

Extract from *KISMET*. Context: The Imam goes to see his doctor.

In Donfield, a bearded man wearing wire-framed spectacles with round lenses, a knitted white skull cap and a serene expression, sat quietly in the waiting room of his doctor's surgery.

Imam Zulfikar Ali Mahmud was a man who had long since developed the ability to sit absolutely still, allowing his mind to dwell on matters more important than anything in his immediate surroundings. Distractions like that annoying little boy sitting opposite, staring and pointing, whispering loudly into his mother's ear. It was no effort to ignore the child, doubtless destined to become just another typical English teenager. Selfish, undisciplined, rude and ignorant, of no value to society.

Just like the ill-bred, beer-sodden animals who had mocked him on a bus only a few months ago. Not one of the dozen or so other British citizens present had intervened as the louts sneered, telling him to go back to his own country. He had remained sitting quietly in dignified silence, looking straight ahead, not responding. No point. Soon, very soon, there would be no more country to go back to. No national borders, just one country, world-wide. One state, one nation: Islam, the Caliphate. Allah had so decreed, it was Kismet.

A buzzer sounded briefly to draw attention to the electronic notice-board on the wall. It scrolled a new message: MR MAHMUD TO DR SHAH'S ROOM PLEASE. Zulfikar stood up, briefly fixing his gaze upon the child and its mother, with just the trace of a thin smile on his face. He made his way through swing doors into the corridor where the doctor's room was located. The door was ajar and he entered and closed it gently.

A minute earlier, in his consulting room Doctor Aziz Shah had been trying to stay calm. He pressed the button to signal that he was ready to receive the next patient. But was he? He sat with his elbows on the desk, seething. Aziz was dedicated to his career in medicine. Being a family doctor in general practice was all he had ever wanted.

He reflected bitterly that he did not deserve to be in the wretched position in which he found himself. The man who was about to enter his room was not even sick, not physically, anyway. Mentally? Another matter altogether. Unquestionably deranged, bordering on psychotic. His stomach knotted as he tried to condition his mind. He must stay calm. The bastard was on his way in; Aziz had no choice, he had to get on with it.

The door swung open and Zulfikar Mahmud entered. The doctor said nothing, merely indicating towards the chair across the desk. Mahmud came forward. He smiled, greeting the doctor in the traditional manner. "Asalaam Aleikum, I trust you are well," he said, in Arabic. Aziz did not respond. He glared at his visitor, saying nothing. Mahmud took the chair.

"Is something the matter?" he asked, again speaking in Arabic.

Doctor Khan folded his arms on the desk and replied coldly, in English. "For a start," he said, "you know perfectly well that in my consulting room I insist on speaking English."

The man shrugged. "Your room, your rules, though you would have learned Arabic as a child."

“Only to study the holy book. Arabic is not my mother tongue and we are not in the mosque now.”

“No. And in your case, not at all, recently. We can speak in Urdu, if you prefer.”

The doctor stared at the cleric. “English, only.”

The Imam leaned closer. “Tell me, why are you in such a bad mood?”

“What? You ask me that? You of all people?” He sputtered, barely able to contain his anger.

“Do you take me for a fool? I will ask you a question. Do you know where I was yesterday?”

The cleric did not answer. He merely blinked briefly and shrugged.

Aziz took his hands off the desk, sat up and stared coldly at the Imam.

“No? Let me tell you. I was called to the mortuary to identify a body. A man murdered in such an obscene way that the police called me to identify him. They did not want his wife or his family to see him until the pathologist has finished his work. That man was one of my patients.” The doctor was breathing heavily. “But of course you know who I mean.”

With his face devoid of expression, the cleric replied, “I don’t know what you’re talking about. You know why I’m here and I don’t need to talk about anything else.”

Unbelievable! It was like talking to a robot, an inanimate, unfeeling monster. Without another word, the doctor drew forward the briefcase that was on his desk, flipped the lid open and removed from one of its pockets a padded brown envelope. He held it out.

“Yours. It was delivered to me by one of my patients.”

Mahmud took the envelope. “I know. We will keep using this system. We need our funds and this way is best, for now.”

The doctor slammed down the lid of his briefcase. “I don’t need lessons in morality from you,” he spat. “And what others think is of no concern to me.”

The Imam stood and moved to the door. “It should be. You are a prominent member of the community. People look up to you, the medical professional.” He waved a hand. “You with your big house and your fancy car. As a Muslim you should be doing much more to support our people. More than just being a post box.”

“I am a doctor. I do my best to support all my patients. And for your information I do not measure the strength of my faith by how often I visit the mosque.”

“But maybe others do?” The cleric opened the door. He curled his lip to say, “Give my regards to your English wife. I hope that she and your children will continue to enjoy good health.”

The implied threat was made in Arabic. Then he left, closing the door behind him. The doctor leaned back and muttered, “I don’t need reminding, you bastard. I haven’t worked all these years to be lectured to by the likes of you, you ignorant, arrogant, hate-peddling piece of shit.”

Aziz reflected with simmering anger, that only his need to protect his family had prevented him going to the police months ago.