

The  
**OWL**  
and The  
**HAWK**

**An End to Terrorism**

**JOHN ERRETT**

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**The Owl and The Hawk by John Errett**

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FOR  
KATHLEEN  
MY ETERNAL  
COLLABORATOR

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# **1 - ROAD TO KANDAHAR**

## **KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN**

ALAN DAVIS STEADIED the business end of a Soviet SVD Dragunov sniper rifle from a roof ledge overlooking the home of Mohammed Omar al-Fayez. Peering through the crosshairs of his telescopic sight, every detail of al-Fayez's neat and protected garden came into view. The crisp morning breeze from the north, the speed of which he would allow for, reminded him of hunts in the Canadian Rockies. Alan watched without emotion as the target touched his forehead to the prayer rug at the heart of the garden, signaling the completion of his midday prayer.

No, Alan thought. That was a lie. There was emotion, enough for a lifetime. The man he was about to kill was the worst kind of terrorist, and, like all terrorists, he was the ultimate coward. The number of innocent lives he had destroyed was worthy of a hundred death sentences. But the bullet in the chamber of the Dragunov this day was to avenge Dan Millar, Alan's best friend. Mohammed Omar al-Fayez had sent Dan to his death, and Alan was about to return the favor. So, yes, there was emotion, a firestorm of emotion, but Alan had pushed it aside for the moment. Controlling his emotion was an art form he had long ago perfected with the untimely deaths of his mother and father. A man couldn't collapse from adversity and then rise to manage a multibillion dollar empire without such skills.

Alan watched as Al-Fayez came to his feet. The terrorist spent a moment gazing at the nearby mountains looming high above the city of Kandahar, a view he took special pleasure in and one he would never again enjoy. Al-Fayez had chosen the house because it afforded him privacy, and with the walled-in garden, a measure of protection. Privacy and protection but hardly the shield he would shortly need as Alan began the gentle, steady squeeze of the trigger so necessary for accuracy at such distances, in this case, 185 yards exactly. He could barely hear the discharge from the sound-suppressor-equipped rifle, but the recoil assured him the shot was off. More assuring still was the sight of Mohammed Omar al-Fayez's head exploding, sending a spray of blood and brain all over the surrounding garden as his lifeless torso collapsed onto the prayer rug. What could be more fitting, Alan thought. Dying on the very rug where the hypocrisy of his existence had been the strongest, twisting the words of the Qur'an to fit his own malevolent purpose.

Alan broke down the rifle. He didn't rush. When he was done, he came to his feet. As he made his way to the roof ladder, he hoped without much confidence that al-Fayez's last prayers had been for forgiveness.

ALAN'S ESCAPE AND ultimate extraction from Afghanistan had been well planned by his organization. He wore a burqa that covered his athletic frame

from head to foot. He had spent hours practicing a more feminine gait, stooping slightly and bending his knees.

The ladder led to an alley crowded with trash and smelling of garbage. This alley joined and intersected many other alleys, forming an intricate maze of centuries-old stone walls and a hundred different places to bury the rifle parts. He did this without haste, hiding the bar-rel in one overflowing refuse container, the stock in another, and the sight in a burning trash barrel.

The end of the maze led to a small town square ringed by vendors displaying their wares to noontime shoppers, most wearing burqas not unlike Alan's. The glint of the morning sun reflecting off copper cook-ware and the aroma of freshly baked breads confirmed that he was in the designated square. One stall sold bolts of muslin. Another overflowed with salt-fired pottery. A third offered vegetables and fresh fruit.

Alan had studied his escape route for hours using photos and video footage taken by his OWL. The car would be waiting for him in a residential neighborhood two blocks away. Just keep moving, he told him-self. Don't gloat, don't celebrate, and don't deviate from the plan even to check your reflection in the dirty glass of the shop on the corner.

He made his way across the square, squinting through the garment's eye screen. It was not easy. Should have practiced more, he thought. At that exact moment, a small child shot out from behind his mother's billowing tunic and crashed into Alan's legs. The collision was just enough to cause Alan to catch a toe on the hem of his burqa, and this tiny break in his stride caused him to lose his balance and tumble onto the uneven cobblestones, his legs splayed and the burqa up to his waist. A crowd gathered, and two men rushed over. They saw the rip in his jogging pants, and they saw legs that could only belong to a man. A woman gasped. One of the men threw up his hands, and a ripple of confused chatter swept through the crowd.

Alan tried to right himself, but he was too late. The commotion had drawn the interest of two passing policemen. One questioned the onlookers—all of whom had differing versions of the incident—the other questioned Alan.

Alan didn't understand a word the man was saying. His training had included a crash course in Pashto but hardly enough to field the questions of an ever more curious policeman, especially one who was suspicious enough to draw his sidearm.

"I'm an American," Alan protested. "American. I can explain. Believe me."

Alan scrambled to his feet removing the burqa as he did. This was a mistake. The crowd expelled a unified gasp when they saw Alan's face. The second

policeman nervously drew his gun, and the alarm bells in Alan's head told him this was not the time to cause a scene. Dying on the streets of Kandahar was not part of the plan. With any luck, his OWL was close by and would take some sort of action.

When the police took hold of his arm and began leading him away, Alan didn't resist. Instead, he tried explaining again. "I'm an American. I am here to help."

The police responded by pulling Alan's wrists behind his back and securing them in a strange looking pair of handcuffs. They were joined by a third and a fourth policeman, and the group dragged him unceremoniously in the direction of a small, one-story building that looked more like a broken-down schoolhouse than a police station. The minute the door opened, Alan was overwhelmed by the smell of decay and dust. Something about the smell triggered a wave of fear, as if he had walked in on a scene where law and order were whimsical terms without merit.

The sparse array of dilapidated furniture did nothing for Alan's confidence. A metal desk, five folding chairs, an uninviting couch were only slightly less out of place than the hobbled wooden table with the empty coffee pot and a stack of stained cracked cups. The walls were adorned with a single picture of Hamid Karzai. Alan didn't know whether to take this as a good sign or not. He knew then that an immediate rescue was unlikely at best.

In one corner stood a makeshift jail cell constructed of chain link fencing, a vertical steel frame, and a hinged door. One of the police-men fumbled with a massive padlock, and another used a sharp word and the barrel of his gun to shove Alan inside. The six by six cell contained a wobbly wooden stool, a bucket, and nothing else.

Alan stood with his hands on the bars listening to the crowd that followed him to the jail. He watched one of his captors trundle over to the table and raise the receiver from an antiquated wall phone. He dialed a number, mumbled a couple of incomprehensible words, and hung up just as abruptly.

Half an hour later, a bearded man with a purple scar tinseling the side of his face arrived. He walked in wearing khaki-colored pants, a matching shirt, and mid calf boots heavy with dust. He appeared unarmed. The two bearded men shadowing him carried AK-47s and looked as if they belonged in a museum. Alan wasn't laughing.

When the scar-faced man spoke, it was to the policemen, and they responded as if an indisputable order had been given them. As one of them grappled with the padlock, Alan sprang forward and asked, "Do you speak English? My name is Alan Davis. I'm an American. There's been a mistake. Do you speak English, please?"

The question went unanswered.

THEY LED ALAN outside to the street. Parked at the curb was an old, dust-covered Chevrolet sedan that looked as if it were held together by duct tape and blind faith. He was forced into the rear seat next to the man with the scar.

“Where are we going?” he asked.

The man didn’t answer. Instead he produced a strip of black material that he wound tightly around Alan’s head, tying off a makeshift blindfold. When the car peeled away from the curb, Alan had enough foresight to listen to the sound the tires made when the road turned from asphalt to dirt, to anticipate their change of speed, and to count the seconds off in his head.

Twenty minutes, he reckoned when the car came to an abrupt stop. He couldn’t be too far from the center of Kandahar. The door swung open. A new set of hands pulled him roughly from the car, up a single step onto a wood porch, and into another building that smelled of cat urine. His blindfold was removed, revealing a naked, windowless room with a single wooden table, four mismatched chairs, and the dim glow of an incandescent bulb hanging from the ceiling. A hand forced him to sit.

There were six bearded men in the room, each looking at their captive with suspicion, arrogance, and an air of inevitability. The fourth man scared Alan more than anything.

He tried again. “Does anyone speak English?” No answer. “Where have you taken me?” Again no answer. “I am an American friend.”

The man with the scar was also the tallest of this group—surely a coincidence. He stepped forward making no attempt at formality or introduction. He simply said, “Stand. Remove your clothes,” in accented but fluent English.

“Thank heavens someone here speaks English.” The questions flew out of Alan’s mouth. “Who are you? What is this place? Why have I been taken here? I’m an American. My name is Davis. I am a friend.”

“Silence! Your questions will be answered in good time, Mr. Davis. Now please undress and give me whatever papers you carry. We’re anxious to determine why an American, as you claim yourself to be, would be dressed as a woman on the streets of Kandahar. To say it is suspicious would be an understatement. I’m sure you agree.”

“I’m here in Afghanistan representing several American charities. My only motivation in dressing this way was to study the needs of your people without making them feel uncomfortable. My wife is a Muslim. She is very active in

Muslim affairs, and we both feel strongly about the charities we support. Please believe—”

“Be silent,” the man snapped. “Remove your clothes, or we will remove them for you. The choice is yours.”

Alan studied the stoic, unreadable faces of the men staring back at him. Unless he was mistaken, the only thing they were not indifferent to was the man giving the orders, and he realized they would have no qualms about doing exactly what they were told. If it meant killing Alan, they were ready to do it gladly and without the slightest remorse. There was no law that could save him, no sense of humanity to still their hands. Resistance was futile. Dying was not the answer. Living to fight another day was.

Alan stripped off his T-shirt, jogging pants, and underwear. He stood naked before them and realized the only embarrassment was his own.

“And so it appears you are of the masculine persuasion,” said the bearded man. He was being neither facetious nor funny. “Explain your-self. Are you some sort of sexual deviant? Do you prefer the company of men? Are you attracted to children?”

Alan may have been tempted to laugh had the allegations not been so serious. And here in a world where Sharia law ruled, serious and deadly were often the same thing.

“No, of course not,” he said, hoping they couldn’t sense the fear in his voice. “I was wearing the burqa so I wouldn’t stand out as a Westerner. I thought it would enable me to move around Kandahar more freely. That’s all.”

“So you say. We shall see. Your papers please.” The tall man stood erect, his dark brown eyes fixed on the American as he clumsily searched through the pockets of his jogging pants. Alan produced a wallet and a passport and pressed them into his captor’s hand.

The man took a seat beneath the room’s only light. He studied the contents of the passport like a man reading a difficult poem and then scanned the contents of Alan’s wallet.

