

## I WOULD BE HAPPY TO LEAVE THIS ASYLUM

### *Aeroporto Mohammed V, Terminal 2*

Couré Kouyata landed in Morocco, one warm day in January, connecting nowhere. He was black and rail-thin and invisible that day. Strong for someone his age—52, or 35, or once, adding up all the years he could remember dancing with various companies, 47. Birthdays were not important days where he was being returned to, in Guinea, West Africa. He forgot one year of his life after another the way a man forgets a price after paying it in a small store along the main road. He was told in the U.S. you cannot be sent home without having a valid age. His deportation officer decided on 41.

Couré walked off the airplane in Casablanca carrying a small shoulder bag of belongings and the clothes on his back. His head had been shaved, twice, by authorities. His hands and feet were oversized and gentle and calloused. His shirt and pants were a patchwork of vivid African fabrics, made for him some years ago by a tailor in the town of Kindia. He preferred the tie-dyed look of these patterns to the symmetrical wax prints available in the capital city of Conakry.

“Con-a-cry,” his deportation officer called it.

“Kona-cree,” Couré told him.

In Kindia, he had paid the tailor to make him two *complets*, one to wear home and one to sell in Conakry to pay for both suits. The sandals on his feet were clear jellies about to break down from so many years of use.

After returning to Conakry, he would need to find a new dance company, one that toured in America the way his former company had. The best dancers and drummers always defected. In his case, it was only to find his daughter, Alisa, in New York City. She was living now in a place called Queens, which made him smile whenever he thought of the name in English.

At the Aeroporto Mohammed V, he was told in French by a woman wearing a blue uniform the last leg of his flight home to Guinea had been cancelled.

“All the night flights to Conakry were canceled months ago,” she told him. How she knew this she didn’t say. She directed him down a long corridor.

“You need to go see the ticketing agent,” she told him. “You need to work something out with them.”

He looked at her for a moment, wondering what to believe.

“This line won’t do you any good,” she told him.

*Didn’t the airline know this when I boarded my plane in New York?* he asked himself. Or his deportation officer, before taking away his handcuffs and handing him his paperwork and sending him on his way?

*Is it so difficult a job to help a person?* He walked down the long corridor alone.

The ticketing agent at the end of the corridor sat behind a plain metal desk emptied of papers. Her hair reminded Couré of his daughter’s hair, the same thick wave covering one eye completely. There was a fullness to her lips, giving him hope. There was efficiency in her young hands. With one eye visible, she cast a spell of temporary kindness on the world.

No flights were allowed to land in Conakry after sundown, she told him, due to a military curfew in effect in the city. No vehicle traffic was allowed on the ground after 8 p.m. This had been the situation for two months. The airlines were aware of the situation. They were hopeful the situation would end. In the meantime, they took your money to bring you this far and then they cited “government action” and required you to buy a new ticket. There were only two

flights a day landing now in Conakry, both from Casablanca. Air Maroc in the morning and Air France in the afternoon.

“Do you have the money to buy another ticket?” she asked him.

“The U.S. Government has bought my ticket.” He showed her his deportation boarding passes.

“This flight is now cancelled,” she told him.

“The U.S. Government itself,” he said.

“This flight is no more. You need to purchase your own flight.”

He looked into his shoulder bag, knowing he had no money there. He had a change of clothing. His deportation papers. A small head lamp with batteries, which he used to see at night when he wasn't living in a place full of electricity such as America. “When is the next flight?” he asked.

Her young hands rattled the keyboard, looking for a flight with an available seat. Her one visible eye studied the computer screen, like a bird of prey searching an empty field for small movements. “There is an open seat in five days,” she told him.

“Ah! Five days!”

“Yes.”

“I will come back then,” he said.

“If you buy a new ticket, the airline will pay for your hotel,” she said.

A new ticket would cost him 4,600 Moroccan dirham. He thanked her and went to find the men's bathroom. He found a vending machine with food. He found a quiet hallway under a flight of stairs where he could sleep. In his pocket he was carrying \$50 U.S., which was not even 500 dirham. He had no other money in the world. It had been a bad year for money, although he carried good memories of finding his daughter in America. He could not be richer, for that.

