

Translated with the help and corrections of

Janet Daldy

Chapter 6 – Lycée Henri IV

(Henri IV High School)

The servants of the Most Gracious are those who walk humbly on earth, who, when the ignorant address them, say, "Peace." (Surah al-Furqan, 63)

Every day I learn a new surah and recite it over and over again at each of the five prayers. When I arrived in Guantánamo¹, I was given a French copy of the Koran. I had never had one before. I was never very religious, but now I have become a little more pious. They also gave me a prayer mat, a misbaha², sheets, soap, an orange outfit and sandals. The call to prayer is announced over a loudspeaker and an arrow painted on the floor indicates the direction to Mecca.

Today I learned that a suicide attempt was successful. A Yemeni man was found dead, hanging in his cell.

Others, who are more resistant, go on hunger strike. Then, strapped to a chair, they are force-fed with nasogastric tubes.

¹ Famous American prison located in Cuba outside the federal justice system

² Chapelet Muslim

I cling to my former life. To fall asleep in the evening, under the permanent lighting, in my cell which looks like a two-by-two metre cage, I walk in my dreams along the Mills Ramp and from the Faubourg district in Béziers (France) to the Henri IV High school. Sometimes I walk backwards to—see the landscape better, rising from Fonsérannes to Pech des Moulins. I frequently remember coming across a poor woman mumbling a name, Claude, I think. And then there, in front of the big staircase at the school entrance, all the students are waiting to hear my story. Some teachers and the headmaster accompany them into the lecture hall. I soliloquise.

"Hello everyone, Es Salam Aleïcum,

Six years ago, I passed my literary baccalaureate here in this beautiful old school. Some of you may know me. I was very happy to pass with honours. For the following holiday, my elder brother offered me the gift of a trip to Afghanistan. I had to go via London and then Pakistan. As I had never left Béziers, I was delighted to take part in this adventure. For me, it was a new freedom. But once we got there, the people who welcomed us took us to Kandahar to a training camp. We had to stay there for 60 days".

Sometimes I have to force my mind to concentrate under the light of my cell in order to continue the dream that might put me to sleep.

I see the students captivated, so I continue. "And then I said to myself: Stop, this is too much, I want to go home! This is not a holiday. There was no way to go back. We had to train to help the Taliban

fight. Kalashnikov in hand, you had to know how to aim and shoot. Dismantle the weapon and reassemble it as quickly as possible. And also, to lay anti-personnel mines. I got tired of it. I slept badly, was hungry, tired and sometimes sick. At the first opportunity I left the camp. I wanted to go home. In the meantime, there were the 9/11 attacks. At the border, the Pakistanis arrested me and handed me over to the Americans.”

Usually, at this point I manage to fall asleep. It's the cell lock sound that scares me. I start shaking. Perhaps, is it another tough interrogation coming up? I've already told them everything a thousand times. I didn't do jihad. I regret having left. I have been betrayed. The prophet words are also betrayed and exploited for the benefit of some leaders. I am not a mujahid and do not dream of becoming one. I do not want to die as a martyr, nor do I want to have a place in El Fardaous, the best of paradises. I don't want to fight anyone. There is no clean war. Convinced to do good, one does evil. Will they believe me at last?

And then the silence. I wait for prayer, which one? I start to hallucinate and hear voices. I hear my mother crying. I hear readings from the Koran with a divine voice. I hear the music of France. And then the guard enters the cell.

I am taken to a small room, and I barely understand my transfer to the French authorities. "Don't think this is over, guy! Next round: jail in France!"

I put my head down and thought about my last sura.

*Good deeds and bad deeds are not the same.
Repel the evil with that which is better; and behold,
he with whom you had an animosity becomes like a
warm friend.*

(Surah al-Fussilat, verse 34)

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