Alan felt humiliated. He felt like the latest exhibit at the zoo. He resisted the urge to cover himself and kept his arms at his side. It may have been a meaningless gesture, but he did it anyway.

“Your name?” the man asked at last.

“Alan Davis.”



“And your profession?”

“I’m the president of Davis Industries. We’re in the energy business. Our headquarters office is in New York City. I’m not here on business; I’m here on behalf of my wife and the charitable organizations she represents.”

“What is your wife’s name?” The tall man raised his eyebrows, his curiosity obviously piqued.

“Aludra Davis. When we married she adopted my family name, Davis. Her maiden name was Millar. Her mother was Lebanese and her father American. She is known by her nickname, Aly.” Alan said, chastising him-self for using Aly’s Muslim background and knowing he had no choice. “Now please, tell me who are you? You’re not the local authorities, are you?”

The tall man took a deep breath and looked pensively above Alan’s head.

“We are the legal government of Afghanistan. We are the Islamic Republic known to you as the Taliban.” He articulated this last word proudly, knowing the emotional reaction it elicited from most Americans. “And make no mistake about it, Mr. Alan Davis; we are at war with Americans and all other infidels everywhere.”

They took Alan’s clothes and left him with a sirwal, a pair of Alladin-like pantaloons and a dirty mildewed shirt. No telling where they had been or who had worn them. Alan put them on and tried not to think about it. He had far bigger concerns.

The two guards who had been assigned to watch him were ominous looking. The weapons they carried could fire sixty rounds a second in anyone’s hands. They stared at him, but he no longer felt like a zoo specimen. He felt like a man on the verge of panic, and panic was his worst enemy.

He huddled in a corner on the cold floor, took one deep breath after another, and began to think. His most pressing concern was really his only concern: how in hell was he going to get out of here alive?

Alan knew the nearest sure place of safety was the coalition military base outside of Kandahar. His instincts told him he was now northwest of there by twenty minutes in a car that probably topped out at 40 mph. A rough calculation told him safety lay 13 miles to the southeast. He couldn’t trust the police, and he had no weapon. The Taliban were apparently everywhere and well armed. He couldn’t bribe the guards since they didn’t understand a word of English. And even if they did, he didn’t have a dime to his name. As a last resort, he could always arrange a substantial ransom, but ransom was no guarantee of freedom. These were not honorable men he was dealing with; this was the Taliban. The

bearded man had just said it. "We are at war."

It was not a pretty picture, and Alan knew it.

He also realized that the assassination of Mohammed Omar al-Fayez would soon be front-page news, and he could not afford to be associated with that even remotely. It wasn't likely the rifle would ever be found, and even if it was, there was no way the authorities could link a Russian-made Dragunov to him. How could they? If the Russians had left the Afghan people one thing when they retreated from their ill-fated occupation, it was stockpiles of weapons that numbered in the tens of thousands.

Alan flinched when the hut door suddenly flew open. The man who hurried in thrust a bowl of some pasty substance in his face. It had the consistency and color of hummus, but not the taste. The stale crust of bread was hardly more edible, but when Alan saw the guards eating the same fare, he forced himself to swallow every bite. He was offered a drink from a water skin, but the putrid taste was even fouler than the food.

The English-speaking man returned just after noon, if Alan judged the time correctly. He took a seat, his companions did not.

The tall man's first words were, "How do you intend to repay Allah for stealing the identity of another, solely for the purpose of deception?"

"I stole nothing, certainly not anyone's identity," Alan said, knowing how severely Sharia law dealt with theft of any kind. "I am who I say I am. Alan Davis. Allow me to contact my wife. She can offer you proof of the Islamic charities we support, and she can also verify that I am here in Afghanistan for just such a purpose."

"You have no right to ask anything of us," the man said, his voice rising in anger. He jumped up, drew his shoulders back, and kicked aside the chair. "You have stolen the identity of an Afghan woman by wearing the burqa. For that you must be punished according to the holy law of Sharia."

"I'll gladly pay whatever fine you assess me, but I must get back to my family in America."

"You do not understand, Mr. Davis, if that is your true name. The Sharia cannot be bought with gold. It may only be satisfied by the punishments prescribed by its laws."

Alan felt a hole open in the pit of his stomach. "What do you mean?" he asked, fearing the worst.

"The penalty prescribed for theft is the loss of a hand, severed as a reminder of

the thief 's crime. Of course, it is always the hand a man uses to eat, not the hand he uses in wiping himself," offered the tall man, his eyes glowing with pleasure.

"You can't do that to me. I am not Muslim. I purchased the burqa and paid for it in full," protested Alan.

The man stood over him. "I will repeat myself only once. You have broken our law. And you will be punished for it. There is no recourse."

Alan spoke with growing desperation. "But to cut off a man's hand when the man knew nothing of your law is unthinkable in any civilized society," he argued.

"And for that reason, Allah has chosen to be merciful. Your punishment has been reduced. We will remove the little finger from your right hand. A reminder of your sin but also a reminder of what will happen if you are again caught stealing."

He spoke a sharp word in Pashto, and his companions converged on Alan. They dragged him toward the table, forced him into a chair, and placed his right hand firmly on the tabletop. The long, crescent shaped knife that materialized from inside the tunic of the man standing at the head of the table made Alan's heart jump into his throat.

"I urge you not to struggle lest we sever more than one finger." said the leader in a matter of fact tone. "Your punishment is inevitable."

The amputation was swift and surprisingly painless. Alan stared down at the blood pooling around his severed finger and tasted the bile in his throat. Not until the pain set in did his brain completely register the terrible cruelty of the act that had just occurred.

The men released their hold on him, and all Alan could do was cradle his bleeding hand and stave off the urge to scream. "You devils," he muttered.

One of the men tossed him a rag that reeked of some kind of anti-septic solution and motioned for him to wrap his hand with it.

TWO AGONIZING DAYS passed. The bleeding eased, and a scab began to form, but the excruciating pain throbbed without respite. He was given a coarse blanket to insulate himself from the cold floor, but sleep was nearly impossible. Every day the food was the same, and everyday the water seemed even more foul. He had developed a severe case of diarrhea from the water forcing his guards to escort him outside for relief.

On the third day, the tall English speaker returned with a leather satchel filled with papers. He turned to Alan as if he were merely one of the details facing him

that day.

“We have sent messages to our friends in America inquiring about you and the activities of your wife. When we receive their replies, we will be able to discuss more specifically the reasons for your presence in Kandahar and your inappropriate use of the traditional burqa.”

He sought a chair and continued. “There is, however, another matter we must discuss. One of our leaders has been shot to death in Kandahar. The timing of his death coincides exactly with your presence in the city. We don’t believe in coincidence, Mr. Davis, so please tell us of your part in the killing of Mohammed Omar al-Fayez.”

“Who?” asked Alan as convincingly as a man who was committed to lying could possibly be. “I never heard of such a person. And I certainly know nothing about his death.”

“Please do not lie to us. We are not stupid people. There are many ways of loosening your tongue and restoring your memory,” said the leader, his voice calm and menacing. “The loss of your finger is nothing compared to what will happen to you if you are not truthful with us.”

“I never heard of this man. I did not kill anyone. I came to Afghanistan for but one reason, and that is to offer aid to the people,” said Alan firmly.

The scarred man shrugged as if he had expected no other answer. Then he said something in Pashto, and two of his men grabbed Alan by the arms and sat him forcibly in a chair. A third man tied Alan’s arms and legs to the chair, and a leather garrote was wound around his neck. Electrical wires, bared at the ends, were connected to a nearby outlet. The man holding the wires in front of Alan’s face wore gloves. When he brought the ends together, the frightening shower of sparks testified to the awful power within those wires.

“Must we go forward with this or are you ready to tell us what we want to know?” the bearded leader said calmly.

“I can’t tell you what I don’t know,” shouted Alan in protest.

The leader motioned to the two men. The wires were placed against Alan’s ears. There was no step down transformer converting the current to 110 volts. The jolt of the full 220 volts of electricity caused his body to cringe and stiffen. Every nerve and every muscle turned to fire, and he cried out in pain. Time after time they repeated the exercise, but Alan’s answer never changed. He didn’t remember losing consciousness, but the torture seemed to go on even in his dreams.

DAYS PASSED. TO Alan it might have been weeks. He had lost all track of time. Eventually, the torture stopped. His eyes cleared, and his memory returned. He remembered where he was and what had been done to him. Just then the scar-faced leader burst through the door.

“Mr. Davis,” he said without preamble. “We have word from our friends in America. They tell us you are a wealthy man. We are undecided as to your fate. The debate is whether to negotiate a ransom or to simply kill you. Before it is decided, however, we want you to witness justice as prescribed by the Sharia.”

## **THE HINDU KUSH FOOTHILLS, AFGHANISTAN**

ALAN WAS TAKEN outside, blindfolded, and placed in a van. After a drive of an hour or so over unpaved and winding terrain, the van stopped. He was dragged from the car, and the blindfold was removed. He found himself in a small mountain village with cliffs of granite on one side and a valley framing a trickling stream on the other. The village square was alive with men, women, and children and filled with the fever pitch of some momentous occasion. At the heart of the square stood a stage crudely built of wood and stone, and Alan could only imagine its purpose.

“Now, Mr. Davis, you will witness the law of the Sharia as it is applied to infidels,” said the English-speaking leader.

The Afghan man being led to the center of the group was shackled around his hands and feet. He was shaking with fear and crying.

“This infidel is accused of giving information to the enemy. His ordeal under the law shall commence at once.”

The “trial” was simple. It involved neither the presentation of evidence nor any representation for the defendant. The question of guilt or innocence seemed not to be in question. The only thing that mattered was the interpretation of the Sharia and the subsequent determination of the appropriate punishment.

Neither the verdict of guilty nor the punishment of beheading surprised anyone present. The guilty man was made to kneel. A group of 12- and 13-year-old boys were selected to come forward and witness the punishment in close proximity. The Taliban soldier orchestrating the execution walked up to the boys, smiled as if Christmas had just come to one of the boys, and handed him a long, sharp butcher’s knife.

In Pashto he said,

“You have been chosen to deliver the punishment to this infidel. You have been instructed. In the name of the Prophet, peace be upon him, proceed.”

The boy took the blade. He approached the quivering man, ignoring his pleas for mercy and the fear contorting his face.

“The boy is his nephew,” the bearded man said to Alan matter-of-factly.

“His nephew?” Alan could hardly believe his ears.

“Yes. His brother’s son.”

The man screamed the boy’s name, begging him in the name of Allah not to proceed. The Taliban leader wound the customary blindfold around the man’s eyes and stepped back. The condemned man trembled uncontrollably. He soiled his pants.

