

HASSAN: A CASE STUDY

Jenni Fortune, a London Tube driver of the Circle Line, and the student Hassan al-Rashid are two of seven characters portrayed in Sebastian Faulks' novel on modern urban life.

In the rear carriage of Jenni Fortune's Circle Line train Hassan al-Rashid sat staring straight ahead. Normally, without a book to read, he would move his head up and down so that the reflection of his face in the convex window opposite would develop panda eyes, elongate¹ like an image in a
 5 fairground mirror and the pop. But this was not the day for such frivolity: he was on his way to buy the constituents of a bomb.

Two white-skinned teenagers opposite him were kissing, sticking their tongues out and laughing when they touched. Although they were absorbed by one another, there was a challenge in their public intimacy. A
 10 black-skinned youth with feet in padded white trainers the size of small boats was leaning forward. From his earplugs came a hissing, thumping noise. Hassan could sense that this youth's eyes, though looking down, were ready to lock on to those of anyone who caught them, so he was careful to keep his own gaze somewhere to the left of the hunched
 15 shoulders.

To Hassan's left, in the standing area by the central doors, were Japanese and European tourists. It was Sunday, Hassan thought; most of these people should have been in church, but these days Christians viewed cathedrals as monuments or works of art to be admired for their
 20 architecture and paintings, not as the place where they could worship God. Their final loss of faith had happened in the last ten years or so, yet in the *kafir*² world it had passed with little comment. How very strange they were, he thought, these people, that they had let eternal life slip through her hands.

25 Where Hassan had grown up in Glasgow, the Christians (he hadn't by then adopted the word '*kafir*') blasphemed and drank and fornicated, though most of them, he knew, still more or less believed. They were unfaithful in hotel rooms, but they got married in churches. They went on Christmas Day of when they buried a friend; they took their babies to be
 30 named there, and when they were dying they still sent out for a priest. Now you could read statistics in newspapers surveys which confirmed what anyone could see: that they'd given up God. And barely a *kafir* seemed to have noticed.

35 The conviction that the rest of the world lived in a dream was one that
 grew in Hassan each day. With the exception of those in his group and
 some of the more committed members of the Pudding Mill Lane Mosque,
 he viewed everyone he knew as deluded³. It was perplexing to him that
 people paid so little heed⁴ to their own salvation; he was puzzled by it in
 the way he might have been by the sight of a mother feeding whisky to a
 40 baby. There might have been some short-term benefit in the respite⁵ from
 crying, but it wasn't something that a reasonable person would do. Yet
 the truth of life, and of life after death, was not exactly hidden.
 Hassan licked his lips and swallowed. Although the individual parts that
 made up the bombs were easy enough to find and buy, he was aware that
 45 the grimmest corner shops these days had CCTV⁶ cameras. The purchase of
 even three or four bottles of soft drinks at once might be remembered by
 the man at the counter, then recalled from the digital memory of the
 camera. He was therefore spreading his custom⁷ right across London, one
 bottle at a time. [...]

50 At Gloucester Road, Hassan stepped off the train and went up into the
 street. Batteries and disposable cameras were easy and cheap enough to
 find; the only thing he was having trouble with was hydrogen peroxide.
 But he had a plan for that.

Source:

Sebastian Faulks: A Week in December, London 2010, S. 20-21.

Annotations

1 elongate – verlängern

2 kafir – an offensive word used by Muslims to refer to a person that is not a Muslim

3 deluded – misled

4 pay heed – pay attention to

5 respite – hier: (temporary) relief

6 CCTV cameras – Video-Überwachungssystem

7 spreading his custom – hier: an unterschiedlichen Standorten einkaufen