

But Paula hadn't gone to the funeral. She didn't know where the grave was.

She repeated the story I'd heard from her before, the same details in the same order:

That after receiving the phone call she had gone to Astra Square in Dokki, to the apartment there, bounding up the stairs to the second floor.

That it had been true what she'd been told: they had broken down the bedroom door searching for her.

That she had seen her stretched out on the bed, beautiful, as though peacefully asleep, the blanket laid over her smooth and neat.

'She'd made up her mind and there was no going back, you see. Such determination! She wasn't playing around.'

Then Paula had lost her mind, swearing at the sleeping woman and beating her hands against the walls. She had left the apartment. And hadn't gone to the funeral.

At eight in the morning, 19 February 2015, I commended myself to God and caught a taxi to Basateen. All I had to go on was an address that had run in *al-Ahram* back in January 1967: *In memory of the late Enayat al-Zayyat, with hearts full of patience and faith, the family is holding a service in her memory which shall not be forgotten, at the tomb of the late Rashid Pasha in al-Afifi.*

Something about these lines itched at me. Demanded I edit them. Say,

... the family will hold a memorial service today for she who shall not be forgotten, at the tomb of the late Rashid Pasha, al-Afifi.

Finding this little paragraph among the death notices, I had been sure that there must be more stories. Among the memories of those still living, say, or in books, or on the shelves of public archives. That all I needed to do was be patient. But now, years after I'd first chanced across this clipping, reverently preserving it as though it were Enayat's identity card, and following the series of telephone conversations with Paula the previous autumn, I still had no idea who Rashid Pasha was, nor anything about his relationship to Enayat. I didn't even know his first name.

Was he from an Egyptian family, or Turkish? Was he Circassian? Nothing.

One of those nineteenth-century pashas, was my guess: men who strutted about with their entourages, sauntering through the palaces and vast estates granted them during the reign of Mohammed Ali, and whose legacies were the mausoleums which bear their names.

I found four men from the period that might fit the bill:

The first was a Turkish diplomat by the name of Mustafa Rashid Pasha, born in Istanbul and buried there in 1858. Jurji Zaidan dedicates a chapter to him in *Lives of the Great Men of the Orient in the Nineteenth Century*.



Notice in the deaths column of *al-Ahram*, January 1967

Second was Rashid Pasha al-Kouzlaki, originally from Kyrgyzstan, who was appointed wali of Baghdad by the Ottoman Sultan in 1853 after leading a military campaign to crush a Kurdish rebellion in northern Mesopotamia, only to be buried in Baghdad just four years later, in the al-Khayzuran cemetery behind the dome of Abu Hanifa al-Numan's mausoleum. It was just possible that one of his sons was buried in al-Afifi.

The third Rashid Pasha had an interesting story. A Circassian who spoke Arabic with an accent, he is mentioned in Ilyas al-Ayoubi's history of Khedive Ismail's military expedition against the Ethiopian Empire. Rashid Pasha went south on the steamship *Dakahlia* with the other commanders, reaching Massawa on 14 December 1875. Al-Ayoubi gives a description of an on-board Babel: the commander-in-chief of the campaign, Ratib Pasha, was Turkish; Maj. Gen. William Wing Loring, his chief of staff, was American; the rest of the officers were a mix of Turks, Circassians, Americans, Austrians and Germans, along with one Italian convert to Islam and a Sudanese.

Al-Ayoubi claims that although they had little combat experience themselves, the Turks and Circassians, Ratib Pasha and Rashid Pasha among them, conspired to withhold their cooperation from Loring and frustrate his plans. The resulting confusion led to the overwhelming victory of Ethiopian forces at the Egyptian-held fort at Gura on 7 March 1876. Some 3,273 Egyptians were killed and 1,416 were wounded, with just 530 escaping the battle unscathed.

Rashid Pasha was killed in the fighting. According to al-Ayoubi, as he lay in his own blood, Ethiopian soldiers stripped his body of its finery, dividing the haul among themselves and castrating him, before moving off to pursue the rout – meaning that this Rashid was buried, if he was buried at all, in Ethiopia.

