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Hooked...

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My mouth closed hesitantly around it. It was warm and smooth against my lips. The taste flooded my tongue like a sea of cappuccino. My jaw tensed with the flavour. My eyes watered with the moist heat. The musky, vanilla-like scent swirled in my lungs like breeze in bamboo leaves. The interior of my mouth felt alive, raw like how I expected a jelly fish would feel, if washed up on the seashore. Turning into dragon, feeling my eyes turn to rubies, feeling my muscles clenching with the moisture... I knew I was hooked...

My live-in girlfriend, Tenisha, had returned to me a changed woman. A world of experience was now in the palms of her hands. Abu Dhabi—the richest city of the world had been her destination. Dubai was where she had gone when she said goodbye. From the moment she had come back and knocked on my door using our secret knock, I knew something was different. Our home had changed. I knew it from the moment we had embraced and I smelled the sweet fog of Shisha in her long, silky black hair.

Tenisha had brought back two flavours of Halwa for me. It was a sweet delicacy with the consistency of firm clay cut into squares: one was made of green slivers of pistachio and the other was of chocolate ripples. I ate my Halwa and listened to beautiful Tenisha, with her lovely mole under her right eye, as she enthralled me with her stories. I had missed her so much. I listened to her for hours, lost in the grandeur of beauty she shared with me.

In her photos and in the revelations of her travels, I felt like I also had gone to that land of great sands, where Sheik Zaid's Mosque sprawled the desert like a magnificent lion in slumber. Through her eyes, I saw the sunset at Jumeirah that glowed like the ultimate solar spectacle. Every gorgeous oasis, great structures, beaches of pristine white sands, the Persian Gulf, the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean. Tenisha took me halfway around the world with her stories.

A little shaken up and scarred after a fall off a camel in a faraway desert and an injury in a London airport, she walked with a limp and an exquisite scar at the back of her pale leg. Tenisha came back from weeks in the United Arab Emirates with stories that spoke of an extraordinary land of riches. Air-conditioned bus-stops and deserts of peach and orange sands, Khaldiya kingdoms of black-garmented women and gourmet food at extravagant restaurants—her stories fascinated and thrilled me. I went to sleep many nights with my mind full of exotic images. I saw the black and white falcon with a leather hood atop her wrist. I saw the camel with its lush eyelashes staring shyly at the sand as she mounted him. Huge, black cannons, forts and hotels of such spectacular dimensions blew me away in contemplation.

After weeks of missing her, fretting and calling her cell phone in the final days of longing, knowing full well it was at her Rio Claro home, while she was thousands of miles away, I was consumed with strange emotions. She came back to me a woman armed with a silver carrying case, lined with black velvet like an exotic coffin. She had brought back a Hookah and the possibility of Shisha parties. Hookah, what a lovely word, such a lovely sound. It sounded exciting and it looked exciting.

Hookah—12 captivating inches of pure delight, a vase of amber glass, a yellow cord of silk, coals and Shisha. A Hookah was a Shisha pipe, Shisha being a delicious mix of tobacco and exotic additives to be puffed away like oral incense. It lay in white containers like brown crushed leaves with a mouthwatering fragrance. Cappuccino, orange, mint, grape with mint and apple were the assorted flavours to be smoked. A flame was all that was needed for the enticing experience. Shisha, such a sweet word like the name Tenisha.

I remember our first Shisha party. Puffing away beneath the stars, lips closing over the silver bullet-mouth of the Hookah, fragrant vapours seducing lungs, me strumming my guitar and singing my soulful songs of experience, without a care in the world, high up on my balcony, overlooking the Aranguez savannah. Sebastian's lips had turned dark red when he declared, after his first taste, it's like kissing a girl wearing lip gloss. How profound a comparison, we had all thought.

Daidre and Tenisha, my eager audience, clapping away at my silly songs like excited children. Priya staring at me with sleepy eyes, caught up in the sweet steam of the Shisha thrills, begging Stephen to breathe the smoke into her hair and fragrance it; and smoke escaping Stephen's nostrils and lips in wispy clouds, the colour of camel's milk. Tenisha reigned supreme like a Shisha queen. Her eyes aglow like the golden pillars in the Emirates Palace.

Life was sweet wasn't it? A Hookah made life better and we owed it all to Tenisha. Smoke in the air mixing with my singing, whilst those who listened laughed, their throats gurgling with joy at my outrageous lyrics. On that night so fresh in my mind like dew on petals, I felt alive. The Hookah bestowed a Middle Eastern experience on us all, and we savoured it like the sheiks thousands of miles away in deserts of rippling, shifting ivory sands.