

## Ghosts of Desert Shield

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The first time I saw one I felt like I was looking at one of those Minnesota frogs that has only one leg and one eye due to environmental poisoning - it was unsettling. Seeing the black ghost made me wonder what was wrong with its environment, what was wrong with the country and culture in which it lived. I wondered if we should really be helping this country and its government if they allowed, even mandated this sort of thing....

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It was August 1990 and Iraq had invaded Kuwait. Saudi Arabia was nervous about Iraq's bold move. To help them and protect our access to oil, we went to war.

"L.T.<sup>1</sup>," said SFC Jones to 2LT Nelson when they were safely off the highway and onto the desert road that lead to their assembly area. "That dude pulled a huge wad of \$100 bills out of his pocket."

"Yeah?" said Nelson, unconcerned.

"He wanted to buy you from me."

That got her attention, "What?"

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<sup>1</sup> L.T. is short for Lieutenant.

“Yeah, he spoke pretty good English and he held out the money, it was a huge wad that he could barely fit his hand around, and he asked me, ‘how much for me to keep her?’ and he was pointing at you.”

2LT Nelson’s mouth opened and she looked at Jones, not fully understanding or believing what Jones was telling her.

“I told him you weren’t mine to sell. Then he asked me, ‘if not yours, who owns her? I like the hair and the eyes. They are very good.’ I told him you were the property of the U.S. Army. I said it as a kind of joke, since the Army owns all of us. Then, that rich asshole said, ‘Ah, I see. That makes sense. So you can all share her.’ I couldn’t believe he said that! Things are definitely different here. Then the Saudi man clapped me on the back and said, ‘I envy you’ and got into the back seat of his car. He had a driver. Of course he had a driver!”

“Gross,” said 1LT Nelson. She didn’t cuss - she was an officer and a lady - so this was an expletive for her. She was quiet for a second and then said, “So he thought I was a hooker....” She said this as though she was trying to make sense of what Jones was telling her.

“Maybe. I think he thought of you more as a rare coin or a shiny Porsche; something he wanted for his collection.” He paused and thought. “Sorry that happened to you, Ma’am. Maybe we shouldn’t go outside the wire anymore.”

“Maybe not,” Nelson said. She paused for a second, then said, “I thought our government told them we were men.”

“I don’t think this guy got the memo.”

Nelson and Jones laughed uncomfortably and then fell silent.

Excerpt – Full text pending publication