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LEARNING TO LIVE IN POLICE STATES

Rafle—Tunisian slang for "police world"
BOP—*Brigade Ordre Publique*

It's a *rafle* out there now, Tunisians say, a world of BOP. Cops lounge on the corners, with their machine guns slung hip level, the way that rock stars wear guitars. Bored gangs of them smoke in parked black vans, outside the homes of government ministers, outside the presidential palace, and the college campus. Nights, they play *controle routier,* half-block the roads with their accordion gates, the kind a mother sets across a door to keep a child home.

Riding the Harley behind Taoufik, I can sense the shift in their stance, know they'll wave the flashlight, stop us. How solicitous they appear, nagging Taoufik about my lack of safety, my sidesaddle perch in the cold winter dark, my absent helmet. How graciously he fields their comments, as if he hadn't lived through bread riots, the kids beside him throwing stones, police with the order to shoot to kill. As if he hadn't told me about the boy beside him, dying, his brains pouring from his mouth.