“I am so happy to see you!” she had cried out when he first appeared, standing at her door in Queens. When a dancer defects, of course, the first place to look is with relatives, but she had hidden him with a friend of hers down the hall until the searching by the immigration authorities ended. After a time, it became clear to Couré, this friend—a Jamaican man, named Davion, who worked for the public schools, whose apartment smelled of fish tea and curried goat—would someday marry his daughter. Such good news, she had a man who loved her, despite her need to use a crutch, despite her leg. Couré recognized the bead bracelet resting on the shelf in the bathroom above the sink. He recognized her perfume on Davion's towel.

Alisa had showed Couré the hotel where she worked in Queens and the market where she bought her food and the place in Central Park near the zoo where dancers danced for money. When he first joined in with a group dancing there, they laughed at his way of dancing, until they saw the crowds he drew. Somehow, he danced smaller than they did, and yet larger. The people were drawn in and could not stop watching the story he told. One day while he was dancing, with Alisa looking on, the immigration officers recognized him and arrested him and drove him away in their car with Alisa pounding on the trunk of the vehicle screaming American obscenities through the back window. He held up two fingers to his lips to calm her and to say goodbye. He had not been able to talk to her since.

One of the stray cats living in the Aeroport Mohammed V approached Couré under the flight of stairs, hoping for a meal. A young tom. Unowned and hungry but not mistreated.

“What is your name?” Couré asked him. “Do you speak Susu? My name is Couré Kouyata. How many years old do you think I am?”

The cat's fur was in good condition. It walked with one hip always higher than the other hip, and wandered the airport night and day, keeping out of arm's reach. Couré fed it part of his vending machine sandwich and it slept at his feet for two nights. Then it disappeared.

When Couré needed to shower, he waited until very late at night and then he blocked the door to the men's room and stripped at one of the sinks and washed himself there. This was the way men and women showered in Conakry every day of the week, it wasn't a problem for him. The security guard was upset that he'd blocked the door and confronted him with an automatic rifle at 2 a.m. while Couré was standing at the sink wearing no clothing, equatorial black and lathered in soap.

"Put on your clothes, man!" the guard ordered, in his green uniform, more threatening than airport blue. "Look at this soap on the floor! Someone will slip and fall!"

"You cancel my flight without any notice to me!" Couré yelled back at him in French. "You give me nowhere to live for a week! I want ten minutes alone to wash myself, to be human, do you understand? Tell me where the mop is kept and I will clean your soapy floor." Couré laughed about it then and the guard lowered his gun and laughed with him. So black a man, and so white the soapy lather. He looked like a cartoon.

"Okay, but hurry up." The guard laughed again. "'Mop my soapy floor...' I will report you as a Crazy One Harmless," he said—one of their classifications.

Couré thanked him. It could be worse than Crazy One Harmless.

The Aeroport Mohammed V was not a busy airport. It wasn't a JFK. It employed many people in blue uniforms to do the same job. During his days of waiting there, Couré started to notice the men working. It was a crazy place to work, he could see. In one line, five officers stood 15 feet apart from each other, checking the same passports as travelers shuffled by. How does a passport change in 15 feet? Is there so much information in a passport, one man can't read it all?

In another line, teams of inspectors worked at a long metal table, opening up each carry-on bag after it had gone through the X-ray machine and searching the contents from top to bottom. Two inspectors stood and discussed a twin-blade razor they'd discovered. One of the men knew the blade could be detached. He detached it and threw it away.

In the next line, 300 passengers were loaded onto two large shuttle buses and made to wait for half an hour on the tarmac during the heat of the day. A few lucky ones were seated. The others stood, body pressed against body, absorbing each other's sweat, without air-conditioning or open windows or food and water. In the end, the driver, sitting in the shade outside, stood up and walked to the front of the bus and climbed aboard. A blue uniform like all the others.

He started the engine and drove the bus less than a hundred feet forward, in half a circle, to the airplane, which had been standing in plain view the entire time, an easy walk from the terminal even for the old, hobbled imam in his long purple robe and his entourage of relatives. The passengers could only laugh at their treatment.

*I would be happy to leave this asylum, Couré told himself. I would be happy to have one of their jobs, also.*

After a week of this, he was awakened one morning at dawn with a nudge from the night guard's automatic rifle. "Couré," he said. "It's time for you to go."

Couré rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

"Patience is running out upstairs and I'll be off work for a few days. I don't want anything happening to you while I'm gone."

"Alright. Thank you."

“I’ll walk you out.”

