

## The Lawyer

Joe walked down Mastmaker Road towards Canary Wharf and the tube station. Yara jogged alongside, trying to open her umbrella. The rain sprinkled gently between the plain trees, settling on his jacket. He looked sideways at her. She had brown almond eyes and glossy dark hair. They would be late as usual. He might have to go in separately in the mornings if she was going to make him late like this. Yara had come from Homs in Syria, and had stolen his heart. Punctuality was not her thing but she cooked amazing food for them. He had finished the Falafels, warmed up, with an Espresso for breakfast.

Yara looked doe-like at Joe as he sat on the tube reading the Metro free sheet. Her contact lenses gave her a slightly myopic gaze. He was a rising star in the law firm where they both worked. The Christmas party had been the moment they got together, how corny was that! She wasn't even a Christian. Despite being a graduate, she worked as a paralegal, while he was a qualified lawyer. She loved the way he focused on the paper while squeezing her hand secretly beneath it. He could look so stern and English while still showing how much he loved her.

Yara and Joe walked into the office separately as usual. You weren't supposed to date members of the firm. Joe's boss Harry called him in for a chat. He was a short overweight man with a double chin and gold rimmed glasses over pale blue eyes. He had spent a lot of time training Joe and regarded him as future partner material. The boy had a can do attitude and good intellectual grasp of both law and commerce. That was what the firm needed. He was also male, tall, white, anglo-saxon, protestant, personable and handsome, which, in this global American empire went a long way (despite political correctness). He wanted Joe to do an important job for a key client. It was a purchase and sale of high value machinery using letters of credit outside the jurisdiction. Joe had used similar documents before, he said, and would be familiar with the form. It was essential to get it right in view of the value. The client was from the Middle East and would come in for a meeting at three that day. It was the first job for him in the commercial department, as he usually bought property assets. Harry had already dealt with the client care. Joe would be introduced, take instructions, and then carry out the work as soon as possible.

Joe walked into the marble atrium to meet the client. Mr Mahmood Husain was reading the FT and drinking a coffee. He rose and shook Joe's hand. "Good to meet you Joe", he said. Joe's first impression was that Mr Husain was huge, and hung with gold. He was bald and very overweight, as well as standing about six foot two. He wore an expensive beige linen suit with a white shirt open from the top three buttons. He had an expensive gold watch, and a gold chain with a medallion round his neck. Several signet rings flashed on his fat hands. None of this put Joe at ease.

The client eased his form into a chair in the meeting room, which suddenly seemed too small. This was a "simples" deal, he said. In fact he didn't think there was a lot of legal work in it, and he was sorry that Joe wouldn't earn many fees from it. He had agreed a time based fee with Harry. Joe asked him to outline the deal. It was "simples", he said again. The goods would be inspected for conformity to description in transit on a boat in the straits of Hormuz. The price was €50m U.S. If the goods were acceptable Mr Husain would sign the contract to buy, while simultaneously agreeing to sell them, back to back for a €20m U.S. profit to an on-buyer, delivery Beirut. Delivery would be to the on-buyer against a letter of credit to the seller, and the on-buyer would also pay Mr Husain the profit in a second letter. The letters would be unconditional, drawn on a London Clearing Bank. Nothing could go wrong. Joe just needed to draft the identical back to back sale contracts (apart

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from parties and price) and the terms of the letters of credit. Standard Incoterms applied to the terms of shipping. Joe understood the legals. It was indeed straightforward, but he was left with a strong distrust of the client, and an uneasy feeling about the deal which he could not place. Mr Husain promised to return at three the next day to pick up the documents and review them with Joe.

Joe poked his head round Harry's door to express his concern, but Harry was on the phone, gazing out of the window, as ever, his feet on the desk. The documents were simple and Joe went home having finished the drafting. He could smell hot Meze breads cooking in the flat as he ran up the stairs. Heaven! He could forget work until tomorrow. Joe went into the galley kitchen and sneaked his hands onto Yara's hips and kissed her behind the ear. Life was sweet indeed.

Joe was back with Mr Husain, reviewing the contracts. The schedules of goods were blank for the client to add the descriptions of the machinery, and the companies' names and addresses were blank awaiting insertion. They would be the parties to the sales. Mr Husain read the contracts slowly, following the text with his finger. Joe sipped his coffee and waited. "Perfect" he said to Joe, "I knew the firm would be good for the job, great work young man." Joe asked for the list of goods and the parties' names, but Mr Husain was already putting his copy in his brief case. The client hesitated. "Look, this is very confidential" he said. He sat back and looked at Joe. He was sizing Joe up and working something out. Finally he said "Look, I need a good lawyer and you seem bright and quick. I have a number of these jobs to do, so I need you on board, but I will have to let you in on the deal, and you will need a bigger fee when you understand, O.K.? Why don't we say one per cent of the profit, no sale no fee?" Joe gaped, that was two hundred thousand dollars for a couple of hours' work! "I'll have to talk to Harry," he said. "You'd better tell me the deal then." "O.K." said Mr Husain. He leant back and shut his eyes. "We're buying anti-personnel missiles from Iraq and selling them to Syria." "That's cluster bombs to you," he said. He opened his eyes to see how Joe reacted. Joe looked down at the table and breathed gently. He didn't trust himself to speak for a few moments. Then he realised what he had to do. "Harry is out this afternoon," he lied, trying to sound casual. "I just need to get him to agree the new fee terms, as the client partner, you know. I'll give you a call first thing in the morning." "Alrighty, but we have to move fast as the goods are clearing customs at the week-end," Mr Husain said. He was cool.

