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Short Fiction
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HAVING A BEER IN PARADISE

By Karl Arnold Belser

Amir exclaimed, "They did it. They crashed airplanes into both of the World Trade towers. It caused a chain reaction." Amir was sitting at his kitchen table that was set up as an office: TV window in the corner of his computer screen, telephone, neat stack of papers and mail, picture of a pretty dark haired woman smiling at him. He was talking on the phone to his section chief, Malik.

"I know. I saw it on TV," Malik replied. His voice was flat and emotionless. "But what do you mean by a chain reaction?"

"I mean that the building collapsed like a vertical landslide, the same way a demolition crew demolishes an old building. The heat must've caused some floors to collapse, the floors above falling and the ones below not being able to stop them. I saw the girders on the floors below pop one

by one like matchsticks as the building came down in a huge cloud of dust. It's pretty incredible."

Malik and Amir, code names that mean the king and the little prince in Arabic, were part of a Southern California terrorist cell. Malik had recently recruited Amir, who still had naive enthusiasm. Malik liked this enthusiasm and remembered when he'd been young and optimistic. That was a long time ago, and now Malik was hard and cynical. He just wanted to serve Allah, and survive.

Malik had replied that after the failed attempt to blow up the towers from the bottom, he had heard talk about some kind of airplane attack. Amir was still on probation and he didn't want to divulge too much, so he forced himself to add, "That was incredible, wasn't it?" like he was really surprised.

Malik and Amir were both American trained engineers with strong allegiance to Islamic Fundamentalism. Their assigned task was to smuggle Soviet nuclear weapons into the United States. And to date they hadn't figured out how to do it.

Let's meet at Jinan's, Amir said, "I've an idea that I want to run by you."

"Ok, see ya there."

Jinan, which means paradise in Arabic, was their code name for a Mexican Restaurant in down town Santa Monica. Malik had explained, "I have been under suspicion by the FBI for a long time, so we should never meet at our apartments. They could be bugged. Anyway, this is not paranoia. It's standard practice."

The restaurant had an enclosed courtyard in back with purple bougainvillea vines on the south facing wall and a Spanish fountain in the center. They bought their beer at the bar, went outside, and sat at the far back of the courtyard behind the fountain so the bubbling water would hide their voices. They just looked like a couple of Mexicans having a beer.

It was the middle of the afternoon, cold with a gray, overcast sky, so there were no other people in the courtyard. Amir squeezed limejuice into the small opening in his bottle of Negra Modelo and the scent of lime filled the air. He began, "I saw a program about Mega Tsunamis on the Discovery Channel the other night, and it gave me an idea about how to attack the United States, as a second wave so to speak. I found out a lot more by searching the Internet." He beamed with pride.

"Amir, You've got to be kidding, a tsunami?"

"Yes," said Amir looking intensely into Malik's dark eyes. "The Island of La Palma in the Canary Islands off of the coast of Africa is geologically unstable. The west side of the island has already started to slip, and the upshot of the program was that if this hundred million ton landslide happened, probably because of a volcanic eruption, a huge tidal wave would occur. It would destroy everything along the east coast of the United States from Miami to Boston."

Milik blinked, "I think you are exaggerating."

Amir stiffened his posture a little and continued, "The tsunami sneaks across the ocean at about 500 miles per hour with no noticeable ripple because it is more than twenty miles long. The wave occurs when the water gets shallow. The water in this case would recede many miles and form a quarter mile high wave, as tall as the World Trade Towers were. A wall of water this high is going to crush everything in its path. Swiss geologists have even simulated the island's collapse and showed that the huge tsunami wave would occur."

Malik ran his fingers through his black hair and shook his head. "This is pretty far fetched." He began to wonder what Amir was up to.

Amir took a deep breath and twisted to face Mailk, "What have we got to loose? We might even damage some

nuclear reactors, causing them to melt down and spew their radioactivity into the air. You have told me that we have dozens of Russian H-bombs that we can't get into the United States. Why not use some of them to make a tidal wave? It'd show how clever we are in using chain reactions."

"I don't know," grimaced Malik, "I don't think that exploding an H-bomb off shore would be enough to start the landslide. I mean it might, but I'd bet it wouldn't. We have to have a sure thing."

"Let me finish," Amir continued, with a surprising assertiveness in his voice. "La Palma is made up of two volcanoes, one active and one inactive. The inactive one has large lava tubes that extend deep into the island's center. I propose that we explode at least one H-bomb in a lava tube in addition to exploding bombs off shore."

"Alright, maybe it will work." Malik's voice sounded irritated now. Malik felt intimidated by Amir's pushy tone and body language. Malik thought, who is the leader here anyway? This is not the behavior of a rookie, and Malik calmly continued, "But getting an H-bomb into the tunnels will be difficult. And we certainly aren't going to do this by ourselves."

Amir nodded, "We'll have to break our silence and talk to our leaders. I think our best bet is to fly to La Palma

and check the situation out. And we can communicate with our leaders from there with less risk of getting caught. What do you think?"

Malik mumbled a slow, "yes, I guess so," and took a swallow of beer. He thought that Amir was making a veiled attempt to find out where the leaders were. Amir apparently assumed that the leaders were outside of the United States. Malik also suspected that Amir was trying to discover where the bombs were hidden. If they went to La Palma and followed this plan, Amir would soon find out. He thought again that this is not the behavior of a novice, and he gave Amir a forced smile.

The sun came out so that the palm trees cast dancing shadows across the vacant tables. "You see that? Amir said with a laugh, "The divine light of Allah is blessing our plan."

Mailk pointed and mockingly said, "Look," so that Amir would turn his head. Malik's pistol, silencer attached, made a Pssst-thunk as the bullet hit the wall after passing through Amir's neck. Amir, the little prince, slid back in his chair without a sound. Malik wiped the splattered blood from his hands and gun with a napkin, replaced his gun, and carefully wiped away his fingerprints from the table and beer bottle before he left by the emergency exit.

Malik muttered to himself, "Amir, that was a very good try. You almost had me fooled. We may use your idea some day when no one expects it. But you should've known that, like any good disciple of Mohamed, we always wait patiently for opportunity. We never push."

"Poor little prince, at least you died in paradise," Malik chuckled.

THE END