The boy took no notice. He stepped up behind his uncle, grabbed a fistful of hair, and lifted his head. The boy placed the cutting edge of the knife against the man’s throat and shouted, “Allah Akbar” (GOD IS GREAT), and sliced through the soft tissue until he reached the spinal column. Then he twisted the head and hacked through the bone until the head was completely severed. As instructed, the boy held the bloody head aloft and basked in the acclaim of his fellow villagers.

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## 2 - TRAGEDY

### **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

HOW HAD HE gotten there? Would he ever have considered such drastic measures had he seen firsthand what the enemy was capable of?

Five months ago, Alan Davis was not a man who questioned himself or his decisions. He had that luxury. Unbridled financial success had that effect. Five months ago, Alan was sitting on his ergonomic executive chair in his birch-paneled office high atop the Davis International building with few worries. He was surveying the city of New York...its bustling avenues and streets, its throngs of commuters scurrying to work, its vibrancy and its beauty. The island of Manhattan, bounded by the magnificent Hudson River to the west with its view of the Jersey palisades and otherwise surrounded by the sparkling tidal finger inlets of the Atlantic, always gave him a feeling of security he felt in no other city. The Empire State Building caught his glance as he imagined an overgrown gorilla in a dogfight when a knock on the door brought him back to reality.

“It’s open,” he called, but by then Dan Millar, executive vice president, confidante

extraordinaire, and best friend, was already inside, his smile as contagious as his voice was energetic.

“Morning, boss. That’s one gorgeous view,” he declared. “Not that I’m jealous or anything as superficial as that.”

“You’re just in time,” Alan said. “If that coffee was any fresher, we’d be picking the beans ourselves.”

“A great view and fresh coffee. No wonder your name’s on the building.” Dan poured two steaming cups: black for Alan, and two

## TRAGEDY

creams and two teaspoons of sugar for him. He took a seat in his usual chair. They drank in silence for a moment, and then Dan said, “You hear the weather report? This should be one of the best weekends of skiing we’ve ever had, my friend.”

For the moment, Alan felt the powder snow beneath his imagined skis as he slalomed downhill to the door of the Davis’ eight-room condo and the waiting whiskey sours.

Dan, his wife Betty, Aly, and Alan had taken over a dozen ski trips together over the years, and Aspen was one of their favorite haunts. “They’ve got a twenty-foot base and enough fresh powder to make a grown man cry.”

“With those new skis you’ve been raving about, I may need a handicap in our annual downhill extravaganza,” Alan mused.

“You’ll get a handicap when hippos can fly,” replied Dan with a laugh. “By the way, how is Aly? Her sore throat any better?”

“Your cousin’s sore throat is a thing of the past. She wanted me to tell you that she’s chomping at the bit to get on the slopes and make us both look bad,” Alan replied.

“Betty’s raring to go, too. She says I’m a much better lover at ten thousand feet, and who am I to argue?” Dan said.

“Just don’t overdo, lover boy. I need you and your A-game around here,” Alan chided. “There’s just too much to do and too many decisions to make.”

“That’s the price you have to pay when you own every share of stock in a multi-billion dollar company. I don’t feel sorry for you in the least.” Dan finished his coffee and jumped to his feet. “Don’t forget, I’m the guy that fixed you up with Aly in the first place. And unless I’m mistaken, that sort of makes me a cousin-in-

law.”

“That’s our secret, buddy boy,” said Alan with a good-natured grin. “So just don’t be spreading it around. I’ll never live it down.”

“Yeah, right.” Dan headed for the door. “I’ll be in to see you as soon as I get an update from Riyadh. Then we’re off to Aspen and the best holiday week we’ve had so far.”

## **NEW YORK UNIVERSITY, MANHATTAN**

THE NEWSPAPERS REFERRED to her as Mrs. Alan Davis, wife of the philanthropic energy chief. Friends and family knew her as Aly. Her students at New York University called her Professor Davis. And it was in that role that she had just concluded a lecture on contemporary Muslim values to a class of nearly 200. She stood erect at the podium accentuating her lithe figure, just over five feet, nine inches without shoes.

“Okay then. You’re not going to forget everything over the holidays, are you? I crammed so much into this last week about the roles Muslims are playing in so many current fields of endeavor here in this country and about their achievements that I hesitate to bring up one very pertinent failure—skiing.”

The class roared with laughter. “But I don’t want any of you to feel ashamed. I want you to know that your professor is the only Muslim I know of, male or female, who has successfully competed in the Aspen Cup’s giant slalom.” Whistles of approval, thunderous cheers, and wild applause filled the auditorium. Aly smiled, bowed, and pumped her fist playfully. “And remember, there’s nothing disgraceful in finishing twenty-ninth.”

When the laughter died down this time, she said, “And on that gem, I wish all of you a very happy holiday. Class dismissed.”

## **THE HINDU KUSH, AFGHANISTAN**

SOMEWHERE IN THE rugged foothills near the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan a group of bearded men in Muslim dress were seated around a campfire. They cradled their Kalashnikovs as if their very existence depended upon the rifles and listened to Mohammed Omar al-Fayez as if his words were a mantra guiding their destinies.

“We have many ready to martyr themselves and attain paradise,” he said in a low, guttural voice. “It is only for us to direct them. I have arranged with our brothers in Al Qaeda to attack the infidel on his flight to Riyadh and eliminate Hassim bin Arabi. We must be certain



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he never reaches the land of the Prophet, peace be upon him, or be allowed to preach against us. We have one task, and we must not be swayed from achieving it. Our efforts must focus on driving the Americans from our country, and we must not allow an infidel such as bin Arabi to impede our efforts.”

### **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

ALAN COULD SEE that the call on his direct line was from Dan Millar, and he picked it up after a single ring. “Dan. How do things look in Riyadh?”

“Bad news,” Dan said. The operations in Saudi Arabia were key components in Davis International's Middle East business model, and “bad news” was not a phrase Dan used lightly. “Three men detonated a bomb at the refinery, and the damage is serious. Security killed one of them, and we have the other two in custody. We’re shut down for the moment, and I’ve got to get over there and figure out how long it’s going to be before we’re up and running again. So much for Aspen.”

“We’ll take a rain check until you get back,” Alan assured him.

“I have a feeling I’ll need it,” Dan said.

“When are you leaving?”

“Today. Sally’s got me an early flight on Air France.”

“Air France? No way! What about our own jets?”

“They’re booked. I’m taking the chopper to JFK. I’ll call you when I connect in Paris.”

“I’ll wire our security people in Riyadh and have them meet you at the airport.”

### **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

ALY DAVIS SAT in the comfort of her den and read the last of her students’ essays. It was late. She hadn’t even discussed dinner yet with Henry, the Davis family cook, but when she entered the kitchen, he was standing at the counter trimming a leg of lamb.

“We had to cancel our Aspen trip, Henry, so I was hoping we could cheer Mr. Davis up with one of your special Lebanese dishes,” Aly said to him. “Any ideas?”

“How about shorbit a`adas, leban immo, loubia b`zeit and anweh arabi?”

“Perfect. And quick. He’ll be home in an hour.”

Henry, whose real name was Henras Abbas, readily accepted Aly’s suggestion to use the name “Henry” around EDEN. It was more easily remembered by guests and other members of the household staff. Soon he was known as Henry to everyone.

Henry was born in America of Egyptian parents who returned to their home outside Cairo when Henry was two. In addition to Islamic studies, his passion was cooking, and by the time he was a teenager, he shone in the preparation of Middle Eastern cuisine. He was lured to Beirut, Lebanon, in his early twenties to be head chef at the world renowned Le Bristol Hotel.

Aly knew him there and thought him the best chef in Beirut. On their honeymoon to Beirut she convinced Alan to make him an offer he couldn’t refuse to come to America and work for them. To Alan and Aly, he was indispensable and they considered him to be almost part of the family. For his part, Henry was comfortable and content in his own apartment over the garage.

ALY FILLED THE large marble tub with steaming water and scented it with exotic fragrant powders from the Middle East. The aroma always brought back memories of her childhood and the time her happy family was all together. She lowered herself into the water, closed her eyes, and spent a few moments counting her blessings.

How wonderful it is to be fluent in English and Arabic, she thought, and she had her parents to thank for that. Aly was born and raised in Lebanon, as a Muslim, but her mother and father had not sheltered her from the world. They had insisted she speak both languages and that she

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understand the customs of her homeland as well as America, her father’s homeland.

A masters degree in international relations had led to her position at N.Y.U., and now she was fully tenured. She could teach and continue her Muslim studies. How very happy she was to be an American; how lucky to be married to the only man she had ever loved. Yet she was torn. The killings in Lebanon were driving a wedge among her Muslim friends. The killings throughout the Muslim world were causing her students to rethink their positions on Islam and creating turmoil among her colleagues.

Aly leaned heavily on what she believed were the true teachings of the Prophet

and the undeniable tenets of her God, Allah: tolerance; forgiveness; mercy; respect for all without regard for gender, race, or religious affiliation; honor; integrity; defense of the defenseless. This was her Islam.

## **WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL, N. Y. C.**

ALAN SAT AT the bar of the Bull and Bear in the Waldorf Astoria with Brian Hall, the director of security for Davis International Industries (DII).

Alan said, "Herb should be along in a minute. You know Herb. Five minutes late and he thinks he's the most punctual man on the planet."

Herb Bentz was Alan's godfather. He had known Alan since the day he was born, and despite the differences in their ages, they had become close friends and confidants. Herb was a former deputy director of the CIA. At the Agency he was known as the great white lion, a label reflecting his thick pure white hair and his tenacity in resolving cases.

He and Brian first met during their days in London when Brian was with MI-6 and Herb an embassy-assigned CIA agent. Intelligence was their business; sharing information with trusted allies was their currency. It was Herb who had recommended Brian when Alan was looking for a director of security. It was Herb who had convinced Brian, a somewhat distraught widower, to come to America and begin a new life.

When Herb arrived, they took their meeting to a corner table where they didn't spend much time on pleasantries. "We've got a problem at the refinery in Riyadh, Herb. Three bombers and some significant damage apparently. Dan's flying in there tonight on Air France. He could use an intelligence contact in Riyadh that he can rely on. Any ideas?"

"No problem," Herb replied. "Have Dan contact Omar Talia at Intel and mention my name. He's a good friend and a square shooter. And besides, he owes me. He's also about as connected as they come. Right now, he's up to his ears with the Wahhabi fanatics; they're committed to exactly three things: the removal of all Westerners from Saudi Arabia; the unseating of the Royal Family; and the conversion of the kingdom to an Islamic state. Anyone, Muslim or otherwise, not subscribing to their version of the Qur'an is an 'infidel,' and the Wahhabi have the right, even the sacred obligation, to kill them. If they had anything to do with the bombing of our refinery, Omar will know."