“Thank you for that.”

He led Couré to the outside door and watched him for a long time to be sure he walked off airport property.

Not many miles from the airport, Couré sat down in a field to wait. He watched a young Arab boy in white shorts and a faded red shirt tending to a herd of goats in an overgrazed yard. The boy tossed stones near the outliers, lacking a good dog to herd them. He spent his morning sitting in the sun, moving along slowly with the herd. The shadows of airplanes raced low through the grass when he least expected them. Later came the sound.

At noon, his mother walked out to the boy with a small bundle of food wrapped in a square of colorful fabric. He sat and ate the food by himself and then he tied the fabric into a head scarf and then a slingshot and then a bandana for one of the younger goats to wear, and then he pocketed it for returning to his mother. Couré smiled at how the boy thought, what he did to keep his hands busy. As the sun fell near the horizon, the boy walked the goats to their pen beside the house, throwing stones again at the outliers, and he stopped to drink a cup of water from a bucket he hauled up out of a concrete well, a metal door that opened to the earth.

Couré had been instructed by the night guard not to arrive at Rashad’s apartment in the city until after evening prayers. He stood up straight. Now was the time to go. He would spend all his remaining money to get into the city. He missed his life in the days when life was simple.

### *Boulevard Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah*

The engine cover was missing from the city bus that Couré took into Casablanca. As it pulled away from the curb, leaving him behind on the boulevard, he could see its belts and levers working. It didn’t seem believable, that so large and modern a machine must depend on such small parts lifting and looping like a child’s toy, like a sewing machine being worked by a hand wheel and a foot pedal. The urge was to cover up these fragile parts, the way you would order a man to dress himself if you found him lathered in soap and standing at a men’s room sink. The bus rolled on, with its working parts exposed to following traffic.

“I need to find work in Casablanca,” Couré explained to Rashad. “I need to earn the money for a new ticket home.”

Rashad was the younger brother of the night security guard at the airport, the same broad shoulders and military air to him, the same willingness to give orders. This was the guard’s way of evicting Couré, whom he had grown to like during their talks in the airport each night.

“Why don’t you drive home to Guinea?” Rashad demanded.

Couré smiled widely at this. It would be an impossible trip. Two thousand miles through disputed territory in Western Sahara; over crumbling roads in Mauritania and Senegal; the bribe money alone would be more than the price of an airline ticket. It would take an army vehicle filled with soldiers to make a trip like that. It would take months.

“You can live here for one month,” Rashad told him.

“Thank you. Thank you very much for that.”

“One month. No more.”

“Thank you very, very much.”

Rashad’s apartment was five stories up, in an aging building downtown. He and Couré could speak French with each other, and some Arabic. Rashad drove a “M’dina” bus during the day, a city bus like the one Couré had taken from the airport into Casablanca. Rashad had a good job for a 25-year-old man. He had a good family with connections.

He had light, Arab skin like his brother, with a long, hooked, vulture's nose and dark eyes set close together under a deeply-cut brow. He could crack open walnuts with his bare hands, and he ate them as he talked with Couré. His cousin, Saïd, was living in the apartment with him. Rashad explained this to Couré while scratching at his arm the way a person might explain to you he had developed a contagious skin condition. "You can sleep here in the front room," he said. He pointed to a woven mat on the floor.

"Thank you very much for that." Couré preferred the floor to a bed. Even in the U.S., where the beds were very good, he preferred to sleep on the floor.

"Saïd drives a taxi, but he broke his leg jumping from a roof and he isn't working," Rashad explained. He took Couré into the next room to meet Saïd, who was lying on a small bed that smelled of dried urine. His leg was in a hard white cast from ankle to hip. He was wearing a thin blue towel around his waist and no shirt. A flat, young, unmuscled chest. The room was hot and airless and dark. He looked 20 years old. Even younger, still a boy.

"It's broken in four places," Rashad said, not introducing Saïd to Couré. Saïd lifted an arm but he didn't smile. He wore a wild, unhappy look of pain on his face, with a small beard scattered along his jaw line and straight black hair long enough to hang down into his eyes. He was wearing black-rimmed eyeglasses that gave him an intellectual look beneath the long hair. He didn't look like any man Couré had seen in Casablanca. Couré thought of young Communists taking to the streets. He thought of a demonstration once in Conakry. Writers and poets throwing stones at their own university. Where Couré grew up, in the countryside, he could not go to school until he was old enough to walk the three hours in each direction, and then he had to stop after five years, already old enough to be a man. He folded his hands together and bowed, to say hello to Saïd.

