

1

I lay in a suspended state, barely breathing, reclining in the plush Emirates Airline seats next to my son as we hurtled over the Atlantic. Though the plane was traveling at unimaginable speed, with a force beyond my comprehension, my body resisted the inexorable movement, as if all five feet of me could stop the inevitable. If we never arrived, we would never have to know.

I couldn't eat or sleep, watch a movie or read. The flight to Dubai would take nearly fourteen hours, but time meant nothing. It had lost its reliable rhythm. Fourteen hours, fourteen minutes, or fourteen seconds, every increment equal to every other, every moment excruciating. We would arrive the next evening, an entire day gone. *And with it, what else?* I closed my eyes and tried to still my mind, and slow my wildly beating heart. I

couldn't look ahead to what we might find, or back on what we might have already lost: our security, our family life together, my identity—*was I still a wife?*

Every so often, I touched Ollie's arm. My almost-grown young man was the very image of his father, with his strong nose, expressive mouth and thick wavy hair, though without its salt and pepper. He sat up most of the night, and watched whatever the screen in front of him offered. As we descended, I held his hand. I wanted to scream, cry, let loose my fear and rage. *How could this be happening?* Instead, I remained quiet, steeling myself for what was to come. I looked into my son's sorrowful eyes—my eyes—their deep blue piercing me, begging *Make it all right, Mom*. I wanted to protect him, but that wasn't possible now. He was too old, and it was already too late. It killed me that Ollie had received the first call, which had set in motion a reality out of our control. He was in this horror with me. There was nothing from which I could spare my child, or myself. Agony.

This would be my third trip to Dubai and my son's second. Jerry, Ollie's father and my husband of twenty-four years, might die in a land none of us had any love for, a land I never wanted to set foot in again. But here we were, in torment, heading towards...

We could not have known then what the next two weeks would bring.

I stared in front of me, and watched the elegant flight attendants in their trim tan suits and veiled red fezzes as they leaned over other passengers, offering them anything they wanted. When they walked past me, I averted my eyes, closed them and pretended to sleep. There was nothing they could offer me. I was beyond help. *What did I want?* Not to think the next thought that pushed towards the surface of my consciousness. Each time it threatened to rise, I forced it down. I knew what it was, but I could not allow myself to think it. If I did, it could be true: *He might already be dead.*