"Dan will be there in a few hours. I'll get word to him," Alan said. He took a pull on his drink and shook his head. "I should never have let him go. I could have directed our people in engineering to handle it. Stupid of me! If anything happens to Dan, I'll never forgive myself."

Alan finished his drink. “Did I ever tell you that Dan and I were roommates at Harvard? That’s going back some.”

Brian put his arm around Alan’s shoulders and said, “Dan knows how to take care of himself, Alan. I wouldn’t worry about him.”

“I’ll have some of my buds from the Agency stick with him the minute he gets off the plane,” Herb promised. “They won’t let him out of their sight. That’s a promise.”

“Thanks, Herb. With any luck, I’ll be able to sleep tonight.”

“Air France, you said, right?”

“Flight 512.”

“Consider it done,” Herb said. “Now go home and spend some time with that wife of yours, will ya?”

“Good idea. Talk to you in the morning.”

When Alan was gone, Herb bought another round for his friend from

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England. “You know how woefully short of Muslim undercover operatives and translators we are, Brian? It’s a big-time problem, and it’s only going to get worse.”

“I’ve heard that,” Brian admitted. “You know what concerns me even more? It’s the bloody ignorance and complacency I see here in the West. The average chap on the street in New York or Chicago or L.A. has no idea of the threat. Doesn’t know. Doesn’t want to know. The only people with even the slightest clue as to what’s going on are the poor Muslims who represent most of the dead.”

“No surprise to me—none whatsoever,” said Herb. “The radical left here in America wants us to get out of Iraq and leave its people to be slaughtered by Al Qaeda or to drown in the blood of a good, old-fashioned sectarian war. And the media’s not much better.”

“A couple of exceptions maybe,” Brian admitted. “But most of them are talking withdrawal too. Clueless.”

They drank. When the heat of the alcohol reached Herb’s stomach, he took a deep breath and said, “Did I tell you? Al Qaeda kidnapped a CIA friend of mine posted to the Pakistan embassy. A couple of weeks ago they found his severed

head by the roadside. His genitals had been stuffed into his mouth. That's the enemy we're fighting, cowards who behead innocent men and mutilate them."

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

THE SOUND OF gravel being crushed could be heard inside the house when Alan swung the Mercedes 450 into the EDEN estate.

Aly greeted him with a warm kiss and the kind of loving caress that Alan treasured almost as much as he did their most intimate moments. He had taken a vow when they were married. It wasn't the kind of vow that was written down anywhere or that he had recited in some open ceremony or even shared with Aly. This was his personal vow. He promised himself without equivocation that he would never take this woman for granted. And "never" was not a word Alan often used because he knew how unrealistic it was. So he made another vow; he vowed to give thanks for their relationship every day, and he did so the minute he opened his eyes in the morning. More than a dozen years later, he was still obsessed with her: the way she moved and talked, the warmth of her smile, the respect she showed for life, and the pleasure she took out of simple things.

"Follow me, mister. The drinks are on me," she said, taking his hand and leading him into a living room filled with furniture they had collected from all over the world, most of it wood, fabric and glass and maybe a little too ornate. They didn't care. Every piece had a story, and every story added to the fabric of their relationship.

Alan stepped up to the buffet and the pitcher of cocktails Aly had prepared. He poured two martinis and handed one to Aly. She didn't abstain from alcohol as was the tradition of so many Muslims, but then Aly's father was American and so she had been quite Westernized. He had never seen her in an abaya, the gown that covered a woman from head to toe, nor the hijab, the traditional headdress of Muslim women. When she visited the local mosque or lectured at school, she favored embroidered caftans and beaded tunics and looked magnificent.

"Please don't worry about Dan," Alan said as they carried their drinks into the garden. "Herb Bentz will have a couple of Agency guys meet his flight the minute it touches down. Herb and Brian are both convinced that the Al Qaeda-supported Wahhabi are responsible for our problems in Riyadh."

"I think they're right," she replied. "That's what they do. They attack so-called infidels. They justify it by twisting the words of the Qur'an for their own benefit, and their existence revolves around it."

"Why in the world does the Saudi government allow them to exist?" Alan couldn't

help ask.

“Because it was the Wahhabi who threw their support behind the royal family after the colonialists packed up and left. The king made a deal with them. In exchange for the Wahhabi’s loyalty, he guaranteed them the right to continue teaching what they were teaching and doing what they were doing, like it or not, and like it or not, the royal family

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might regret it now, but back then they needed the support of anyone and everyone willing to get on their bandwagon.”

“Excuse the interruption, Mr. and Mrs. Davis, but dinner is ready,” Henry said over the house intercom.

A table for two had been set in an intimate corner of an enclosed porch. What it lacked in formality, it made up for in the splendid view of the gardens and lawns of the estate Alan’s father had named EDEN.

“Magnificent,” Alan said, as the sun dipped below the horizon and a wash of pinks and purples bled across the sky.

Henry poured two glasses of a decanted Barollo and then retreated to the kitchen. When they were alone, Alan raised his glass and said, “Here’s to the loveliest lady I have ever known.”

“And I will drink to the handsome young man whose vast array of skills includes knowing how to make a lady blush.”

Henry presented their dinner consisting of extraordinarily well presented lentil soup, lamb with yogurt (one of Alan’s favorites), green beans in oil, and finishing with fresh ground Lebanese coffee.

Alan didn’t eat much, though it had nothing to do with the quality of Henry’s Lebanese entrees. He was preoccupied with the terrorist attack that had shut down his Riyadh refinery, but he was even more concerned with the safety of his employees and their families. He had sent his best friend and most valued executive into a crisis situation that Alan should have taken responsibility for himself. How stupid!

He knew Dan was up to the job, just as Brian had said, but the name on the refinery belonged to Alan Davis.

Alan and Aly were in bed by ten. By midnight, Alan had given up on sleep. He listened to Aly’s soft and regular breathing and watched the shadows of moonlit trees dancing across his ceiling.

Almost magically, his thoughts turned to the evening he had asked Aly to become his wife. They had been sitting at their favorite corner table in Maison Chez Louis on a night much like this one, and he could hear her reply as if it had been yesterday. “Yes, my darling...yes, yes, yes forever.”

They had not been intimate before that night—it was a mutually accepted arrangement that was strongly influenced by her Islamic faith and his Christian beliefs.

He recalled driving to the guest cottage and starting a glowing fire in the bedroom. He said, “This is a once in a lifetime moment and I just want to hold you close until our wedding night.”

## **PARIS, FRANCE**

DAN MILLAR WALKED through the Charles de Gaulle International airport in Paris with a light duffel bag in one hand and a computer case in the other. His connecting flight to Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, was due to board in eighteen minutes according to his watch.

More than half the passengers waiting at the boarding gate were in Muslim dress. Dan had flown in and out of Riyadh a dozen times, and this was nothing unusual. On most occasions, the bearded man with the conservative gray tunic would simply have blended into the crowd had it not been for the four brutish men surrounding him. They studied every face as if an enemy of the bearded man lurked there. Persian, Arabian, European; it didn't matter. The suspicion was not new to Dan. Neither was the hatred. The suspicion he could understand, but the hatred confused him. So many Muslims seem to hate the West, and particularly Americans. Why, Dan wondered. What in the world have we done to them? America was never a colonial power. Most of us know that the followers of Mohammed once led the world in the arts and sciences. Most of us realize they were tolerant of other religions through the dark and middle ages.

And we know too that they initially spread their religion with the sword, their Prophet, Mohammed, leading them. We never experienced anything like that in America. Why hate us? Maybe, he thought, they see us as having everything and themselves as having nothing. Even if that were true—a terrible generalization in Dan's view—who's fault was that? Ours?

Five minutes later, boarding commenced. Dan found his seat, stored his carry-on, and buckled up. He closed his eyes and thought about

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Betty and the girls, his everlasting treasures in life. He thought about their aborted ski trip and of the plans they had for their daughters' future. But mostly

he thought of how much he loved them.

As the plane taxied to the runway, another thought intruded, and it wasn't nearly as pleasant. He pictured the Saudi representative who would be there when he landed, and he realized how much he detested the meeting. It was only a ploy. There was nothing earnest about the arrangement. It afforded the Saudis an opportunity to offer "special services" and even outright bribes to anyone they felt they could benefit from.

It was a game he would never play, Dan told himself as the plane started down the runway and the G-force of takeoff pressed him back in the seat.

## **HAMBURG, GERMANY**

IT WAS FOUR o'clock in the morning on a drizzly night in Hamburg. Three men were unloading a rusted out van in front of a vacant two-story building along the waterfront. The crates were large and unwieldy, and the men appeared to be exhausted from a long night's work. One of them tripped over the curb and lunged forward. The crate tumbled from his arms, broke open, and the contents spilled out on the sidewalk.

The leader of the trio lashed out at the man in Arabic.

"You clumsy fool. What if someone came past and saw what we have? Then what? Get this cleaned up before I have your head."

The one-room apartment next door was the address of a parolee named Franz Heffner. Franz had never been a deep sleeper, and the commotion out front aroused him from a particularly uninteresting dream. He crept to the window, parted the curtains, and stared down at the men hurriedly repacking the damaged carton. Franz couldn't identify the contents, and he didn't really care. He closed the curtains again and buried himself beneath the covers.

The next morning Franz left the apartment in a bad mood. He had an appointment with his parole officer, and this always spelled trouble. The van he had seen last night was still parked in front of the vacant store, and Franz was observant enough to see an unusual object with multicolored wires wedged beneath one of the tires. He wiggled it free, stared at it in amazement, and slipped it inside his jacket pocket.

His parole officer was a slight man named Alford Weitz who kept an office off Dortmund Street. His greeting was always the same. "Come in, Franz. Have you been behaving yourself since our last visit?"

Franz's reply didn't vary much either. He grimaced and said, "Oh, yes, Herr Weitz. Clean as a whistle."



Just then, the phone on Herr Weitz's cluttered desk rang. Weitz excused himself, picked up the phone, and sat back in his swivel chair. Franz wasn't interested in his parole officer's phone conversation, so he reached into his pocket and removed the object he had found. He studied the strange looking cylinder with the colored wires and knew from years of criminal activity that he had stumbled upon something that would prove to be of considerable interest to the authorities. Now if he could just use it to his advantage.

When Herr Weitz finished his telephone call, Franz set the object rather dramatically in the middle of his desk. He said, "Herr Weitz, I may have some valuable information for you."

Weitz stared at the cylinder. "Now what sort of information might that be, Franz?"

Heffner related the events of the previous evening. "It was dark, and they were in a hurry. They must have left this behind."

Herr Weitz wrapped his hand around the cylinder.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll be back."

