

أنا مسلم

I am Muslim

BY

P.A.DAVIES

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

One

Compared to what the weather had been like previously, the day was unusually warm and sunny especially given that it was only 9am. That said, Kyle didn't give a second thought to the current spate of high pressure, other than to be subconsciously grateful that the steps he was now sitting on were dry.

He held his head in his hands and closed his eyes, dwelling on what had been and what was yet to come. The last few weeks had been like an agonising nightmare but - unlike nightmares encountered whilst sleeping - this was one he could never wake up from. Maybe, in the unforeseeable future, things would get better but Kyle couldn't see it happening. Not soon, not ever. He was trapped inside it all and it hurt like fuck.

“Cheer up mate, it might never happen!” A chirpy, unfamiliar voice said, immediately snapping Kyle out from his troubled thoughts.

He looked up and stared at two men now standing in front of him.

“Too late mate,” he replied solemnly. “It already has.”

Two

2300hrs: Monday 22nd May 2017
Manchester UK

The telephone rang for quite some time before the fifty-five year old man pressed the mute button on the TV's remote and wearily picked up the mobile phone from the arm of his chair.

"Hello." He said, after thumbing the green connect button.

"Kasim. Turn on your television?" Came an anxious response.

"I'm already watching it Hazan. Such terrible news!"

"Yes, I know. Wasn't Ecrin supposed to be going there tonight? Does she know yet?"

Kasim shuddered. He had already considered the *what-ifs* many, many times during the past ten minutes and now, sitting here - with a phone in his hand and his eyes glued to the silent television broadcast - he found himself dwelling on those same what-ifs once again.

"Kasim?" Hazan asked softly "Are you still there?"

Kasim exhaled a long breath and wiped away the formation of a tear with the heel of his free palm. "Yes, sorry Hazan, I'm still here. Ecrin is asleep so she hasn't heard yet."

On the other end of the telephone, Hazan frowned, as silence prevailed once more. "What is it Kasim?" He quizzed. "Are you okay?"

“Am I wrong to thank Allah, with all my heart, that Ecrin was too poorly to go to the concert, Hazan?” He finally asked. “Or does this make me a bad man?”

“No, no, no Kasim, you are not to think like that,” Hazan responded, firmly. “If anything, it only shows that you are a good and loving father. What has happened tonight is very, very tragic but we must thank Allah for each and every mercy that he shows. He, nor anybody else, will condemn you for giving thanks that your daughter is safe!”

“But they are saying that ... that children have been badly injured, maybe even killed and ...”

“And Allah will punish those responsible Kasim,” Hazan cut in.

“And what about the Manchester community Hazan? Who will they punish?”

“I’m not sure I ...”

“The news reporters have already suggested that this was the work of some Muslim extremist from ISIS,” Kasim quickly continued. “So who do you think that retribution will be sought against?”

“But we are Turkish *Muslims* Kasim, not Iraqis or Syrians. Surely they will see...”

“The ignorant only see a label hanging from the colour of a man’s skin Hazan, not the man beneath it. You know this. Don’t you remember what happened after nine-eleven?”

“What? The broken windows at the restaurant you mean? We don’t know that that was anything to do with what happened in America Kasim, we agreed on that!”

“No,” Kasim retorted sharply. “You dismissed it as coincidence but not me. I don’t believe in coincidence!”

“So what are you saying?” Hazan asked. “That we should go into hiding like frightened rats?”

“No. I’m just saying that we should be very careful over the next few weeks, months even. The residents of Manchester will mourn this day and rightly so, but a few will simply use this tragedy as an excuse to display their inherent hate for Muslims. Turkish we may be Hazan, but whichever way you want to look at it, we are still Muslims living in Manchester.”

*

Outside the open living room door, Kasim’s seventeen-year-old son, Mehmet, sat on the staircase listening to his father. Like his father, he too was thankful that his fourteen-year old sister was upstairs and in bed – safe, alive – but he was also harbouring his own concerns.

Thirty minutes earlier, a suspected bomb had been detonated in a concert hall no more than three miles from where he lived: a concert hall where his best friend’s sister - Abby – and mother had gone that evening. Just two excited fans that would have been a trio, had Mehmet’s sister been well enough to go with them.

Mehmet took a phone from his pocket, looked at the screen and frowned. Still no reply to the messages he had sent to his friend. He brought up the call log, touched the name *Kyle* on the screen for the umpteenth time that evening and held the phone to his ear whilst the call connected.