*The dead were buried in the wadi and the stream beds, writes al-Ayoubi. There were almost two thousand of them, and they were not interred properly, for the rains soon washed the topsoil from their corpses and the wild beasts fed on their flesh.*

Reading this, I was secretly hoping that this improbable Rashid would not turn out to be Enayat's.

The final Rashid Pasha came from a family with close ties to Mohammed Ali. His name first enters the record in the 1850s, on a list of officials responsible for digging canals, draining marshland, and reclaiming desert land for agriculture. By 1868 he was governor of Cairo. He was among the founders of the Egyptian Geographic Society in 1875, and a year later he joined what was then called the Privy Council, where he headed the precursor of the Ministry of Finance. From January 1878 to April 1879, he was Speaker of the final parliamentary sessions to be held in the reign of Khedive Ismail.

There is almost no information about his origins or life outside of these facts, though in 1868 we find him registered as a member of the Society of Knowledge, which places him, in the historian al-Rafai's words, *among the best classes in society.*

To take the tone of a policier: it looked like this was the Rashid Pasha I wanted. If he turned out to be the owner of the tomb where Enayat lay, I would have to return to his story, but first I needed to see the tomb for myself.

The driver took Salah Salem Street as far as Sayyida Aisha Square, where he turned right, dropping me off a few minutes later at a narrow opening in a wall that ran parallel to the road.

'Ask here,' he said. 'There's a thousand can show you the way.'

I stepped through the opening onto a ruler-straight street. To my right there was a high wall broken by sections of black

corrugated iron, and to my left the entrances to the tombs, each dressed in a fresh coat of yellow. I saw a little girl trotting towards me. She wore a violet robe flounced in tiers, loaves slumped across the lattice of palm fronds that she balanced on her head. The sight was so compelling that I longed to take a picture and wished I had a tourist's audacity.

The girl passed me, then the scrape of her sandals stopped abruptly and I looked round to find her standing and staring. Our eyes met. Did she know where al-Afifi was? 'Man or street?' She was older than I'd thought. I took a couple of steps towards her and asked the way to the nearest bakery. She described it precisely.

It wasn't as crowded there as I had anticipated and I sensed people watching me. A woman asked what I was after, and as we were trying to figure out whether al-Afifi was a street or an alley, a gentleman seated on the ground, sunning himself and smoking, remarked: 'She'll be one of those newspaper people, come to take her photos and fuck off.'

Politely, as though I hadn't heard, I asked him if he knew where I might find the tomb of Rashid Pasha in al-Afifi. 'There are no Afifis here, but there's Abou Aouf's court. I'll take you if you want.'

Better I find my own way, I thought, but I made a mental note to refer to a court not a tomb the next time I asked for directions. If I didn't find Enayat today, she would send me a sign when she was ready.

I wandered aimlessly, peering through the entrances to the courts and up at the family names over their lintels. I didn't mean to spy, but every step I took delivered me countless scenes from their interiors. I was in a strange mood. Not frustrated exactly, because Enayat had taught me over the years that nothing about

her would ever come easily. Nor did the traduced beauty of these tombs inspire any sense of sorrow in me or moral judgement on the living occupants who disturbed the rest of the dead. I couldn't remember which of my friends had once described his mood as 'pins and needles', but it fitted perfectly.

Around me, the living were sleeping and waking, eating and bickering and breeding. It was somehow ugly to witness, painful even, a scene better not seen at all, yet at the same time, it offered powerful evidence of a will to live, of their resolve. Passing by the incised names – bedrooms, kitchens and washing tubs all open and spilling onto the street, the electric cables strung tight across Kufic calligraphy (*And every soul shall taste death*) – my initial shock shaded into familiarity. Cactuses next to dried flowers next to mounds of rubbish, the smell of piss and fried garlic. Barefoot children scamp-ering, one in an Adidas T-shirt. A gas range set on a grave. A washing line slung from tree trunk to marble headstone. Mayada al-Hennawy singing 'I adore you' . . . and, despite the chill, beneath a tree that fronted the green of a finely worked iron gate, a knot of men all smoking in their underwear, white shorts and vests and nothing else besides, as though lounging by an invisible seashore.