True to his word, he returned forty-five minutes later with two other men in tow. He didn't bother to introduce them, but Franz recognized government help when he saw it.

One of them sat on the edge of the desk and looked down at Franz Heffner. "Herr Heffner, we need your absolute cooperation on the matter of this object you found. If you work with us, we may be able to end your parole visits once and for all."

German intelligence set up around-the-clock surveillance from

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within the building across from Franz Heffner's apartment. Over the course of the next two weeks, they photographed every face and recorded every word. By then, the object Franz had discovered was identified as an Iranian-made detonator, and the men using the vacant building were marked as Egyptian nationals belonging to a terrorist group allied with Al Qaeda.

The men were quickly rounded up. Intense interrogation eventually revealed a rather insidious plot to detonate any number of powerful explosives at a holiday performance of a children's circus.

"Martyrs" dressed as clowns were to carry the explosives beneath their costumes, simultaneously detonating them at a prearranged moment during the middle of the performance.

The conspirators were taken to detention facilities where they were given the opportunity of meeting with the CIA, MI-6, DGSE, KGB, and Mossad.

While their story sent shock waves through the intelligence community, the lack of remorse or guilt demonstrated by the conspirators was perhaps most telling of all.

## **AIRBORNE ABOARD AIR FRANCE**

THE FLIGHT HAD been aloft for a half hour when the in-flight movie began. Dan had been thinking of all the things he needed to consider in Riyadh when he happened to glance up at the screen. The actress in the scene at that moment reminded him so much of his darling Betty, that he turned his attention from the business at hand and allowed his imagination to paint a perfect picture of their future together. He saw the girls growing into womanhood, marrying, and raising families. He saw himself becoming a grandparent, retirement, the house on the beach in Newport Beach, growing old with the woman of his dreams. He closed his eyes. Yeah, he thought, a satisfied smile filling out his face. I can handle that.

A MUSLIM WOMAN seated next to a window in coach class was nursing an infant. To the observant eye, the baby may have seemed a bit large for a nursing infant, and it's wrapping bulky and overly cumbersome. Who could have anticipated the explosives wrapped in its blankets? When the woman finished her task, she rose, placed the infant in her seat, and stepped into the aisle. From beneath her abaya she produced a cell phone. The phone triggered the explosives a moment after the woman cried:

Allah Akbar

The wreckage of the aircraft, the remains of its cargo, and the body parts of its passengers were later found strewn over a hundred miles of the Alps.

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## **3 - AN IDEA – ADALA**

### **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

BREAKFAST WITH ALY was a treat, even if it happened at the crack of dawn with a light rain feeding the landscape as it was doing this morning. All too often one of them would be traveling—Alan had projects in the works all over the globe, and Aly often had to attend seminars or simply prepare for an early class.

It was the calm before the tempests of the day. It was the time when they could explore and discuss their plans and desires.

Henry, dressed and smiling after having said his dawn prayers, served the regular Davis breakfast of fresh fruit, poached eggs, and Lebanese coffee, though only the coffee seemed of interest to Alan this morning. Aly was busy penning notes into her day planner. Alan was scanning the headlines, but not with much enthusiasm. He put the paper aside and expelled a weary sigh.

“More good news?” Aly said, knowing how involved her husband allowed himself to get in the events of the day.

“I honestly don’t get it. Why are we having so much trouble with Muslim elements all over the world?” Alan thumped the newspaper with his knuckles. “In England, suicide bombers killed over fifty innocent people on the underground, and the BBC shows Muslim demonstrators taking to the streets, creating massive traffic jams while carrying signs calling for the beheading of anyone who might look at the world a little differently than they do. Is this Muslim tolerance?”

He drank coffee and set his cup down with an exuberant clang. “In France, Muslims are rioting in the streets by the thousands. They’re setting cars on fire, looting storefronts, and trashing businesses all over the city. Why? Because they disagree with the government over some planned regulation or other. Is that Muslim civility and citizenship?”

“Pretty depressing, I grant you,” Aly agreed.

“Theo Van Gogh was murdered in broad daylight on a public street in Holland by a Muslim extremist for producing a documentary about how a Muslim woman legislator, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, had been, and other Muslim women still are, abused by Muslim men. The Muslims found the killing to be acceptable since a ‘fatwa’ had been issued by some cleric calling for the deaths of Van Gogh and Ali. They haven’t gotten to Ms. Ali yet since the Dutch government assigned police protection for her twenty-four/seven; but when the expenses for her security became unbearable, she was forced to leave and now lives in America.”

“You’re preaching to the choir, Alan. I share your sentiments.”

“And you know that in Spain Muslim terrorists planted high explosives on rush hour commuter trains that killed how many hundreds of innocent people?”

“And the worst of it is that, much to the satisfaction of world-wide terrorists, their actions had exactly the effect they were hoping for on the Spanish elections,” Aly added.

“In Denmark, they weren’t happy with a couple of published cartoons portraying

the Prophet Mohammed. They were offensive, as if nothing offensive to Muslims should ever be published. Within days fanatics had orchestrated demonstrations and flag burnings all over the Middle East and were urging a boycott of Danish goods.”

“Sorry to tell, my love, but I have to take exception. I was offended by those cartoons myself, and I’m pretty hard to offend,” Aly said, closing her day planner and gazing expectantly across the table.

“I think the cartoons were in bad taste too; don’t get me wrong. But I would never deny the Danes or anyone else the right to publish them,” Alan said. “But my main point was that the organization of the demonstrations a day after the cartoons appeared was remarkable. Coincidence? Maybe so. Overkill to the point of fanaticism? Absolutely.”

### AN IDEA – ADALA

“But it’s just as important to remember that the fanatical Muslims you’re talking about, the ones causing the very events you just cited, are in the minority,” Aly said calmly but without reservation. “Most Muslims, including your wife, are peace loving, law abiding people.”

“I’ve never had a doubt about you, darling, but I can’t agree that most Muslims are peace loving. I’m really bothered, and I hope you are as well, by the paradox that if the majority of Muslims, including American Muslims, are peace loving and law abiding, then why are they so conspicuously silent about all of this?”

“Many of them are frightened. They fear retaliation. If not to them-selves, then to their families back in their native countries. The greatest weapon these terrorists have is fear, Alan,” she said pointedly, “and they wield it most skillfully.”

The telephone rang just then. They looked at each other with quizzical expressions. “Kind of early, don’t you think?” Aly said and picked up the receiver.

“Hello.”

“Good morning, Aly. It’s Herb Bentz,” a voice said softly. “I’m sorry to call so early, but I have to speak with Alan. It’s important.”

Aly heard something in Herb’s voice that sent a chill along her spine, something purely instinctive. “What is it?” she heard herself ask.

“Dan Millar was in an accident.”

“What? What kind of accident? Is he all right?”

“Please, Aly; I have to speak with Alan. The battery on my cell phone is about to

quit.”

Aly turned to Alan with an apprehensive look. She handed him the phone. “It’s Herb Bentz. Dan’s been in an accident.”

“Herb! What’s going on? What’s this about Dan?” Alan said into the phone.

“Alan. I’m sorry to have to be the bearer of such terrible news,” Herb said, his voice cracking, “but Dan is dead.”

“Dead?” Alan looked into Aly’s eyes. He reached out for her hand, taking it and squeezing it as if that might reverse what he had just been told. “What are you talking about, Herb? Dan’s on his way to Riyadh.”

“He didn’t make it, I’m afraid. A couple of hours ago the Agency learned that an Air France flight to Saudi Arabia, to Riyadh went down over the Alps with no possible survivors. A terrorist group calling itself Martyrs of Islam claimed responsibility an hour ago. The minute I heard, I obtained a copy of the manifest. Dan was on that flight.”

“Oh, my god! Those dirty cowards!”

“Alan, Alan, what happened? What happened to Dan?”

Alan dropped the receiver on the floor. Tears welled up in his eyes. He took Aly in his arms, and together they wept like children.

“There will never be another like him,” cried Alan, “They killed him, Aly. They killed Dan.”

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

MARIE CHAVEZ, ALAN’S private secretary, greeted his late arrival with tearfully genuine condolences, knowing in her heart that the loss was hers too.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Davis,” she said. “Dan was such a warm and dear friend. A kinder man would be hard to find.”

“Thank you, Marie. I know how close you two were.” Dan had once described Marie as down to earth, attractive, trustworthy, and intelligent but not necessarily in that order. Coming from Dan, that was a high compliment.

“He never forgot a birthday or a holiday,” she heard herself saying. “Every Christmas, I’d give him something practical like a new tie, and he would give me something whimsical and expensive like a kaleidoscope.”

“That sounds like Dan, doesn’t it?” Alan said. He let her cry for a moment and then said. “Marie, I need you to set up a meeting for this afternoon with Herb Bentz and Brian Hall. I know it won’t be easy, but I’d like you there as well.”

Marie wiped her eyes. “Anything special you’ll need?”

## AN IDEA – ADALA

THE MEETING BEGAN at 1:00 that afternoon in Alan’s executive conference room. His dad had decorated it with alternating planks of American birch and Lebanese cedar. The aromatic cedar always reminded Alan of his dad as he wondered what his father would think of what he was about to say.

Alan opened the meeting by saying, “I’ve been thinking seriously over the last few hours about the consequences of losing Dan Millar, not only the loss to his wife and kids and to the rest of his family, including my wife, Aly; not only to me as a close, personal friend, to you three and all his other friends as well...I don’t have words for that at the moment” Alan admitted, “but I’m also thinking about what it means to Davis International. Dan was as close to an irreplaceable asset as they come. His death constitutes a very substantial loss to the corporation. It may seem a bit cold to view Dan as an asset, but I want it clearly understood that whatever actions we may decide to take regarding his death will be motivated exclusively by the need for corporate personnel protection. With that in mind, I’d like all of you to agree that this meeting will be held in the strictest of confidence. All agreed?”

Marie and Herb nodded, and Brian said, “Here, here.”

“Thank you,” Alan said. “Here’s the thing; I’m convinced that some-thing must be done to protect the personnel of this corporation against harm from the kind of terrorists who killed Dan and 200 other innocent people last night.” He looked at Herb and went on. “You probably know as much about terrorism as anyone in this country, Herb. You spent most of your career with the CIA thinking about it, planning for it, and plotting against it. And if anyone knows as much as you do, it’s probably Brian. Toss together the best of MI-6 and the Agency, and we’ve got a pretty good team.”

Herb sat silently; Brian nodded modestly.

“Here’s the bottom line,” Alan continued. “As sole owner of this business, I pledge to personally finance any undertaking designed to lessen our exposure to terrorists, no matter where they are. As I see it, the perfect undertaking would be one that eliminated every terrorist in every radical organization on the planet. But let’s say that might be a bit too ambitious at this time and give some thought as to what we can do independently.”