“This is Kyle and clearly I ain’t here. Leave a message or whatever an’ I’ll call you back ... maybe?”

Mehmet sighed and waited for the beep.

“Kye, it’s me again man. Hope everything is okay with ... y’know, your sister and stuff? Call me back mate, yeah?”

Mehmet disconnected the call, placed the phone back into his pocket and put his head in his hands.

“Any luck yet Mehmet?” The unexpected sound of his father’s voice at the foot of the stairs caused Mehmet to jump. “Sorry son. I just wondered if...?”

“No, nothing yet Pop. I’ve sent texts and left voice messages but ...” Mehmet shrugged.

“They’ll be fine son, I’m sure of it!” Kasim offered, trying to reassure his son, although he himself wasn’t convinced by the attempt.

“I don’t know Pop,” Mehmet doubted. “It just doesn’t feel right, you know?”

Kasim nodded. “Let’s see what happens son. There is no point in second guessing things.” He began to climb the stairs, putting a hand onto his son’s shoulder as he passed, “I’m going to check on your sister. Try not to worry Mehmet. Allah will do what is right. Of that I *am* sure!”

Just over four weeks later, Kasim Yilmaz - a man who lived by the teachings and guidance of the Quran - would not only come to question that particular surety but also, the actual existence of Allah himself.

Three

In the winter of 1968, the family Yilmaz upped sticks, left their home in the Sultanahmet District of Istanbul, Turkey and immigrated to England. Not because of the two years constant badgering to do so by Baba Yilmaz's brother, Omer - already a resident and small restaurant owner in Manchester – but because Baba Yilmaz feared for the safety of his wife and his children. Economic recession and social unrest plagued Turkey and Baba Yilmaz knew that years of repression, martial law and distaste for the government of the time, would almost certainly lead to an uprising of some description. He wasn't wrong, as 1970 saw another Military Coup in Turkey and a new, more intense wave of violence courtesy of the Turkish People's Liberation Army. The Yilmaz family may not have had much in 1970s England but at least they had their health and their freedom.

Kasim Yilmaz was just six-years old when he and his family came to England, the initial announcement of which made him both confused and sad. Confused, because he couldn't understand why he had to leave his friends behind and sad because his dog, Micha, had to live with the neighbour forever more.

“But Orhan bey doesn't even like Micha,” Kasim pleaded. “He throws stones at him!” The lie-tainted plea was of course in vain. Micha took up residence in Mr Orhan's home and Kasim believed that his once happy life would never see the light of happiness, ever again. However, on the very first day that he stepped foot onto British soil, all that confusion and sadness he

had felt in his homeland, dissipated faster than the snow melting under his shoes; an element of winter that he had never seen before that particular day. He felt excited and a little scared by what this new country had to offer but above all else, he felt ... well ... he felt bloody freezing.

In the inner cities of England during the '60s and early '70s', it was not unusual for the young children of an immigrant family to be *home-schooled*, although that concept usually consisted of working long hours in whatever business their parents had established. Unlike his brother - whose only son had worked in the family restaurant from just nine-years old - Baba Yilmaz wasn't of that mind-set and insisted that his sons attend school and attain the skills and qualifications needed to survive in such a competitive world.

"But I want to do what you do Baba," Kasim said. "With cousin Hazan!"

"And wait on tables all your life? What kind of future is that?" Baba Yilmaz replied.

"But I..."

"There are no *buts* Kasim. Get yourself an education, learn the English language and one day you might own a chain of restaurants for yourself."

Kasim mulled over the words of his father and - despite it being a foregone conclusion anyway - agreed to attend school, work hard and make his father proud.

"Good boy," Baba Yilmaz said, hugging his youngest son.

*

And so it was that Kasim studied hard and tried to make his father proud, which he regularly did. According to his teachers, Kasim was bright and well

mannered and actually wanted to learn all that he could: an unusual trait for a now thirteen-year old boy in a state comprehensive school of inner city Manchester.

“He is a *credit* to Moss Street High.” Was the usual accolade of his peers.

At sixteen however, Kasim’s personal life was thrown in to turmoil when his father and uncle Omer were killed in a car accident whilst travelling from Manchester to Sheffield via a snow-laden road known as the *Snake Pass*. This tragedy clearly impacted on Kasim’s education too, because he left school that same year without a single qualification to his name. His teachers were highly surprised and his mother highly disappointed, but there was nobody more upset with the results than Kasim himself; years of study, years of making his father proud, eliminated in a whisper.