The plan was this, Rashad told them: Couré would impersonate Saïd and drive his taxi while Saïd's leg healed. Couré and Saïd would split the money 50-50. Couré would drive tourists from the airport into town, as Saïd did, and offer to be their walking guide.

"The side streets of Kaza are very confusing without a guide!" Saïd offered suddenly, speaking up for the first time. He had a high, urgent, Arabic voice when he spoke, almost a woman's voice. "Drive down a side street!" he told Couré. "One or two times. Show them how confusing it is, how they can't make it on their own." He had found surprising energy in his broken body, as if to spite the men at his bedside for thinking he was weak. He would not be kept down for long. "Americans pay the best price," he said. "Smile big for them, they love big smiles." The Americans all wanted to see the same things, he said. Old Medina. The Grand Mosque. Rick's Café. They all wanted to take a picture of the hookahs for sale on the sidewalks. "Do you speak English? They all want to speak English," he said.

In Conakry, when Couré was a younger man like Saïd, he drove taxis for more than a year, but never tourists. There were no tourists in Conakry. Here, on the wide boulevards of Casablanca, lined with palm trees and working stoplights, driving was easy. Pedestrians worked their way across rush-hour traffic lane by lane. The oncoming cars, turning left, surged forward as a pack and lurched to a stop until they broke through and interrupted the flow. At red lights, men rolled their sick mothers and crippled children in wheelchairs up and down the lanes between traffic, asking drivers for money. Other men stood or sat along the sidewalks, idle for the day, with a beaten-down look to their faces. Very organized. Nothing to worry about.

Couré had never liked begging. There were no beggars in Guinea, where the people were much poorer than Moroccans. Couré wanted to say to these people in Kaza, "Get up! Make something happen for yourself!" You could learn how to do something. Sell a bag of fruit. Drive

a taxi. Fix a car. Where will you get sitting by the road all day? You have to force the action if you want to make money.

Couré impersonated Saïd for a week and made good money for both of them. He drove his taxi 14 hours a day, a small, red Fiat Uno that smelled of incense covering the smell of marijuana. He smiled big for Americans. He chatted with them about life in New York City. He chatted with them about American football and baseball names.

One day, alongside the Boulevard Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdallah, a policeman stopped him and pulled him out of the car by his arm. The policeman was young and strong and vicious, like a guard dog inside a store at night. Couré had no papers to prove he was Moroccan. He was a black West African. Did he steal this car? Was he a refugee? Couré explained his cancelled flight, which only angered the policeman more. “Do not lie to me!” he yelled, and he started to beat Couré with a black police baton in plain view of bystanders. “There are so many men without work!” he yelled at him. “Look at them! What are you thinking? Impersonating a Moroccan! Stealing the work from these good men along the road! What is that? The smell of drugs in your car? Are you a drug-seller, too?” Couré received another beating because his stolen car smelled of marijuana.

The call for mid-day prayers began, coming over the loudspeakers of the Grand Mosque near the waterfront. Arabic and soothing, it went on, until the policeman gathered himself and straightened up and left Couré lying where he was on the sidewalk. Still holding his black baton in his hand, the policeman walked off to prayers with the other men beside the road. Hundreds of men were walking now, past the black man lying on the sidewalk. Couré most likely had a broken rib, he could feel. He had protected his face, though, and his hands. *The main thing is to protect your face and hands*, he told himself. You can always get by, if your face and your hands aren't broken.

#### *Apartment A300, Boulevard Hassan Seghir*

“Have some tea. It will help.”

Rashad had noticed Couré was having trouble breathing. The tap water in the apartment had a bitter smell to it, like gunpowder, especially in the bathroom, where a lingering odor sat in the corner on its haunches—a beggar waiting by the road. The tea helped his broken rib, despite the flavor of gunpowder.

“How much more money do you need?” Rashad asked him.

“500 dirham.”

He nodded. He would like Couré out of his apartment, if possible.

“Are you able to drive tomorrow?” he asked.

“No problem.”

“You can hardly sit up,” he said.

“I can drive, no problem.”

He nodded again.

“Have something to eat,” he said.

