grips the corner of the canvas.

Roza AIMS, nods.

Adela pulls the tarp back slow-time...

A tunnel revealed. Darkness warmed by the dim glow of rhythmic light, powered by a car battery.

ADELA

Let me.

Roza hands over her AK47.

ROZA

Keep your eyes open.

She pulls a pistol and slips noiselessly down. Adela lowers the tarpaulin.

INT. TUNNEL

Crouch height. One-way traffic. Halfway down fairy-lights blink a path for another ten yards or so.

Roza feels her way forward using the back of her hand to guide. It's more sensitive to touch, to--

TRIPWIRE...

Roza slides her hand along the wire and secures the pin to a PHOSPHORUS GRENADE... she exhales slow-time and pockets it.

The lights go out. Complete BLACKNESS.

Roza's BREATH falters.

A lighter SPARKS somewhere ahead... the soft glow of a candle permeates.

Roza waits. Listens. Continues into a--

Hollowed out ROOM.

A dying FIGHTER with sunken eyes lies on a cot bed. An empty saline drip is crudely attached to a withered arm.

Half-light from another tunnel. A shadow of movement. Feet SCRAMBLE away.

Roza gives chase.

A hunched over figure reaches up and breaks daylight.

Roza leans round the corner-- SHOOTs.

EXT. ISIS CAMP, BAGHUZ - DAY

An INJURED MAN emerges and crawls away. Spilling blood.

ADELA

Here!
 (aims)
 Over here!

A waft of smoke drifts and obscures.

Adela advances...

The rest of the team keep formation and shadow. High alert. Disciplined.

Roza climbs out. Takes back her AK47 and holsters the pistol.

The injured Man crawls. MUTTERING a prayer.

Roza's cell BUZZES. She tosses it back to Adela and walks toward her prey. AK47 aimed from the hip.

 ADELA (cont'd)
 (into phone)
 What?...
 (to patrol)
 It's over... It's over!

Vehicle HORNS and celebratory GUNFIRE erupt as news spreads.

 ADELA (cont'd)
 Roza! It's over!

The injured Man keeps going, piss-wet through with fear. Roza treads on his wounded leg--

 INJURED MAN
 Yeargh!

 ROZA
 Hey. You lost.

Roza gazes over the shitty camp as he glares up at her.

 ROZA (cont'd)
 This is some caliphate you got yourself here.

 INJURED MAN
 You whore--

Roza digs and twists her foot.

 INJURED ISIS
 YEARGH!... YOU FUCKING--

BANG. Roza stares as his chest deflates...

She waves her team on. She pulls the grenade pin-- chucks it down the tunnel and strides off...

BHOOM-- phosphorus laced smoke blasts out the entrance and catches fire.

EXT. TOWN, SYRIA - DAY

Roza leads her team through the battered remains of town. Their mood lightened. Too light for--

ROZA
Keep sharp. Watch for IED's.

Victorious SHOUTS and CHEERS: a HUMVEE overloaded with SDF male soldiers trundles by. Two DEAD ISIS fighters strapped to the hood.

A trailing cloud of dust sweeps through and dissipates...

Roza watches hundreds of prisoners make their way up the track along the cliff.

EXT. RUINED VILLA, RIDGELINE - DAY

Roza's team stretch out on the rooftop terrace of a battle-scarred villa. Scarves draped over their faces.

Roza slumps in a rickety camp-chair at the parapet.

Overlooking:

- Makeshift medical tent.
- Aid agencies. Handing out food, water, and basic baby supplies.
- A truck packed with ISIS WOMEN throw abuse and water bottles at a NEWS CREW.
- Long lines of filthy MEN, WOMEN, and CHILDREN: Injured. Desperate.

The men sit on the ground, subdued, ruined. Beaten.

A disturbance breaks out in the female line. A burqa-clad WOMAN curses out the men.

It draws the attention of a young YPJ RECRUIT.

RECRUIT
Hey! Back in line.

BURQA WOMAN
(to recruit)
You're nothing! Devil's pawn. He
plays with you like a child plays
with fire.

She advances. One fist held tight by her side.

RECRUIT
Get back!

BURQA WOMAN
You're nothing-- nothing! Who is
great? God is great!

The Recruit points her rifle.

RECRUIT
I said back!

The woman raises her right hand: Index finger points to the
sky.

BURQA WOMAN
God is great! God is great!
(raising left hand)
God is gre--

BANG-- her veil lifts from the inside as the back of her
skull explodes outwards.

Up high on the parapet Roza aims.

The Woman keels over. Detonator switch rolls from her grip.

ISIS men dash in panic-- automatic FIRE rips across their
path taking out the front RUNNER.

They freeze.

ROZA
She said back!... Do it!

All return. Recruit braces herself.

RECRUIT
Back in line. Come on! Move!

Roza watches and takes out an old bottle held together with
tape. She takes a couple of short slugs wincing: MOONSHINE.

LATER

Under guard, TRUCKS for the women and kids are filling up. One WOMAN, in an abaya and niqab, stares as Roza walks past with Zilan.

ZILAN

Join the escort to Al-Hol. Then get over to camp. I'll R-V with you there.

ROZA

Okay.

The Woman hoists a TODDLER on board.

ZILAN

Hey, you did good today.

Roza nods thanks and Zilan heads to her tan pickup. Roza scrutinizes the prisoners. The Woman has gone.

EXT. DESERT, SYRIA - DAY

A beige landscape cut in two by a black highway. Sand drifts lazily across the asphalt.

A long convoy of prison trucks passes a couple of burnt out cars by the roadside.

I/E. TRUCK - DAY

Roza strains to keep awake. Adela nods off next to her. A chain-smoking civilian DRIVER casually handles the rig.

To the right, eastwards across the desert, a mountain range peaks the horizon.

DRIVER

How was it?

Roza looks at him with tired eyes. Dead eyes. He shifts, hesitant.

DRIVER (cont'd)

The fighting?

Roza looks back out the windshield.

ROZA

Wouldn't call it fighting.

DRIVER
... You been this way before?

ROZA
Huh?

DRIVER
Been here before?

ROZA
... Yeah.

Roza's fixed on the truck in front: packed with female prisoners--

I/E. ARMY TRUCK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Canvas covered. ISIS emblems painted on the sides and rear.

Two smug FIGHTERS guard the cargo: around thirty young WOMEN and GIRLS packed tight. Subdued. Frightened.

Roza's in the mix, five years younger, fuller in the face and unscarred. She comforts her little sister, FERAH, 14.

Roza tries, and fails, to squeeze out the way as a line of piss snakes down the rough metal floor. A TEENAGE GIRL looks down and weeps.

DRIVER (V.O.)
There it is.

I/E. TRUCK - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT DAY)

Roza stares blankly ahead...

Adela wakes up wiping dribble from her mouth. She squints through the windshield. The driver lights a new smoke from the previous one.

ADELA
It's huge.

DRIVER
Seventy-thousand, so they reckon.

EXT. INTERNMENT CAMP, AL HOL, SYRIA - DAY

Like a tented refugee camp but with razor wire, watchtowers, and armed Kurdish GUARDS.