Asides from the grief and educational disaster, the untimely deaths of his father and uncle brought about another burden for the troubled teenager to carry. With neither of his two elder brothers being able to take over the reins, it was down to Kasim to step in and help his cousin Hazan with the restaurant. After all, with very little savings and no life insurance, the family would have virtually nothing to live on if the restaurant ever closed down. A sixteen-year-old child and his uneducated, nineteen-year-old cousin, entrusted to keep the family business afloat? Not a combination that would encourage a vote of confidence for survival. But - with some guidance and advice from his mother - Kasim didn’t just *help* Hazan with the restaurant he completely ran it. In fact, he ran it so well that in the spring of 1986 the family managed to open a second, much larger venue in the centre of Manchester. Brits - it seemed - had a love of Turkish food, especially after a night of clubbing and drinking.

In that same year, Kasim interviewed an eighteen-year-old Turkish girl called Azra Tekin for the position of waitress at the new restaurant. When he told her that she hadn't got the job, she wanted to know why?

"Because." Kasim began, with a confidence that was bordering on arrogance. "No future wife of mine is becoming a waitress!" He didn't care how it sounded, he was smitten with the girl the moment she had walked through the door.

The girl held his stare for a while and gave him a wry smile. "And no future husband of mine," she said. "Will ever tell me what I can or cannot do with my life!" She stood up and held out her hand. "Thank you for wasting my day Yilmaz bey!" She offered, sarcastically.

Kasim stood up, took her hand into his own and smiled. "And thank you for making mine, Tekin hanim," he replied. As she released his grip and began to walk away, Kasim decided to throw caution to the wind. "Oh, one more thing before you go, Tekin hanim?" The girl turned back around, raised an inquisitive eyebrow but said nothing. "Erm, seeing as you're not going to be an employee of mine," Kasim continued, suddenly feeling a lot less confident. "I was sort of hoping that I could take you out sometime?"

The girl looked at Kasim, gave an encouraging smile and stepped back towards him. "In that case," she replied, softly. "It looks as though we are both going to be disappointed today, doesn't it?" She watched his expression change and his shoulders droop before turning once again to walk out of the office.

Within two hours, Kasim was on the phone offering Miss Tekin a position in his restaurant. Just over three months later, she finally agreed to go out

with him. One year on - in the summer of 1987 - Mr Kasim Yilmaz and Miss Azra Tekin were joined together in holy matrimony.

On 25th July 2017, Mr and Mrs Yilmaz were due to celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary with a host of family and friends. However, a tragic sequence of events beforehand, were set to overshadow that particular celebration and darken many more to follow.

Four

On the day that the boy first came into this world, his father held the tiny bundle close to his chest and wept. His wife Azra watched on, smiling yet silent. She knew exactly what her husband had seen in the child because she had seen it too; the moment the midwife had placed the newborn into her arms.

“He looks like Baba,” Kasim whispered, not taking his eyes off his third son.

“I know, my love.” Azra replied. “And I was thinking. Maybe we should let him take Baba’s name?”

Kasim turned to his wife and nodded. “Baba would have liked that,” he said with a sodden smile. “Thank you.” He looked back down at the child - gazing back up at him through bright, brown eyes - and gently stroked his son’s head. “As long as I have a breath inside me,” he whispered. “I will love and protect you with all my life. Welcome to the family, Mehmet Yilmaz.”

Two years later - in the autumn of 2002 - Kasim Yilmaz was on the move for only the second time in his life, taking his family from their home in Fallowfield, South Manchester, to Cheetham Hill in the north. Kasim announced that the move was due to the cramped conditions of their existing home but in truth, it was much more sinister than that.

*

In 2001, the Yilmaz family was one of only three Muslim families living on a road in Fallowfield

otherwise dominated by white British and black Jamaican residents. They were also the only Turkish family in the area, with the other two Muslim families having originated from Pakistan. All the neighbours knew that the Yilmaz's were Turkish and some of them had actually visited the family restaurant. Kasim recalled the odd phrase, *mate's rates*, being explained to him by his white neighbour Terry and subsequently giving Terry and his friends a regular discount off the menu prices. Kasim didn't mind as Terry had always invited Kasim and family into his home for summer barbeques and New Year's Eve parties. It was a nice community to be a part of and - given the cultural diversity - relatively close-knit. However, post 11th September 2001, that changed dramatically.

*

It started subtly of course - the occasional strange look, neighbours seemingly avoiding conversation - but then the momentum grew. No more invites or visits from Terry, eggs thrown at the house, a window smashed at the restaurant, stones thrown at the house, paint thrown at the house, and human faeces left on the doorstep. The anonymous note pushed through the letterbox was the final straw.