Joe showed the client out and went into Harry's office without knocking. Harry finished typing an email. "Sit down Joe, you look worried", he said. Joe told him the story. "Look, I'm not happy to get involved in arms dealing," he said, "and this is a supply to Assad to use on his people. You may not know this, but Yara and I are an item. She still has folks in Syrian war zones. Even if I was prepared to do this professionally, personally I can't do this anyway." Joe thought that was it. He might as well have handed in his resignation.

Harry leant back, swung his chair round to the window and looked out silently. It was his fault. Joe was bright but very green, and he had probably asked too many questions. He wasn't to know. "Look Joe, we're having a partner breakfast at eight tomorrow. I need to bounce this off the management board and come back to you. You go home and have a break now and I'll let you know. You forget this until tomorrow. We'll sort it out, O.K.? Try not to fret. Just remember this is confidential and I'd rather you didn't tell Yara in case she does something stupid."

Joe walked home early through the park. It was raining again and he put his collar up. He couldn't believe what had just happened. He thought his job was about law. Now it seemed that was the

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least of it. He couldn't believe that he had a client who was supplying arms to kill Yara's family. Unbelievable. How on earth could he look her in the eye? Joe stopped at a Wetherspoons and had a pint. The smell of disinfectant filled the room, spoiling the taste of his pint. He just needed a bit of time to sort his head out. Suddenly life didn't seem so simple. He nursed the pint of London Pride as he sat in a dark corner of the pub, trying to control his thought processes. There was no way he was going to do this deal. He would have to resign if necessary. This was a test for the integrity of the law firm, if anything, not one for him, he decided.

Joe got to work early with an empty rucksack and tidied his desk. He half expected the sack. You had to be a yes man in the big firms otherwise you were dead meat. The phone rang, it was Harry. "Look Joe, this is complicated. The firm agrees that we don't want to get involved in arms deals. You were right to come back to me. However, the client is part of a large middle-eastern consortium in the property market here in London. We may not like the arms dealing, but that should be none of our business. Our property department is seriously concerned at losing the very large property work. It's not just Husain, it's all his sisters and his cousins and his aunts, as it were. I'm sure you understand..."

Joe did understand. It was business. It was client confidence. It was legal ethics. But it was also clear now where the money for the property investment came from. It stank. Harry waited for Joe to comment and went on:

"I've had a word with Husain. He understands, and he took a shine to you, so he's disappointed. We've got a contact in Paris. A loner in International law in the Champs Elysees, an American attorney. He's going to take the instructions off us and earn the fee. We'll give him the papers with no firm name on and Husain will dis-instruct us. There is no record of the goods or the parties on the file so it will rest in the archive. I've got you and Husain a flight from Heathrow to Orly at 1.15 p.m., British Airways, and you can come back on the last shuttle tonight. Simple handover, O.K.? You don't even have to use your French" he chuckled. Joe felt he had no choice. At least he still had a job. He picked up the papers and went home to get his passport, leaving a note for Yara that he would be late.

Joe and Mr Husain, Mahmood now, met in a large dark Chinese restaurant off the Champs Elysees for a late lunch with Jamie Schwartzel. Jamie was a smart forty-something smoothie from the East Coast who had ended up in Paris working with American ex-pats and the U.S. Embassy. He was calm and polite. He seemed to be doing Joe a favour. He had had the detail from Harry on the phone, and simply put the papers in his bag. Suddenly Joe seemed redundant and he declined Jamie's invitation to lunch. Joe made a dive for the sunlight. As he left he saw some armed police pass him in the Foyer. Must be the high level of security since the Charlie Hebdo Affaire, he thought. There was a police wagon outside.

Yara had waited up. It was after midnight. "Harry said to ring, however late" she said. Joe called Harry's mobile. "Look, I wanted to know you were alright", he said. Joe thought he sounded embarrassed. "I'm fine" said Joe "what's up?" "I wanted to know you got clear," Harry said. "The fact is that after you left the restaurant it seems the police arrested Mahmood and Jamie". Mahmood was known to be smuggling illegal arms, and without a permit, from a proscribed organisation, Hezbollah, to an enemy of the French State. I thought you should know. I can't imagine who tipped them off!" he said, pausing. "Look, why don't you take a week off with Yara and have some down

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time? You deserve a break. The management board are grateful for your bringing this to our attention so quickly. Oh, and by the way, probably best not to go to France for a week or two.”

Yara lay on the sun lounger next to Joe on the beach in Ibiza. She dug him in the ribs. “What was all that about then?” she asked, poking him again so that he giggled. “Suddenly we both get a week’s paid leave together!” she said. “Well”, he said, rolling her onto the sand and kissing her, making her laugh, “I plead client confidence M’Lady”, he said, tickling her again.