“I don’t quite understand. Are you thinking about special security forces for our own people? Something like that?” Herb said, nosing around the subject.

“Something a little more proactive than that, I think, Herb. Something a little more aggressive,” Alan suggested.

“How much more aggressive?” Brian asked. “Like some type of independent military action?”

“More covert, I think,” Alan replied. “My thought is that if we cut off the head, the body dies too.”

Herb and Brian shared a quick look. The ex-CIA man said very carefully, “A covert type of action meant to do what, eliminate as many top terrorists as we can?”

“Yes. Exactly.”

“And when you say eliminate, I assume you mean kill,” Brian chimed in with considerably more bluntness.

“That’s exactly what I mean, Brian. Consider this. I would suspect, for example, that the elimination of Osama bin Laden would earn the assassin not only considerable praise but probably a \$25,000,000 reward, as well. Maybe even a ticker tape parade. I can’t imagine any government or any international governing body bringing charges against the assassin, much less prosecuting him. And I see no difference between bin Laden and any lesser-known terrorist leader. All are murderers. All are cowards. All are evil to the core.”

“Straight out assassination is not new. Every foreign intelligence agency in every government in the West has been trying to figure out the best way to do that for years, and with very limited success,” Brian noted. “Unfortunately, these agencies work at cross-purposes for political reasons. Nation A and Nation B each profit from a mutual arrangement. One needs the other.”

“What are you saying?” Alan asked.

“Would either Nation A or Nation B embarrass or humiliate the other

#### AN IDEA – ADALA

by uncovering terrorists in the territory of the other if that would jeopardize a mutually profitable undertaking. I think not. Would either take any action against a terrorist within the other’s border? Not likely. Or would they ever take action against a necessary third party to their mutual agreement? They would not.”

“You’re right about politics, Brian, and we have to respect that to a degree. Any

action we take on an independent level will still call for as much inside intelligence from government agencies as we can get. It's a key element to be sure," added Herb.

"Okay, if we need their assistance, then that's how we proceed," Alan said. "The question is how."

"Well, for one thing, France has called for an intelligence conference next week in Paris thanks to the Air France disaster. I can't think of a better place to start."

"Think they'll let an old CIA guy like you attend?" asked Alan.

"After what we've been discussing today? Wild horses couldn't stop me," Herb replied.

"Good. Let's plan on it then, Herb."

"All right. Let's talk about specifics," said Brian. "If we're talking about covertly targeting individual terrorists around the world—an idea I think is long overdue—let's begin by asking the most basic question. Who? Who pulls the trigger?"

"We hire assassins," Herb said.

"Logical, I suppose. But where do we get them?" asked Alan.

"Fair question. There are enough mercenaries and soldiers of fortune around these days that finding them isn't a problem. We could advertise in a dozen different publications and get a hundred résumés tomorrow. Are they trustworthy? Discreet? Reliable? In most cases they can be convinced to be. Are they committed? That's the real question." Replied Brian.

"Mercenaries are one idea, for sure," Alan said. "But I have another one I think we should try first."

"I'm really looking forward to this one," said a smiling Herb.

"Look," said Alan. "This is a Muslim thing. There are probably a couple of million American Muslims, an unknown number of whom might be as angry at these terrorists as we are. Yet he or she takes it on the chin every time a terrorist event occurs. People shun them. People hate them. Mostly, people fear them. They have a tough time just walking down the street and going into a shop. They suffer extreme humiliation at air-ports. They jump on a bus or a train and have to endure looks that would put a hole through most of us. Their religion is made to look ridiculous. The Qur'an suddenly becomes a lot of contradictory nonsense."

"So what are you saying?" Herb wanted it spelled out.



“I’m saying that if anyone should be motivated to take action against terrorism, it is the American Muslim.”

“Take a look at the most recent Pew Research Center study. You might be right,” Brian chimed in. “According to their findings, American Muslims feel just like the rest of us do when it comes to terrorists, and they don’t see a societal division when living in the more modern Western world.”

“If that’s true,” they heard Marie say, “then why aren’t they more proactive and more vocal when it comes to condemning terrorists? I don’t get it.”

“I asked Aly that same question, Marie,” Alan said. “According to her, they’re scared to death...scared about retribution to them, to their families.”

“Yeah, but there’s another point worth mentioning,” Brian said. “The same study found that twenty-five percent of younger Muslim adults think Al Qaeda is performing a necessary function and doing a pretty good job of it. What about that?”

“Obviously we scratch that particular twenty-five percent off our list. But that leaves us with a pretty good-sized pool of potentially eligible candidates.”

“Ninety-nine point nine percent of whom have absolutely no skills or experience in the art of good, old-fashioned assassination.”

“So we teach them the good old-fashioned art of assassination,” Alan replied with a shrug. “We build a training facility. We provide training in everything from weaponry and methodology to espionage and camouflage.”

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We provide visas and passports and whatever else they need, and we offer the kind of compensation package that makes it hard to say no.”

“Alan, I know you’re upset about what happened to Dan. We all are. But what you’re proposing could cost a fortune,” Herb said. “I don’t want to mislead you.”

“That’s my worry. I need you and Brian to help me set up the project from beginning to end—all the nuts and bolts. We cover all the bases. And when word gets out that it’s Muslims risking their lives to rid the world of terrorists, their reputations will reverse dramatically. They won’t be shunned or mistrusted or hated anymore. Just the opposite. Their clerics will become proactive in defense of their brave congregations, air travel will become a pleasant experience again, and the Qur’an will be accepted as the sacred book that it is.”

“Wouldn’t that be nice,” Herb agreed.

“There is something else to consider,” Brian said. “As we go forward with the project, you can believe that many people—Davis International personnel, our own families, even our friends in foreign intelligence around the world are sure as hell going to wonder what we’re doing.”

“You’re right,” Alan said, “And the safest way to conceal the actual nature of the project is to tell the truth, or at least as much of it as we can. If we have to, we say we’re training Muslims to supplement agents already working undercover in Islamic countries. If that’s not enough, we say any-thing our people learn is to be turned over to the appropriate government agencies. The one thing we never reveal is that we intend to take further direct action against the targets we specify. Best case, we don’t tell anyone anything, and I mean anything, unless we have to.”

“On that we agree,” Herb said.

“So what do you think?” Alan asked.

“I think you’ve dropped a bomb on us, Alan,” Brian said without equivocation. “And I think Herb and I have some serious ethical and moral thinking to do. Shall we schedule another meeting?”

“If you’re both available, I’d like to make it for two days from now.”

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

WHEN ALAN ARRIVED at EDEN that evening, he was greeted by a wan, anxious Aly. She had just spent the day with Dan’s wife, Betty, and a house-ful of disbelieving, grief-stricken family members.

“How is everyone?” he asked as they walked into the living room arm in arm.

“It’s just the most heartbreaking thing in the world. Betty is a wreck. And I look at the girls and realize they will never see their dad again. Oh, Alan, it’s so unfair.”

Alan made cocktails and joined Aly. Seated close together on one of the silken Oriental couches surrounding the great fireplace above which hung a portrait of Alan and Aly’s wedding party, they spoke softly and solemnly about Dan. The image of the best man, standing next to Alan reminded them of the joy of that day along with the sadness and bitterness they were feeling today.

Finally, near exhaustion from emotion, Aly changed the subject and asked, “What kind of a reaction did you get today darling?”

“We had a good preliminary meeting. Not much was decided other than the fact that DII will bear the costs of whatever we do. Herb and Brian are going to

brainstorm the idea. We've scheduled the next meeting for the day after tomorrow and hopefully we'll come up with something solid."

"What is it that you, Alan Davis, friend, confidante, and the brains behind DII think is a good plan?"

"Probably to set up a camp to train agents in the art of gathering covert information about anyone who might represent a threat to our personnel here or abroad. We'd want to look into the circumstances of the Air France flight and try to identify the killers. In short, we'd look into who the terrorists are and what their plans might be. Our best protection is timely, accurate intelligence."

"And what would you do with this information once you got your hands on it?"

"Turn it over to the proper authorities," he lied—lied and hated him-self for doing it.

#### AN IDEA – ADALA

"Haven't the U.S. and their allies enough spies of their own?" Aly wondered.

"Evidently not. Herb and Brian told me the West is woefully short of undercover agents." Alan drank.

He felt the heat of the alcohol and wondered what Dan's last thought was before the end.

"One idea we kicked around was to recruit Arabic speaking Muslims living in the States and insert them in places where we suspect terrorist activity."

"And then what? Just wait? Can you afford to underwrite the expenses on something so open-ended?"

"The cost isn't the problem," Alan assured her. "But there are two things you can help me out with."

"Fire away."

"I want to give our project an Arabic name...I was thinking about the Arabic word for "justice."

"That's easy. Adala. Here, I'll write it down for you." Aly retrieved a pad and pencil and wrote: A- d- a- l- a. Then she said it. "Adala."

"Adala is perfect," Alan said. "It's perfect."

"And the other thing?"

“I’d like you to call Imam Mohammed Aziz and ask if it’s possible for him to come to my office tomorrow afternoon.”

“Consider it done.” She kissed him gently. He held her.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

THE DIRECTOR OF human resources for DII was a brisk, compact man named Harry Neuman. Harry was forty-seven years old and could well have passed for a man ten years older. He sported a neatly trimmed gray beard, silver hair, and a face straight off a scarecrow. His claim to fame was a penchant for being ten minutes early for even the earliest meeting, and he was waiting in Alan’s outer office when the boss arrived at 5:45.

“Don’t you ever sleep, Harry?” Alan asked as he glanced at the coffee carafe.

“Not if it interferes with a good sunrise,” Harry admitted.

“And you probably don’t drink coffee either.”

“You’d be wrong there, Mr. Davis.”

“Good.” The coffee had just finished dripping, and Alan poured two cups. He handed one to Harry as he waved him toward a chair and carried his own to his desk.

“As you know, we all grieve the loss of Dan Millar, Harry.” Enough small talk. “And I want DII to do something about the way he died. We have to try to protect our people. Some of them travel to the most problematic areas in the world. That’s just the nature of their jobs.”

“Yes, sir,” Harry replied.

“What I want to do is hire and train Arabic speaking Muslims for espionage activities in appropriate countries to assist existing authorities in the identification and monitoring of terrorists.”

Alan could see Harry trying to control his face muscles. “Okay. And the profile?”

“Muslim, Arabic fluency, American citizen or green card. They have to be in good health and between the ages of twenty-five and forty. I need you to find out how to reach this profile quickly. There will also be an excellent compensation package.”

“How soon would you like the info, sir?”