Every day they ate *kufta*. Couré could hardly look at it—one large ball of ground beef in a bowl, mixed with egg and onion and tomato sauce, very spicy, very good the way Rashad made it, but not the kind of food Couré could eat. There was only trouble in his stomach, eating so much beef at once. He swallowed a spoonful of honey to settle his stomach afterward.

“I'm not hungry today,” he said.

Rashad didn't care if Couré ate. He would like him out of his apartment. He would like Saïd out of his apartment.

"I'll take it into Saïd," Couré said.

Saïd was in a lot of pain every day, recovering slowly, spending long hours alone in his room without strong-enough medication. Memorizing the cracks in his ceiling, the folds of the curtains. He had no television. Nothing to read. Couré opened his window to keep the room aired out and cooler during the day. Listening to traffic, five floors below him on the street, only reminded Saïd he wasn't working. Couré brought him newspapers in Arabic and French. Reading them only reminded Saïd the world was going on without him.

Saïd was feeling better today. Couré made sure he had a clean towel every morning. He helped him into the bathroom. He turned on the light at night so Saïd could read in his bedroom but he liked it dark.

"Here is some food," Couré told him.

"You're a good man, Johnny Kay," Saïd said. He liked to give people nicknames. Couré had no idea how he came up with his nicknames. He called Rashad "The Rock." "More *kufta* from The Rock," he said to Couré.

"Yes. More *kufta*."

Saïd sat up straighter in bed, pulling his hips out from under the sheet. He wasn't wearing his towel. He pointed to the bowl of water on his nightstand. "I've been washing myself," he said. His genitals sloped in Couré's direction, a soft pile of flesh glistening with moisture near the top of his plaster cast, like a warm dish of food waiting to be served.

You reach a point where modesty is irrelevant. He considered Couré a nurse. Couré helped him wipe after going to the bathroom. He helped him stand at the toilet. The room was very hot and it was good for Saïd to feel the air against his skin. He took the dish of *kufta* from Couré and set it on his lap like a fig leaf and started to eat.

It was sundown and they could hear Rashad starting to pray in the other room. It was quiet in the apartment. The prayers came through the wall like a lullaby. "You're home early. Why aren't you working?" Saïd asked.

"I received a police beating today," Couré said. He lifted his shirt. Even with his black skin, one could see there was swelling and probably bruising. "I think I have a broken rib," he told Saïd.

Saïd ran his fingers gently across Couré's skin, as if he were reading the Braille of the injuries. "You don't do evening prayers?" he asked Couré.

"Some days, yes and no. Do you want to do prayers?"

He expected Saïd to decline, but he said yes. He set the dish of *kufta* on the nightstand, next to his bowl of washing water. Couré uncovered the young man's feet and washed them along with his own. He helped Saïd stand. Couré's broken rib hurt more than Saïd's leg with the effort. *What a pair we are*, he thought. He brought Saïd a clean towel to wrap around his waist. The room was nearly dark—sundown arrived earlier indoors. Saïd pointed to a prayer mat leaning in the corner for Couré to unroll. They stood and began.

Couré was older, and Saïd asked him to lead the prayers while he stood on his prayer mat, wearing a towel, in the twilight before Allah and joined in. Because of his cast, he couldn't kneel, but he could lean forward and reach the floor with his hands, and from there he could lie flat on the floor, on his stomach, if Couré helped him to his feet again. Couré groaned at the pain in his ribs. *We're a sad pair*, he thought again. They carried on with prayers this way until they were finished, standing and lying on the floor and standing. Then Saïd asked if he could have a

look at Couré's injuries again. He felt in the dark for the broken rib. He agreed with Couré. The second rib was broken on the left side. The other injuries were bruises. Swelling. There were old scars across his abdomen. Along his arms. Some of them were surgical scars, healed slowly, with infection. Saïd placed his cool hands flat against Couré's skin and held himself there for a long time, heartbeat against heartbeat.

When Couré helped him back into bed, re-adjusting his towel for him, he could see that Saïd was developing an erection. *You are a complicated boy*, Couré thought. *Bothered by strange ghosts perhaps*. Saïd hadn't eaten his *kufta* and the food was cold by now, but it tasted better cold, he told Couré, sitting up in the hot, still room, in the dark. He arranged the dish as best he could on his towel in his bothered lap and he ate his dinner.

"How are you going to work tomorrow?" he asked Couré.