“Any idea why you are being targeted?” The young Police Officer had asked, once Kasim had finally reported the incidents, almost six months later. “Have you fallen out with anybody?”

“Officer. I know exactly why we have become targets!” Kasim replied, angrily. “The same reason that the Patels at number seventy-one and the Khans at eighty-five have become targets too!” The officer raised an eyebrow. “It is because we are Muslim,”

Kasim continued. "And therefore, by definition in the dictionary of the stupid, we are fully responsible for the atrocities that occurred in America!"

The Police Officer frowned. "You think that you are being harassed because of what happened to the Twin Towers last year?"

"I don't think it officer," Kasim replied, pulling a piece of paper from his pocket. "I know it."

PC Richards took the paper from Kasim and unfolded it, sighing with disgust when he saw what was on it. There was a crude, almost child-like drawing on the paper that showed a house. On the front door of the house was the number of the Yilmaz residence whilst jutting from the roof was the blazing tail end of a plane. Underneath the picture the words *How would you like it you cunts* - together with - *watch this space*, had been added and purposely coloured in red to look like dripping blood. It was as pathetic as it was unnerving.

Every official body knew that to do little about this particular complaint would be foolhardy especially if things went tits-up in the future. Thus, with the risk of huge explanations and mountains of paperwork being greater than the perceived threat, the Housing Authorities - on the recommendation of the Police - arranged for the Yilmaz family to be moved to what they believed was a safer, more Muslim-friendly area of Manchester. Why investigate the problem when you can remove the cause? As pathetic a policy as it was publically unofficial.

Nevertheless, the anti-social behaviour towards the Yilmaz family stopped. The Police were seen to have taken positive action and the housing authorities? Well, they had a reliable, rent-paying family living in one of their less desirable residence. Everyone's a winner ... for the foreseeable at least.

Five

Mehmet Yilmaz and Kyle Roberts had been friends for as long as either of them could remember. They had attended the same pre-school together, the same primary school and the same high school, although Kyle would be the first to admit that Mehmet was the brighter of the two. Kyle, on the other hand, was the stockier and the one who wasn't afraid to stick up for himself.

The area in which Mehmet grew up was culturally diverse – White British, Pakistani, Indian, West African, Irish, Polish, Jamaican, Chinese and of course, Turkish - with each sub-culture minding their own business and each tolerating the religions and practices of the other. Most people in the local community knew Mehmet as a polite, smart and accommodating young man who didn't have a bad bone in his body.

In contrast, Kyle grew up in an area no more than three miles from Mehmet's home yet the cultural diversity there almost mirrored the Yilmaz's former hometown of Fallowfield. White British families dominated the area with much more than a handful of them firmly against change. For them, alternative religions – that is, those that were not ordained by the sacred churches of Manchester City or Manchester United - were begrudgingly tolerated. But ... “Don't ever come to my gaff trying to convert me mate!”

Kyle Roberts was known by his local community as the boy that came from *that* family, a family that was no stranger to the likes of Social Services or the Police.

Kyle's eldest brother, Thomas, was currently serving a three-year sentence at HMP Strangeways for an aggravated domestic burglary, whilst his younger brother, Michael, was the one with ADHD; the sibling who was constantly smashing up his home or threatening his parents with causing harm to them or to himself. Social Services, teachers, specialist behavioural units and doctors did what they could for Michael - which in essence, was the bare minimum of duty bound care - with all of them predicting that in time, Michael would undoubtedly join his brother Thomas on the criminal career path. When this *non-official* deduction was first reached, Michael Roberts was just eight-years old.

Other than a couple of Police warnings (Mrs Roberts) and one fine (Mr Roberts) for public order offences - together with a string of domestic related incidents between the two - Mum and Dad were relatively crime free. They hated politics, they hated the Police, they hated the council and they hated England becoming a free for all.

"Don't mind who comes 'ere," Mr Roberts had often announced. "As long as they contribute and pay their way like we all 'ave to!"

Fine words indeed, from a man who - unlike his wife - hadn't worked for many years. Not legitimately anyway. Well, he couldn't afford to lose his disability allowance and other government benefits by working now, could he?

