

FAR OUT by Khaled Talib

EXCERPT

Chapter One

As she lay on the verge along the Pacific Coast Highway under a starless April sky, a faint bleat caught Goldie's lips. Her heart pounded irregularly as her breath whizzed in and out of her mouth. Blurry faces swam in her vision, and obfuscated voices floated through and lingered in her distorted senses. She heard maybe six; maybe more, maybe less. Her fading blariness made it hard to tell.

Out of the corner of her eye, Goldie noticed the coils of steam spewing from the hood of an overturned Lexus underneath the mountain incline on the other side of the road. The red car had smashed into a barrier.

How did it happen?

She sucked in the salty breeze, struggling to refocus despite her discombobulation. As she writhed in pain, she felt her eyelids flicker, pulled down by her mortality.

Is it time to go?

Too soon to die.

At least let me say goodbye to...who?

Why can't I remember anyone?

A hand repeatedly patted Goldie's cheek, pulling her out of her stupor.

"Stay with me, okay? Don't sleep. Help is on the way." The soothing feminine voice kept Goldie in a state of equanimity. Her gaze strayed toward its owner, a young woman with long, dark hair bracketing a set of angelic eyes within a pale, long face etched with concern and worry.

Angel Eyes leered down at Goldie. "Do you feel pain anywhere? Blink once for yes, and twice for no."

Goldie blinked once.

"Don't move." Angel Eyes gleamed with emotion. "An ambulance will be here shortly."

"She sure looks like Goldie Saint Helen, the movie star," came from another, astonished voice, this one belonging to a plump curly-haired girl with ringlets across her forehead. "Hey, wait a minute—it is her!"

Movie star? Who? Me?

“You sure?” Goldie heard another voice ask, this one from a man. Moments later, he inched forward, revealing himself: A blond with a surfer haircut.

“Remember *Gun Kiss*? We watched the movie last year,” said the curly-haired girl. “Goldie Saint Helen. She was kidnapped by a Mexican drug lord. Her husband saved her, and he wrote the original screenplay inspired by the incident.”

Mexican drug lord? Husband? What's my husband's name?

A chilly breeze carrying the salty air swept over Goldie's warm body, and she shivered involuntarily.

“Someone get her a blanket from the van,” Angel Eyes demanded.

The curly-haired girl stood up and scampered away. She returned momentarily with a blanket.

Goldie felt the thick blanket spread over her right up to her neck, rendering immediate warmth.

A smile blossomed across Angel Eyes's face. “We'll stay here with you until the ambulance arrives. You'll be okay.”

A sting suppressed Goldie's attempt to raise her lips into a smile. So, she blinked once to acknowledge Angel Eyes's statement.

Car doors banged shut, and Goldie looked up as she heard someone approach.

“What happened here?” asked a woman wearing a jumper.

Goldie looked up at the woman, but the throbbing headache behind her eyes, which had spread across her cheek and down her ears, restrained her from prolonging her focusing. She dropped her eyes, subsiding the tension.

The woman doubled over, hands on her knees, her eyes fixed on Goldie; the look in them was somewhat curious, somewhat empathetic.

“We're not sure,” the blond man replied. “We pulled her out of her car,” he said, pointing to the burning car. Flames unfurled from the hood, but were being fought by men with handheld extinguishers containing the fire from spreading in the interior and trunk.

“Did you kids hit her?” a beefy man asked, to which he received a volley of antagonistic replies.

The blond man stood and cocked his head towards a white van parked up ahead, along the verge. “That's our van over there. Go see if there's any damage, then come and apologize to us.”

The beefy man raised both hands, palms up. “Take it easy, man. Just making sure.”

“Why don't we let the police handle it?” said the curly-haired girl.

The beefy man balked, pulling along the woman in the jumper.

Goldie saw more cars blur by, some stopping. Onlookers approached and jostled for a good spot.

“Hey, isn’t she Goldie Saint Helen?” asked a man in a yellow polo T-shirt. He took his phone out of his pocket and took a few pictures of Goldie. The camera flashed repeatedly, briefly blinding her.

“Have you no shame, Mister? She’s a human being,” snapped the curly-haired girl, glowering at the opportunist.

The man in the yellow T-shirt retreated to his car.

“Asshole.” The curly-haired girl stood up and snapped at the other bystanders. “Well, what are you people waiting for? Go ahead and take some more pictures!”

“Take it easy, I can help,” said a bob-haired woman in a gray sweater and white athletic pants.

“Nothing much to be done here, unless you’re a doctor,” Angel Eyes replied to her.

“I’m a nurse,” the bob-haired woman said. “I just thought—”