“Yesterday.” Alan walked him to the door. “Please drop by tomorrow morning with an update.”

THAT AFTERNOON, IMAM Mohammed Aziz, the Muslim cleric from the Shah Alam mosque that Aly sometimes attended, appeared at Alan’s office. The imam was a cheerful, somewhat rotund man with a white-trimmed beard and Ben Franklin glasses.

Over the years, Imam Aziz and Aly had spent many hours discussing Islam, and although he was a Shiite and she a Sunni, they had become close friends. The imam had been a guest at EDEN on many occasions and knew Alan well.

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“Hello, my friend,” said the imam. “I’m so terribly sorry to learn about Dan. My prayers are with his family and friends.”

“Thank you, Mohammed. And thanks a million for coming. We don’t see enough of each other. May I offer you some tea?”

“Ah, thank you, but no. I’m feeling a bit bloated after lunch. I know we would see much more of each other if you converted to Islam and joined my Mosque,” said the imam with a smile and a twinkle in his eye.

“Aly’s working on that,” said Alan as he motioned for Mohammed Aziz to take a seat. “I wanted to talk with you briefly about the American Muslim and perhaps become a bit more educated.”

“We both know how bad it is for American Muslims when terrorists murder people anywhere in the world; the suspicion that befalls them, the mistrust, and the disdain. Terrible. How do they feel inside?”

“They are unhappy certainly,” said Aziz, “and they would like for terrorist activities to cease.”

“Would they, themselves want to do something about it?”

“I suppose some would, but this is a very difficult matter for them.”

“What do you mean Mohammed?”

“Simply this; they have families both here in America and in the countries from which they emigrated. These people are extremely vulnerable to reprisals.”

“Are you saying they are too frightened to express their opposition? That they actually believe the terrorists have arms long enough to reach them even here in America?”

“Yes, the truth is they are afraid or at least apprehensive and choose not to create waves which might, in the end, drown them.”

“From what you’re telling me, they must feel that both the end of their humiliation and the end of Muslim terrorism cannot be brought about by anything they might be able to do. Am I right?” asked Alan.

“You must believe this, Alan. There is a God. The one and only God, and you and I both pray to Him. Pray to Him now. Pray to Him to enlighten the evildoers. You must believe that the punishment these terrorists will suffer if they don’t repent will not only be terrible, it will be for all eternity.”

Alan leaned across his desk. “I’m sorry, Mohammed, but I had hoped there was something more proactive that good Muslims here in America might do. Something like organized opposition to terrorism, demonstrations at the UN, media articles, or the clergy speaking out. I feel that, unfortunately, the Muslim community has been altogether too silent.

“I will send you a list of the most important Muslim organizations in America. You might wish to contact them for their opinions,” offered Mohammed.

“Thank you, my friend.”

## **RAMADI, IRAQ**

TO THE WEST, the sun inched below the horizon, leaving a blush of pinks and purples. To the east, the coming of evening allowed a sliver of new moon the chance at illumination.

Ramadi, in what had come to be known in Iraq as the Sunni Triangle, would never have been chosen by a person of even mild logic as a place to vacation. Even the most curious of sightseers would have avoided it like the plague.

The consequence of battles had reduced much of the city to rubble. There were a few surviving rooftops, but the prevailing architecture had been given over to piles of rubble. The upside of this was that the city afforded little opportunity for ambush and a greater opportunity for cover.

The aroma of almonds, raisins, and spices frying in sesame oil flavored the air as the U.S. Army platoon made its way along a dusty empty side street. The night’s silence was interrupted by gunfire not one hundred yards away. Men scurried. They dropped to the ground or dove behind walls of broken concrete. This may have struck Staff Sergeant Willard P. Chance as an odd moment for reflection, but sometimes the mind just took off. He found himself back home in Pennsylvania working on the engine of his 1957 Chevrolet. He ran down the rather lengthy list of things

## AN IDEA – ADALA

that still needed to be done on the car, and he made a brief calculation as to whether the money he had saved would be enough to get the job done. He thought about Elly and how foolish he had been not proposing to her when he had the chance. Now he had to wonder if she would be available when he got back.

The sounds of Kalashnikov gunfire echoed down the narrow corridor, once a street filled with ox carts and street vendors.

“Stay down,” he heard someone in his platoon hiss, and Will hunkered down even more. An image of Elly returned to him.

He had met her when she transferred to his high-school class in Pineville. He couldn't take his eyes off of her even when he quarterbacked the football team and she was a cheerleader. On weekends she would visit him in his garage working on his beloved Chevy and invariably go home with grease on her nose or her cheek.

For the next two years they were inseparable. Was there some way to finish the Chevrolet and escape from Pineville together? There had to be. Please God, there had to be.

A mortar exploded thirty yards from their position, shattering Will's reverie. How had he ended up in this forsaken place? Who was trying to kill him? Was it the Sunnis, the Shia, the insurgents, the Baathists, the Saudis, the Iranians, or Al Qaeda? It didn't matter; he would be just as dead.

“Medic! Medic!” a voice shouted.

When Will heard this, he jumped to his feet and gave the order to move out. An instant later, he spotted a shadowy figure on a rooftop and shouted, “Rooftops! Rooftops.”

That was the last thing Staff Sergeant Willard P. Chance, serial number #32789614, ever said. A mortar exploded less than a foot away and blast-ed his body all over a Ramadi side street. There would be precious little of him to be bagged and sent home. To be sure, Elly would not recognize the man who had left for war not five months before, and the waiting she had endured would now be replaced by anger, grief, and questions too many to answer.

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## 4 - CAREFUL PLANNING

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

AFTER TWELVE YEARS of marriage, Aly had learned to read the expressions on Alan's face, and what had most impressed her over that time was how infrequently he was dejected or depressed or put off. He just didn't approach life that way. He relished the obstacles. The old cliché about obstacles being poorly disguised opportunities actually ran true with this man. He was confident without the need to boast. All he demanded of people was that they work as hard as was needed to get the job done just as he did.

So when Aly, wearing her most seductive kimono, saw the set of Alan's jaw and the singular crease running across his forehead as he walked into the solarium and tossed his briefcase on the table, she knew something was amiss, and she guessed correctly that his meeting with Imam Mohammed Aziz, as good a friend as he was, had not been as fruitful as Alan might have hoped. She knew he never even heard the piano CD, softly playing his favorite lounge melody, "Deep Purple."

"So?" she said with resignation, "how did it go with the imam?"

"So it shows, does it?" he replied. He paused at the wet bar, chose a beer over a cocktail, and fixed Aly a dry Manhattan.

"The lady in your life is nothing if not observant, especially when it comes to her man," she replied. "So? Not well?"

"A bit disappointing to be frank," said Alan. "He doesn't approve of our plan to insert covert agents into Muslim countries for purposes of espionage, even if our intent is to gather information in the name of

### CAREFUL PLANNING

thwarting terrorism. He says they would be acting with deceit. I suppose he feels we should give ourselves up to prayer and leave the fate of terrorists to God and judgment day.

Aly followed him outside to the garden. In one corner, a fountain made the kind of music that only moving water can. They looked out over a bed of azalea bushes, anxious to flower. When the moment seemed right, Aly volunteered, "I suppose I should have told you a little more about his values in such areas. The imam believes in turning the other cheek and leaving retribution to the Almighty. It's really more of a Christian thing. As much as I respect and admire our good friend, I don't personally subscribe to that view. I believe, as you do, that we have to rely on secular law for the punishment of evil. And I will tell you this; there are very few Muslims who feel as Mohammed does."



They returned inside, and Alan sank into a low soft couch. Aly curled up in the loveseat across from him. The look she saw on his face now was as inquisitive as it was serious, and she waited patiently for his response.

“Let me ask you this,” he said eventually. “As a Muslim, do you have any qualms about what we plan to do?”

“None that I can think of, not given what you’ve told me,” Aly answered. “Espionage, at least the way you describe it, is not sinful in my opinion, Alan. It is simply the gathering of facts identifying the guilty and exonerating the innocent. As long as this so-called espionage is held apart from punishment, I have no problems with it. Fair enough?”

Alan sat up. He leaned forward. “And yet you find fault with our invasion of Iraq,” he reminded her. “Which was based on what we thought was credible information gathered for the most part through various means of espionage including reports from foreign intelligence agencies.

“You’re right. I find fault with it. The information you’re talking about turned out to be garbage, Alan. There were no weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq and no evidence to suggest there ever were. We were misled. We preemptively struck another country which posed no threat to us, and now four million Iraqis have been displaced and who knows how many tens of thousands have died.”

“Come on now, Aly. You and I both know there were several other sound reasons for the invasion, not the least of which was Iraq’s refusals to let the United Nations verify the existence or nonexistence of the weapons of mass destruction they claimed they didn’t have. If the implementation of UN resolutions is left in the hands of that incompetent organization, we’ll never see anyone complying, not North Korea, not Iran, not the man in the moon. When that happens, then what? Noncompliance leads to more resolutions, which leads to another round of noncompliance. The whole process is a waste of time. It’s a waste of time because the UN has become irrelevant.”

“I’m sorry to disagree, but we have to support the UN, Alan. Cooperation among diverse nations on every continent is our best and maybe our only hope for peace in this world. The UN isn’t perfect, but it’s all we’ve got.”

Alan couldn’t sit still. He came to his feet and carried his beer across the room. He took the seat next to Aly and anchored his elbows to his knees. He said, “History suggests differently, my dear. When it comes to conflict, conflict of any kind, the United Nations has proved to be disastrously impotent. In the past sixty years, what do they have to brag about? With the exception of the Korean War—and I hesitate even to mention it since the conflict was fought almost entirely with United States personnel—the UN can’t make a single relevant case for the ability to intervene where intervention is called for. And they’ve had

their chances. Rwanda, the Sudan, Vietnam, the Six-Day War. What did they do in that one? The UN secretary general ordered the 2000-man peacekeeping force monitoring the border between Egypt and Israel to withdraw the minute Egypt amassed an army at the border. Shall I go on?"

"You and I have set up camp at different points on the political spectrum, I'm afraid, and we could argue the point forever," Aly said. Then she flashed a disarming smile and added, "I'm not sure that's in the best interest of our loving relationship, however."

"On that we agree," said Alan, setting aside his drink and putting his

### CAREFUL PLANNING

arm around his wife. "I'm sorry to get so wound up, but my feelings about Dan seem to overshadow everything else."

"I can't blame you. I'll miss my cousin every day," Aly lamented.

Alan held her a moment. Eventually he took a deep breath and said, "Let me ask you a tough question. Let's say you had positively identified the terrorist responsible for Dan's death. And let's say you had him square-ly in your gun sights. Would you pull the trigger?"