"No problem. I can drive," Couré said.

"You're a liar. Eat some of this food."

Couré shared the only spoon in the room and they finished the *kufta* ball. It was painful for his rib when he sat on the bed so he stood beside Saïd and ate only a little food from the dish.

"Come home early again tomorrow for prayers," Saïd told him. "Don't work so late as you've been working."

### *Stairwell, Hassan Seghir Apartments*

"It's a good sign," Rashad told Couré, "to have Saïd up on his feet and doing prayers. He's been wasting his life, I tell you, all along. He stays out until dawn with his friends, drinking alcohol, smoking pot, I don't know what makes him behave the way he does. He's wasting his life, I tell you. What is he doing, jumping off a roof? How do I explain that to his mother? She is trusting me to watch out for him. I haven't told her yet about his broken leg, that's between the two of them. When is he going to tell her? I don't know what to think about him. He doesn't treat his mother right, I know this much, if you don't have your mother's blessing in this world, then you have nothing. You have no chance."

"I'm not making as much money as I was," Couré told him. "Taking care of Saïd, coming home for prayers. I have to pay the police not to beat me."

"You make as much money as any taxi driver," Rashad said.

"Yes, I do. I'm sorry."

When Couré washed Saïd in the dark before he went to sleep, he could feel Saïd developing another erection.

"Enough of this," Couré told him. "You need to wash yourself."

Still, Saïd was happy to have Couré there, a witness to his uncertain desires, which he could not reveal to many others.

"Can you deliver a shirt to a friend of mine?" he asked. He was sitting up in bed eating a dish of *kufta* in the dark. He pointed to a package on the nightstand, wrapped in heavy brown paper and taped shut with wide strips of packing tape. Couré walked over to the package and lifted it.

"Tonight?"

"Here's the address." He handed Couré a piece of paper.

Down in the taxi, Couré stopped to consider the package. He tore it open and pulled the shirt free of the paper. It was an old shirt, worn through at the elbows. He found a plastic bag inside—filled with marijuana. On fire with anger, he hurried back to the apartment building with

the shirt and the marijuana and he climbed the stairs to confront Saïd in his dark bedroom. His broken rib caught sharply with each step, adding to his anger.

“This could get me arrested and beaten!” he yelled at Saïd. “Locked away forever! What is the matter with you? Do you think about what you’re doing to other people?” He continued yelling. He was angry at something more than the package, Saïd could see it in his eyes. Saïd was afraid of what Couré might say to Rashad. However, Rashad was forced to defend his cousin against Couré’s attacks—to choose family over a stranger.

“You will have to leave,” he told Couré. “Please move out tonight.”

“No problem. He’s crazy, that one.”

“Move out!”

“No problem. That one is crazy.”

“You’re both crazy! Get out of here!”

“What does he think he’s doing to me?”

“Nothing has happened. Go on now.”

It took Couré only a few minutes to pack his bag in the front room. Rashad was in Saïd’s room, talking quietly to him in Arabic. Couré called to them through the door: “I’m leaving now, thank you!” He didn’t wait for a response.

Rashad caught up to him in the stairwell between floors. “Hey!” He held his hand in the air, coming after Couré. He had a small roll of money in his hand. It felt like a drug sale, or a bribe, about to be paid. Couré refused the money.

“For your flight home,” Rashad told him. “Take it.”

It was the last of the money he needed to reach home. The last 500 dirham. Couré worried about the curse on money being given as a gift. He took the roll of bills and counted them in a stack, sitting down on the stairs to do it. “Thank you very much for this,” he told Rashad. He was careful not to put the money in his pocket, where it would touch his other money.

“It’s from Saïd. Not a gift from me. It’s between you and him,” Rashad said. He turned then and climbed back up to the fifth floor landing and out of the stairwell, leaving Couré to sit alone with his money and his thoughts.

A floor below him, a young boy entered onto the landing while Couré still sat considering how to get to the airport without spending any of his money. The boy called out in the empty space to hear his own voice echoing off the walls. “Hoo-hoo!” His voice rose to Couré and fell again. “Hoo-ha!” Couré smiled. He was very tired and pained by his broken rib, but happy there were still young boys running loose in the world.

The boy’s mother found her son there a short time later and scolded him sharply in Arabic for wandering off. Not seeing Couré, she pulled him back quickly out of the stairwell and into her arms.