

## Passengers from Hell

It was late afternoon as Sol Hindley left his daughter's house in Golders Green for his monthly pilgrimage to a Jewish cemetery in South London. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of each month he visited the grave of his beloved wife Rachel at 8pm, the exact hour that she had died in his arms three years earlier. It was a miserable autumn day as he backed his venerable, tank-like Mercedes saloon onto the main road. He always took the same route through Hampstead and then Regents Park before crossing the river via Vauxhall Bridge. He and Rachel had spent countless hours on Hampstead Heath and in their favourite central London Park. Driving through these hallowed places always triggered a rich kaleidoscope of memories for Sol.

As Sol was leaving Golders Green, Omar had just turned his taxi light on after dropping off a fare in Mill Hill. As he was pulling away he was flagged down by a heavily bearded young man who was beckoning to a woman in a hijab to follow him.

"London Eye mate," he grunted as he bundled his companion into the back of the cab and put their two rucksacks on the floor.

"Christ Almighty watch yourself Jamil," she said as she slumped into her seat. "You banged my bloody knee on the step as you pushed me in."

Omar was as surprised by the woman's nasal, Liverpudlian twang as he was by her foul-mouthed tirade.

"The Eye is a long way from Mill Hill folks...You sure you want to rack up a 60 quid fare....You'd be better off taking the underground.

"You are a taxi driver aren't you? Just take us to where we want to go without all this rabbit."

Omar curbed his immediate inclination to tell this uncouth man to get the hell out of his cab.

"I'll take you but you need to show me you have the dosh to pay the fare."

"Jesus," Jamil snarled, "do you believe this Fatima....Show him the money so we can get going."

Fatima took a wad of notes out of her pocket and waved them at Omar. He nodded and moved out into the early evening traffic. It was a dreary, drizzly day and the traffic was light until they got to Brent Cross. Omar was an affable man, an eternal optimist who hated falling out with people. He decided to try to lighten the atmosphere.

"Where are you guys from?"

"Birkenhead," Fatima said. "You?"

"I'm from Hounslow but I came to London from Afghanistan when I was a kid."

"You a Muslim?" Jamil chipped in.

“Yeah, but I can’t say I’m the most devout follower of the Prophet,” Omar said diffidently.

“We are of the true faith as well,” Fatima said proudly. “We converted to Islam two years ago and we are true believers and...”

She stopped in mid-sentence and Omar had the strong feeling that Jamil had signalled to Fatima to shut it.

“So why did you come to the UK?” Jamil said, changing tack.

“My parents were killed by a Russian air strike and I was brought over here by my aunt to start a new life in the West.”

“You must hate the Ruskis then,” Jamil said.

“I don’t hate anybody...not the Russians or anyone else. I believe hate is the least useful emotion. To spend your life hating is a waste of a life.”

Fatima sneered, “Very noble I’m sure....but that Christian bullshit about forgiving your enemies is a total cop out. You need to fight for what you believe in. Never forget and never forgive.”

Omar did not like the way the conversation was going so decided to move to a less contentious subject.

“You two booked to go on the Eye then?”

“Oh for Christ’s sake,” Jamil shouted suddenly. “Let’s stop all this stupid chat....Listen mate, we are soldiers of Islam and we are going there to blow the fucking thing up.”

A stunned Omar nearly rammed the car in front. Jamil continued in a quiet, chilling voice, “In your rear-view mirror Omar, you’ll see that I have an automatic pistol pointed at your head and if you do anything stupid I’ll put a bullet in your brain.”

They were at the top of Finchley Road now and Omar knew that he had less than half an hour to avert what could be a major atrocity. He could see that both Jamil and Fatima were white-faced with tension and he thought that he had to try to keep them talking to see if he could defuse the situation.

“Why are you doing this? You know that you will kill many Muslims if you do it”.

“The Jihad involves collateral damage,” snarled Jamil.

“But you know that committing such an act will only strengthen the UK’s commitment to ramp up the fight against violent Islamist groups”.

“Rubbish!” Fatima shouted. “We will be lighting a fuse that will encourage our brothers and sisters to fight against this weak, decadent and ungodly culture and ultimately install a pure society run under Sharia law. We can’t allow western unbelievers to rule the world”.

Omar’s heart was racing and all he could think about was his beautiful wife, Nadjiba and Hashem, the son he doted on who had just started secondary school.”

Suddenly the fear in Omar's heart turned to utter fury. He would not allow these vicious, brainwashed jihadis to rob him of his future with his beloved family. A risky plan crystallised in his head. His route would take him into Regent's Park and if his plan backfired at least he would be in a less populous part of the city with a reduced risk of casualties.

He suddenly started to cough violently causing the cab to swerve up onto the kerb. He pointed repeatedly at his back.

"What the hell's the matter?" Shouted Jamil.

"I've got something stuck in my windpipe," croaked Omar sounding really panicky... "You'll have to bang me on my back ...I can't breathe."