As I went, my mind began to wander with me. A memory of the last time I'd been to the cemetery in Basateen. It was back in 1995, not a funeral but a wedding, whose I don't know, but the Sufi praise-singer Sheikh Yassin al-Tohamy had performed. That night it had seemed the most beautiful place in the world. A summer breeze, the distant lights from the top of Mokattam's cliff-face, strangers holding out hands that held fat joints, and the rasp of al-Tohamy's voice: 'What good be there in love if it should spare the heart?' I had floated motionless for hours, that extraordinary sensation of being cut off from

past and present. Not of going away, exactly, not of travelling, but rather that you're flying: a flight which ends with the end of the night.

The day after my walkabout, I had a taxi drop me off on Sixteen Street. I passed the shoppers and the sellers, the pavements and the walls of the courts covered with goods and every conceivable kind of scrap and appliance: VCRs and washing machines and gas bottles, window frames and bedsteads in wood and iron, aluminium cabinets and broken chairs and car tyres, empty bottles that once held quality whiskey and vodka. A market for the waste disgorged from the city's guts.

I turned off one side street into another, then another, and I began to hear my own footsteps. There was no one around me, like I'd wandered into the outskirts of the City of the Dead.

I came to a great tomb towering like a castle, barred against invaders by the huge locks hanging from its gate. Through the railings I could make out cactuses and well-tended flowers and I imagined the lucky residents stepping out from their burial chamber bedrooms at dawn to gather in the courtyard and talk.

Squabbling children brought me out of my reverie. An Adidas T-shirt again. Surely not the same child I'd seen the day before. 'Adidas among the tombs . . .' came the thought, and all of a sudden I was remembering a relative of mine, a classmate back in primary school who'd become a construction worker in Cairo. One of the most intensely pious people I've ever known: gentle with his family, prays the five prayers daily, and goes into seclusion for the last ten days of Ramadan. He has never harmed a soul and to me is the model of what a true Muslim should be. I once saw him, dapper and handsome, wearing a T-shirt which bore, in English, the slogan of an abortion rights campaign from

overseas: *The right to choose – It's my body!* God knows where he'd found it. I'd been unsure. Should I tell him? Did he have the right to know? A moral quandary which I settled inside a minute: I didn't say a word. And now I felt guilty.

My journey ended at a makeshift cafeteria outside the entrance to a tomb, seated on one of the red plastic chairs that were clustered beneath an ancient tree. I felt at peace, as though this little stand of chairs had always been my destination, and ordered a tea, then changed my mind, and asked for a bottle of water.

'We don't have bottled water, miss. Will you take a Pepsi?'

'Please.'

A man seated beside me smiled my way, and once we had exchanged greetings, I asked him if he knew the area.

'Well I've lived here for forty years.'

We chatted for a while and, emboldened, I lit myself a cigarette and another for him.

He wanted to know why I'd come and I told him that I was looking for a street called al-Afifi. An alley, perhaps.

'There's no al-Afifi here,' he said. 'It must be in Basateen or the Mamluk cemetery.'

'This isn't Basateen?'

I must have come further than I'd thought.

I once read that this stretch of desert was where the Mamluks held their military parades, their rites and races, feats of arms and religious feasts. They chose to be buried here because it is so dry. Amid its miles of walls and doors, the ramrod avenues and evergreen trees, outsiders quickly lose their way. Historical periods tangle, interleaving their walis and pashas, mosques and palaces, the shrines of their saints. There are no signs to mark boundaries in the City of the Dead.



I intended to resume my search the next day, convinced I must be very close to finding Enayat's grave. But this was naïve. I would finally locate Rashid Pasha's tomb in the summer of 2018, only to learn that this tomb was not the end of the trail. Enayat's resolve, it seemed, was as strong as Paula had claimed, as though she were watching over every moment of my journey and wanted me to reach her by some other road.