Despite being labelled as the product of a dysfunctional family, Kyle actually liked and took an interest in school. He was never going to be the country's top academic but if there were ever an award for consistently good effort, he would be up there on the centre podium. But he didn't just attend school for

himself, he also did it for his sister Abby, three-years his junior. He needed - wanted - to set an example for her that his brother Thomas had failed to do for him and, likewise, his parents for Thomas. He had seen how some of the local girls of his age group - and younger - strived for nothing more than being some wannabe gangster's moll. Their misguided idea of education was getting wasted on cheap alcohol whilst being only too willing to give out hand-jobs to the local *scrotes* in return for a bit of weed. This, Kyle vowed, was not the path his sister would take and, as such, became overly protective of her. There were a few disgruntled words from Abby about this particular arrangement once she'd entered her teen years, but in the main, she followed Kyle's guidance. The result? Her schoolwork was excellent and her friends decent. Ironically, her best friend was Mehmet's sister Ecrin, with whom she shared the same taste in music and teen idols, and the same distaste for the company of boys. That would undoubtedly change the older she became but for now, Kyle could relax. A little.

*

Kyle's father - Alan Bryan Roberts - had an indoctrinated attitude of indifference towards non-white people. He wasn't racist per se, just badly educated and influenced by an era that found the cultural labels of *Coloureds*, *Pakis* and *Chinks* socially acceptable. He revelled in distasteful humour about race and sex, enjoyed lager - canned not bottled - and harboured a strong opinion on every religion, every political party and every football match ever played by Man City and England. Alan's idea of change was watching Mrs Roberts apply a new colour scheme to the walls of their

lounge each and every year, a routine he didn't subscribe to but always had an opinion on. He believed that an Englishman's home was his castle and that homes in England should remain solely the castles of Englishmen.

To a decent society, Alan was a bigoted, self-centred man who constantly hung the flag of St George outside his bedroom window: not as an act of patriotism but as an act of defiance against the politically correct housing association that banned its *permanent* display outside their properties.

As for those like-minded people in Alan's world, he was the salt of the earth, a rough diamond whose heart was made of solid gold. Never too shy to put a hand in his pocket and buy a round, never too busy to listen and advise ... unless the football was showing on his forty-eight inch plasma TV of course.

In contrast to Mrs Roberts, Alan's love for his children was felt - and displayed - in varying degrees, usually dependant on his moods, but always dependant on which child he was talking to or about at the time. He felt disappointed in his eldest son though maintained that Tommy was actually a good lad who just fell in with the wrong crowd. One could argue - as a prosecution barrister had - that Tommy hadn't been in a crowd when he burgled Edna Jones' home and threatened the frail seventy-eight year old with a kitchen knife. Unlike his father, the jury failed to see any goodness in Thomas Roberts during his trial and subsequently found him guilty. The Judge - who had already formed his opinion of the accused prior to the verdict being reached - vehemently gave the smirking little shit before him the sentence he deserved.

"In my opinion Roberts," Mr Harris QC had voiced about the prison term imposed. "Three years is

not long enough. But unfortunately, I am bound by the sentencing rules of our current legal system.” He sighed and shook his head in dismay, knowing that the defendant would no doubt forget what the elderly Mrs Jones would never be able to. “Take him down please officer!”

Of his second son, Kyle, Alan wondered why the boy was putting so much effort into his schoolwork and actually looking forward to college once his high school days were over.

“The Benefits Office doesn’t need you to have GCSEs to sign-on you know?” Alan had said, with his usual embrace of negativity. “And believe you me sunshine, given the state of the country, that’s the only place you’ll be heading to in the long run!”

Had it been a decade earlier, Alan would have insisted that his son leave school at sixteen and start contributing financially to the household. However, given that the Government had changed the law to keep children in education until they reached the age of eighteen, the Roberts’ family would continue to receive child benefit for Kyle. Not all bad then.

Other than his Kyle’s obsession with wanting to be a swot, there was something else that niggled Alan about his son; in particular, the company he kept. Now, Alan wasn’t saying that Mehmet was a bad person, not at all. It was just that ... well ... he was different. Why Kyle couldn’t hang around with lads of his own kind was beyond all comprehension to Alan. *And* - if that wasn’t enough - his daughter Abby had adopted the same bizarre mentality as Kyle and was seemingly closer to Mehmet’s sister than she was her own younger brother.

“Oh Alan,” his wife had sighed. “Don’t be so ridiculous. She’s just a young teenager, and everything’s about BFFs and pop music at that age.”

“BB what?” Alan asked, frowning.

Angela raised her eyes and shook her head. “BFF, not BB,” she replied with a titter. “It stands for *best friends forever*. What century are you living in love?”

“One where brothers and sisters are close and love each other, no matter what!”

