

## THE COLLECTOR

Henry Naylor

ZOYA: Under Saddam, there was one popular music station - controlled by his son, Uday: 'The Voice of Youth.'  
Played our leading boy band - Unknown to No One - on loop.  
Their biggest hit? A song honouring Saddam's birthday, which was played twice an hour.  
'Get up, get up, let me hear you say, To the Father of the People: Happy Birthday.'  
Or some such thing.  
Crazy.  
Would be like NSYNC singing George Dubya their compliments of the season.  
Just occasionally, 'The Voice' played Boyzone.  
But as war loomed, even they got banned. In Iraq, even Ronan Keating was dangerous and edgy. So, you can imagine: Western music was all underground, performed in deserted garages, sweaty backrooms...That was I how I first saw Nassir. He was singing Eminem covers in a defunct warehouse.  
Shaved head, telling everybody he was Slim Shady, the Real Slim Shady.  
Was subversive.  
Rebellious.  
Very rebellious; it was dangerous to play Western music in the weeks before the war. Showed a 'troubling affinity' with the enemy.  
So we, Nassir and his crowd, were risking a lot for his art...  
But it was worth it.  
For me.  
I fell in love with him at first sight.  
He was selling CDs after his gig. I had to have one. If only to be able to talk to him.  
'You're risking a lot. Aren't you worried about the Mukhabarat?' I asked him.  
'The secret police? They'd put you in prison for owning a Westlife CD.'  
'Maybe they don't get everything wrong.'  
He laughed, a warm smile. 'You love music? Proper music?'  
'I'm a collector. Eminem, Tupac.'  
'Heard any Ludacris?'  
And he gave me a Ludacris CD. Most people fall in love to 'love songs'. But not us. 'Our song' was 'Pimpin' All Over the World'. Didn't take us long to start talking of marriage.  
But my father, he was opposed.  
'He is a musician. Musicians never have money.'  
And annoyingly, he was right. Nassir spent all his money on CDs. We always used to joke, that if you gave him a dollar, he'd swap it for Fiddy Cents.  
'I won't let my eldest daughter live in poverty.'  
Nassir of course, tried to laugh it off.  
'What do we do?' I said.

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'There's only one thing we can do. In the words of Fiddy, we got to get rich. Or die trying.'