Jamil unclipped his seatbelt, reached through the gap in the glass partition and started to bang Omar violently on the back. Omar simultaneously jammed his foot on the accelerator, swung the wheel as the cab jumped forward and rammed a metal lamppost with an almighty crunch.

Jamil was caught off-balance and smashed his head into the partition. Fatima did not have her seatbelt fastened so she ended up in a heap on the floor. Omar had braced himself for the impact and had opened his door before the cab hit the post. He was halfway out of the cab on impact and was not impeded by the air bag as it inflated. He hit the pavement hard with his shoulder but was up on his feet in a flash and ran in front of the cab where the air bag would block the view of Jamil on the back seat. Omar raced towards the nearest park entrance. It took Jamil a few seconds to get his groggy head together and get out of the cab. He saw Omar about a hundred yards away zigzagging along the road and he loosed off a full clip at the retreating figure. Omar could feel the wind of the bullets and he felt something pluck at the sleeve of his bomber jacket but he flashed through the park entry unscathed. After a few hundred yards he dived into a shrubbery with his heart almost bursting. He looked back and saw absolutely no-one behind him.

Omar punched 999 into his cell phone and stammered, "Police!...There's a gunman in Regent's Park." The call handler managed to get Omar to slow down and give her a measured account of the incident which had already been logged. Officers had been mobilised and she asked Omar to go to the nearest police station to give a statement.

Meanwhile, Jamil could see that several cyclists and pedestrians had observed his attempt to shoot Omar and were moving away from the vicinity at a rate of knots. He saw that a few of them had their phones to their ears and were probably making 999 calls.

"Shit...we've got to leg it...flag down that car Fatima."

Fatima had blood seeping from a nasty gash in her forehead and she stepped out into the road waving her arms frantically. Thinking it was a traffic accident Sol Hindley pulled up and laboriously wound down the window of his vintage Merc. Jamil jumped forward and jammed his Glock pistol into Sol's chest, screaming, "Get out of the fucking car."

Sol nearly died of shock but quickly exited the vehicle as Fatima retrieved the two rucksacks from the back of the cab and slung them onto the Merc's rear seats.

"I can't drive," shouted Jamil. "You'll have to get behind the wheel Fatima."

"I can't drive either," she screamed.

"Shit, shit, shit," Jamil hissed through gritted teeth. Sol was still standing only a few feet away, seemingly transfixed. Having a gun pointed at him had stirred up harrowing images of events three-quarters of a century in the past. He could hear the harsh, guttural commands of the SS troops and their terrifying baying Dobermans as he was herded into a cattle truck at gunpoint

"You... get your arse back in the car," Jamil gestured towards him with the pistol.

Sol was so nervous he stalled the engine of his old car with its manual transmission. This enraged Jamil who jammed the pistol barrel hard into his ear.

"Wake up granddad," he yelled. "Get this heap moving for Christ's sake."

"Where to?" Sol was now in tears. Blood was running down from his damaged ear and seeping onto his collar.

"Get us back to the M1," Jamil said as he heard the insistent sound of approaching police sirens. As they headed north round the park's outer circle two unmarked police cars with blue lights flashing sped past in the opposite direction towards the reported incident.

"We'll have to dump this car and hijack another," Jamil said. Fatima, who was still concussed just nodded dumbly. After a couple of minutes they told Sol to pull off the main road towards Swiss Cottage and drive into the quieter side streets of St Johns Wood. They stopped the car in a deserted cul-de-sac and forced Sol into the boot. In an adjacent street a chauffeur was leaning against the side of an impressive black limo smoking a cigarette and reading the Evening Standard.

As he approached the relaxed figure, Jamil thought he had found the ideal way to get the hell away from this disastrous episode. But he had picked the wrong man. Paddy Dempsey was ex SAS and now acted as driver and bodyguard for a member of the Saudi Royal family. Jamil got too close to Paddy with the Glock and with unbelievable speed Paddy smashed the hardened edge of his hand onto Jamil's forearm and with his other hand took the Glock from Jamil's deadened fingers. For good measure, Paddy then chopped Jamil on the side of the neck and watched him slide to the ground out cold.

The next day the TV, radio and print media all had a field day reporting the thwarted terrorist attempt by the two hapless jihadis. Both Omar Afridi and Paddy Dempsey were lauded for their part in foiling the planned attack. Omar, in fact, became a real local hero in the extensive Afghan community in Hounslow. But what about Sol? The police found his car quickly enough but when they forced open the boot they discovered his lifeless body. The post-mortem revealed that he had suffered a massive heart attack and would have died instantly.

So....Sol Hindley born Schlomo Hindl in the town of Stupava in Slovakia who survived the Treblinka death camp, died at the hands of two brainwashed extremists in a quiet London street. He was interred next to his soulmate Rachel in the Jewish Cemetery in Streatham.

His grave bore the simple epitaph, *'Whither thou goest I will go.'*

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