

**BUZZ**  
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**BUZZZZZ**

by Guy Mannes-Abbott

Which way out today? Across the desert of mirroring light southwest of Kandahar and on towards seas of Iranian salt; or valley-trailing to Herat with a little shot of adrenaline over the border-posts and in that way? I love what I do: getting straight up and out, freed of soil and sand.

*I'm a human fly. It's spelt F. L. Y.*

The Cramps's song was my Daddy's favorite, now they're selling Nissans with it all day long on TV back at the base. I can't get it out of my head.

Here we go. Programmed to the north today, along a valley with dusty impressions of water all the way to the green city. Blessed mountain mornings. Beaming through nothingness and back again. Leaves me without words.

*I'm an unzipped fly and I don't know why, but I say buzz. . .*

My mind wanders almost as soon as I get going. Thirty of these missions done now; always the same experience for me. I scan the planting of rice one day, scan them picking pomegranates another. I scan them lighting-up in vehicles at the border, heading for prayers or sitting in eternal groups in the shade. And all the time they can't see me or know how much I scan of them.

*And I say buzz, rocket ride.*

Garden city, Herat. Gone. Today it looked as though someone had dropped a pot of green paint over it. To think they've fought over these scraps of aridity since the first of them found their way here. It's mostly empty, good for nothing. Even now that we've liberated it for them, they've held to a hand that will never win the game. I'm from Las Vegas, in part, and know about these things.

Coming in over the border-posts now. I'm not policing smugglers, just scanning jumbles of trucks and pick-ups around Fort Islam Customs on the Afghan side and attempts at neat organization on the Iranian side. Despite varying efforts, they're all the same and surrounded by infertile sand with immaculate dust-free ridges of exposed rock in the distance. Meanwhile, from out of nowhere, I enter their little world undetected.

*And I say buzz, I don't know why.*

This landscape is as backed-up in me as Home in Nevada. The scape itself, not the strange use made of it to conceal nuclear-armed bunkers here. I recognize sharply detailed mountain textures, seasonal river plains, pretty watery tracings. Especially out this way, over what they call Khorasan. It's the same around the base; the stretch from there to here and on to the middle of Iran. The very ground they can't stop fighting over: Arabs, Persians, Turks, Mongols,

Russians. That's why I'm here, to help straighten things out from above.

I'll follow the valley's line across the middle of the plateau: three- or four-thousand feet above sea level and madder by the mile. Thirty? Thirty-one, maybe thirty-two missions now. Below me are mountains covered in missile-tree forests, valleys choked with grenade-trees and bullet-shrubs. Underneath all that is their labyrinth of terror, which must never be allowed to surface. Still, I'm programmed for revelation, not judgment. That is my duty.

*And baby I won't care, 'cause baby I don't scare . . .*

Cutting down to the water now: Bushehr, Bandar Abbas, then back in via Zaranj and over the shining desert to Kandahar base. I like the shock of the blue, the buzz from being in control over the Gulf. It's the same as I pass invisibly over the diamond-dust centers of the desert. These seas of salt remind me of where my daddy and I were built, where his daddy was the first of the scanners.

*Rockin' . . .*

Check, check, check: three towns in a row and on between crisp ridges towards the great salt desert, passing the little salt desert to my south. Just like home, except for the plots they work-up below. In the midst

of this remote, crusty plateau are patchworks of fields, farms, food. I know it's Iran when land looks this way: long, thin, green strips with diagonal strings of paths. It must be rice, laid out with a sigh across the desert. Around it there's nothing: makes for crazy.

*'Cause I'm a reborn maggot using germ warfare.*

Settling in for a long ride over the center followed by a gentle angle to the south, reaching Bushehr in a few hundred miles. Turning now, 45 degrees. Turning 90 . . . Whoa, turning right back on myself? Sharp movements are bad news. Dropping right down: doin' recon for a hit? What have the guys seen between all the little two-fisted mosques? Sometimes I wish I were armed.

*I'm a human fly. It's spelt F. L. Y.*

Cutting close along blackly crystalline mountain ridges, beautiful anywhere else in the world. I've recorded all of this time and time again. Soon I'll be equipped to scan through the ground to the actual roots of Terror. Right now I'm coming in so low that I'm going to shave the walnut trees of munitions as I head back up the valley. Never seen it like this though, fields of knots and squares, lines of bullet-bearing vines.

*I say buzz, buzz, buzzzzzz . . .*

At this height I'm not invisible, so it must be important. I'm scanning pylons, water-pumps, kids on the school-

run. Flat ground, another town in the distance, craggy mountain ridges rising to my left and right, a single strip of tarmac running like a seam. It appears I'm being guided-in to a movie set, but it must be a training base of ours. Can't see a strip.

Whoa! Another sharp turn, straightening again, lowering. Something's not right. Crop after crop form a chaotic quilt in front of me. Those peculiarly ornate pathways are made for and by feet in this land of bunkers and bullet-trees. In the beginning, I really did think the pistachios were bullets, the walnuts small hand-grenades. Now my dials are down, indicators dimmed. Off. Definitely off.

*And it's just because . . .*

Flat, flat, flat. A thin layer of ground between me and the source of all our problems, the scariest secrets on Earth. Down in that soil is everything we stand against.

A bang! A definite bang. I've got none of my back-ups, no dials, lights, nothing and I'm coming down in the dirt. Is this for real? Surely can't have been hacked. But I'm down! Down for sure and powered off. Scraping, grating, surfing to a thickening halt. An exhalation in still silence.

Now unfamiliar men are all over me, screaming, shouting. There's so much noise and everything's

different. What am I looking at? My job is to reveal, I'm not used to looking for myself. Everything appears dimly lit down here between shades of brown complexity. I can see a lot of people, vehicles darting around and I'm being moved between bright green vines: grapes!

The screaming is pleasure, everyone is smiling through beards, talking code. This is not part of any plan. These are not our guys. We're coming to a halt outside a large, poorly camouflaged building. Who are these people: smiling, talking, holding each other warmly? They're brushing, cleaning, caressing me.

*Don't know why . . .*

Third day: hangar, bright lights, film-crew and uniformed men. Now I can see clearly. I'm looking at them, they are looking at me. What to think? If these are not terrorists, who or what are they? What ever the answer, there are so many children that it looks like a kindergarten behind the cameras. While they complete a circle, a mother reads from a book bearing an elephant. In the other corner women busy themselves in an improvised kitchen.

I'm watching the screen and it's watching me. I'm wearing a skirt in stars and stripes that reads: "The U.S. cannot do a damn thing." The screen is talking about me too: RQ-170, Creech, Skunk Works, worth six million dollars? I've never been

so praised, not when I first arrived in Kandahar, not even after Abbottabad.

*I went buzz, buzz, buzzzzzz.*

Seven days have passed. I keep hearing them describe Khorasan, the place we're in now, as the Land of Light, variations on the theme. Inside here, time is marked by periods of electric illumination. Outside, I glimpse a light that is novel to me. The place itself looks different from here, in my own eyes.

*Just because.*

I hear they want to reproduce me, can't avoid the admiring tone in their voices. It's good to stand face-to-face with them, bare-winged and vulnerable. In place, where things begin.