“She *does* love Michael,” Angela insisted. “He’s her brother.”

“Then she should show it a bit more,” Alan replied. “Instead of constantly picking on him like she does. No wonder he’s an angry little sod!”

“You can’t blame Abby for our Michael’s condition Alan, that’s not fair. You know what he’s like!”

“Well. She doesn’t help matters does she?” Alan retorted. “I’ve heard her making fun of him, especially when she’s showing off to that Paki girl!”

“Shush!” Angela warned sternly, raising a finger up towards her lips. “Ecrin’s up in Abby’s room and she’ll hear you!”

“I don’t really give a fuck!” Alan shrugged.

“No, but your daughter does!”

“Hmm.”

“And for the millionth time, Mister Uneducated, Ecrin’s of Turkish descent, not Pakistani.”

“Whatever,” Alan replied, waving a dismissive hand. “Still a Muslim though, isn’t she? I’m surprised that her Uncles or whatever, haven’t started grooming Abby yet!”

“Now that’s enough!” Angela snapped. “I won’t have that disgusting talk in this house Alan. What the fuck has gotten into you?”

Alan shot up from his chair and hastily folded up the newspaper he had been trying to read. "Fuck this," he hissed, almost to himself. "I'm going for a dump!"

"Good," Angela said, sarcastically. "Let's hope you get rid of *all* your crap whilst you're up there!"

"Maybe I will, maybe I won't," Alan snorted, walking away. "But I bet you're still 'ere when I come down?"

"Don't bank on it arsehole," Angela replied bitterly, as Alan disappeared into the hallway. "And make sure you open the window when you've done?" She shouted out. "Me Mum and Dad are coming later and I don't want them gassing!"

"Really?" Alan said to himself. "I couldn't think of anything better!"

As he reached the top of the stairs, Alan heard music blaring from his daughter's room, the boom-boom-boom adding to his already developing headache.

"Abby!" He called out. "Turn that rubbish down will you?"

Seconds later, the music was lowered and Abby's bedroom door flew open.

"It isn't rubbish dad," Abby called out towards the closing bathroom door. "And it's way better than that old-fashioned, pensioner stuff you listen to!"

"Yeah, whatever Abby," Alan called back. "Just keep it down!"

Abby scowled and immediately did something that she would never - ever - do in front of her dad. She flicked two fingers up, before going back into her bedroom and slamming the door on her personal space.

"He's such an idiot," she moaned, sitting on the bed, next to her best friend.

“That’s dads for you,” Ecrin said, raising her eyebrows. Ironically, Ecrin didn’t think the same about her own father though, not in the slightest.

*

5th March 2017

“Happy birthday dear Abby ... Happy birthday to you!”

The Roberts’ family (bar Thomas of course) cheered loudly as the birthday girl blew out the fourteen candles on her cake.

Abby loved the perfume from Kyle, appreciated the shopping voucher off Michael (even though he didn’t have a clue that he’d bought it ... so, thanks mum) and nearly passed out when she opened the present from her parents. In fact, she cried.

“Oh my god, oh my god! How? When? I, I thought they were all sold out?”

“We got them the first day they went on sale,” Mum replied with a wide grin. “And look,” she added, pointing to the concert tickets. “We’re right near the front!”

“Oh wow!” Abby giggled. “That’s so cool!” She gave both her parents a hug and a kiss, the likes of which her dad hadn’t gotten since her last birthday.

“And there’s something else,” Mrs Roberts announced, her eyes now welling slightly at her daughter’s joy. Abby frowned. “We figured that you wouldn’t want to go with just your mum, so ...” She reached into a drawer behind her and produced a third ticket. Abby gasped. “This one’s for whichever one of your friends is worthy enough to come with us.”

With a mixture of a high-pitched scream, happy tears and laughter, the fourteen-year-old girl embraced her parents once again. “This is the best birthday ever,” she sobbed. “Thank you so much!”

“I wonder who she’ll invite to the concert?” Kyle asked, knowingly winking at his mum.

“Erm, Ecrin, obviously,” Abby replied, turning quickly towards her favourite brother. “She loves *Ariana* as much as I do.”

“Oh, I’d never have guessed that one.” Kyle laughed, pulling a tongue out at Abby then giving her a hug. He’d never seen his sister so giddy and excited as she was today, but there again, she’d never gotten a ticket to see her favourite Pop Star before. If she was this hyper now, he mused, what would she be like on the actual day of the concert?

Tragically, somebody already had an answer to that particular question.
