



1 Runners in Training

LOOKING AT pictures (escorted by armed men).

The wise athletic fish leaps, and topples down the fisherman. We move along. From the millstones, tiny warriors in blue armour spill out.

Someone nearby is playing ping-pong. There is perfect peace. I can see the plantations through the plate glass, too stuffed with sun they seem, the plants can't nod with no wind – but the filtered scent is lulling. Midsummer. Satyrs, druggy decadence, and peace – for this slice of time – is perfect.

The ping-pong's more insistent, and my

counsellor, Shapur, says, ‘Get the fuck down!’ – we’re all asprawl each other, a kind of terrified orgy – me and Shapur, the lady spy, Lili, and Rick who will succeed me. A fine quintet, end of act one, all horizontal.

‘Some guy is popping at us’ – maybe the guy that’s grown those too green plants, the flowers already on the edge of rot. It’s someone else’s territory, or even faith, a state in travail. We’re pinned down, and then we hear the helicopter, and we think ‘we’re saved’, but no, it’s rattled off. It’s like those solitary wasplike things, so finicky about their nesting, just buzz around, out on house hunts.

When we’ve all settled down again, our situation’s bad. Wrong orders given, guys get killed – I only bought this job, I’m not elected, just got lucky with the cards. I’m the one responsible for all the guys that’s killed, but not responsible for being killed.

We scuttle out. Sara, the lady spy, has brought her hammered car, her Hummer, a military look,

no windows and no armour. We all jump in, the pictures in the show have left us with their violence, not tranquillity – the fish, the mill. We're all scared stupid. Our paid friends, with guns, have left.

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