Aly let the magnitude of this remarkable hypothesis settle on her. Then she shifted slightly in her seat and looked Alan directly in the eye. In a voice firm and resolute, she replied, "Yes."

### **GREENWICH VILLAGE, N. Y.**

BRIAN HALL HAD chosen the intimate corner table for two in Café Lyon on purpose. His meeting with Marie Chavez may have been couched in business, but Brian wanted to think that the potential for a relationship had a far better chance of taking root if the atmosphere spoke of romance. Marie hadn't resisted. In fact, the first words out of her mouth as they were led to their seats were, "Nice, Brian...very nice. What are you planning?"

Brian had been a widower for three years now. For a man of fifty-five, he still looked good. He had kept his six-foot-three frame as trim as a man with limited exercise time could, and looking across the flame of a single candle at Marie reminded him that all the normal instincts were still functioning quite well. He wasn't much good with words, however, and he fumbled something about "two hard working souls deserving a bit of opulence."

Marie Chavez laughed her rich, husky laugh, and Brian realized how easy it was

to relax in her company. It also didn't hurt that Marie had the radiant smile of a model and the fair skin of a woman half her age.

“Okay, I admit it,” Brian said, his British accent winning him points with each word. “It's got me a trifle excited, this prospect of working with you on Alan's project. There you go—cards on the table.”

“I like a man who puts his cards on the table,” she admitted. She knew Brian had been hard at it today organizing his presentation for the meeting with Alan tomorrow, and she had been busting it just as hard herself. “And with that in mind, I think we should do our best to unwind tonight, don't you?”

“You have my vote. Anything particular in mind?” Brian asked.

“Dinner at this very quaint restaurant, a short walk, and an after dinner drink at my place? And I have no etchings. Sound all right?”

“You read my mind.”

## **DALY'S BAR AND GRILL, N. Y.**

HERB BENTZ WAS sitting down with two former colleagues and longtime friends at a favorite watering hole of his across from Grand Central Station. Warren Dye drank Irish whiskey, Jameson's by choice, and Don Evans, nine years and fourteen days sober, took a long draw on a club soda and lime.

They talked of sports for a time. They had to since Dye was an Ohio State Buckeye graduate, and no conversation was worth conducting without some evaluation of the coming football season. This made for a serious bit of jousting since Don Evans had played three seasons at Florida State and both teams were nationally ranked. Herb preferred pro football to the college game every day of the week, and this incensed his buddies no end.

“Okay, fine, now that you've heard us both, you'd better get to the boring stuff,” Evans said. “To business, Mr. Bentz.”

Herb got serious pretty quickly, and his fellow CIA colleagues got the message. He said, “Here's the lay of the land. I have this consulting gig. The client has energy interests in the Middle East, and he's sustained some substantial losses due to a couple of terrorist groups no one seems to want to take on.”

“Big surprise, that,” Evans said.

“So here's the thing. My guy's has serious dough. How serious? He's positioning his firm to hire and train espionage agents, American Muslims

## CAREFUL PLANNING

fluent in Arabic. His goal is to locate, infiltrate, and identify terrorist groups in the Middle East and possibly Europe. He wants to try to discover their plans before they get off the ground. He would need intelligence advising him of where best to insert these people and who or what to look for—that's where you two come in, if you're willing."

"Expensive," Dye said, chewing a piece of ice.

"Let's assume his firm is financially able to sustain the burden," Herb advised.

"And you're asking us if we're in a position to provide this intelligence," Don Evans said. "Okay, I get that; but I have to ask the obvious, if these 'agents' do in fact develop any worthwhile intelligence, would we benefit?"

"Yes, certainly," Herb assured them. "Quid pro quo."

"Good," said Don, "because the fact is this, Herb: we're way too short of Arabic-speaking undercover operatives. Way short. So who knows? If it's done right, your project could help."

"Can you tell us the name of your client?" asked Warren Dye, motioning to their waitress for refills all around.

Herb shook his head back and forth. "So sorry, gents, but you'll have to trust me on this."

"Can you tell us where he plans on getting these agents? Are they pros? Are you going to train them? Fill us in."

Herb did his best without broaching the line of confidentiality established by Alan and his team. "As far as where we'll get these agents, my client wants to grow them himself. Neophytes."

"Home grown and molded for one task and one task only. I like it," Don Evans said. "Why don't you count us in as far as placement goes. We'll start putting together a list of whos and wheres."

"Very discreet," Herb said, knowing it was unnecessary but following procedure anyway. "If this has one thing going for it, it's the element of surprise."

## DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING

THE HEADQUARTERS OF Davis International were located on Park Avenue in the Davis International building a few blocks from the Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

Davis International occupied the upper forty-five stories of the fifty-five-story building and leased the offices on the lowest floors to tenants. There were usually one or two vacancies on these floors, so Alan leased a suite complete with reception area, conference room, several offices, and a small maze of partitioned cubicles.

The conference room was nicely furnished, as was the rest of the suite with the pleasant smell of lemon furniture polish everywhere. Even the Jackson Pollack prints on three walls looked as if they had just been framed and hung.

The players were the same. Herb, Brian, Marie, and the man in charge. Marie poured coffee into her cup, stirred in two sugars and a cream, and tried to pretend that nothing at all had happened last night with the British member of their team. She said, "This is it, gentlemen. Our new project headquarters; hope you'll be comfortable here."

"I don't suppose anyone will raise a fuss if we spread out a little. Tear down a few walls, build a squash court, that sort of thing," Brian said to her, smiling like a Cheshire cat.

"If there's anything you need in the way of bulldozers or paper clips," she retorted, "just ask."

Alan commented on the really lousy coffee, topped off his cup anyway, and officially opened the meeting. He said, "There are a number of issues to discuss, but the first thing on my mind is to give our enterprise a name. I'd ask for suggestions except I've already given it some thought. Since the main focus of our operation will be to counter groups like Al Qaeda, I feel the name should be Arabic. According to my lovely wife Aly, the Arabic word for justice is Adala. That's my suggestion. What do all of you think?"

"Terrific," said Herb.

"Absolutely appropriate," echoed Brian. "You've got my vote."

"And mine," Marie said.

## CAREFUL PLANNING

"All right then, Adala it is," replied Alan, "and may justice be served. Brian, if you wouldn't mind beginning."

The former MI-6 operative stood up. He hung his suit jacket on the back of an adjoining chair. Then he paced. "Herb and I have assessed some candidates for both security and undercover operations, Alan. These are good folks with years of experience," he said, passing him a single page with a dozen or so names on it. "I also made up a profile of what I think we should look for in our applicants."

“Great! Let’s hear them,” said Alan.

“First and foremost, they have to be fluent in both Arabic and English and have a beard or be willing to grow one.”

“A beard? Why?” quizzed Alan.

“Without one they’d stand out in some Arab countries,”

“No argument there,” Alan agreed.

“They should be between twenty-five and forty-five years of age.”

“And forty-five might be pushing it if they’re not in prime shape,” Herb added.

“We’re looking for males only, guys in good health, and preferably single. Our man has to be of at least average intelligence. He has to be willing and able to put himself in very tough situations without cracking. He has to be trainable in the art of investigation. And, the biggie, he has to be willing to assassinate without compunction.”

“That is most certainly a big one,” Herb agreed again.

“That’s our starting point. I’m sure we’ll develop additional criteria as time goes by.”

“Good. Herb?” Alan said.

“I’ve been thinking about the various kinds of training we will need to provide these guys, and it’s considerable,” offered Herb. “The physical training will be intense. These people must be in top physical condition when they go out on assignment, and the physical conditioning won’t even compare to the mental rigors. Going undercover requires a psycho-logical toughness second to none. You don’t just play the part, you become the part.”

“Without letting it swallow you up,” Brian added.

“Indeed, with a big exclamation point.” Herb agreed. “Then there is the skills training: weaponry, explosives, arson, espionage, assassination techniques, disguises, and whatever else might arise. They can’t just be adequate at these things; they have to be pros.”

“They have to be versed in local customs: local politics, local folklore,” Brian said, “you slip up on why the locals eat watermelon for breakfast on Friday and you are dead.”

“We get the picture,” Alan assured him, “which all goes to suggest that we need

a really private place to train and live and study. It's got to be as secure as a military base and as out of the way as we can make it," said Alan. "I've met with our real estate manager, and he's working on it."

"The location has to be top secret, to be sure," Brian concurred, "which leads to several security issues worth considering even at this early stage. We should start with somewhere between four and ten trainees if we can, get them trained and out on assignment before the next group begins training. This is so that no trainee should know or be able to identify more than nine other trainees."

"To avoid a mole or a plant, each trainee must undergo a protocol of specialized testing before they ever get a thumb's up. This means dispositional testing and as many polygraph tests as we think are necessary." Herb did the honors, filling coffee cups and talking at the same time. "Which reminds me, all trainee meals must meet Islamic requirements. We don't want to slip up there."

"I guess if anyone flunks the testing, which must come before any training begins, we send them packing no wiser than when they applied. That'll make it a bit less dangerous flunking any of them and sending them home." said Alan.

"Exactly," said Herb. "We're bound to have a couple of failures despite our screening, and we need to be able to cull them out, which reinforces the need for a location with no identifiable characteristics."

"What about instructors?" Marie asked.

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"Good question," Brian said, "and I think Herb and I can make some top-notch recommendations when it comes to that."

"We spare no expense in that regard. Got that, Herb and Brian?" Alan said. "Top of the line."

"Another point we have to plan from the beginning is identification," Herb said, "and this is no place to cut corners either. We need the best counterfeit passports and visas out there. Brian and I will get together on that one and start putting together a list of cover names, birth certificates, the works."

"Excellent, gentlemen. Now let's talk about the benefit and compensation package I'm proposing. Give me some feedback," Alan said. He nodded at Marie. "Would you pass out the compensation proposal, please?"

Marie shared a single sheet of paper with Brian and Herb, and both men studied it hard. The package included:

- \$1,000.00 weekly salary

- \$50,000 bonus once a mission has been completed successfully
- All expenses paid both here and abroad once a trainee signs on
- Medical insurance
- \$500,000 life insurance
- All necessary training & equipment provided
- An extraction plan to bring them home

“That last one’s not exactly a benefit per se, but I thought it was important enough to put in writing,” Alan continued.

“Agreed,” Herb said drumming his fingers on the mahogany table. “What about recruitment?”

“We do it the old fashioned way. We take out ads in Arabic publications and newspapers in two dozen targeted cities to begin with.”

Marie was already passing out a copy of their ad. Brian pored over it, and Herb read it in a low whisper:

WANTED – REPRESENTATIVE TO TRAVEL TO MIDDLE

EAST ON ASSIGNMENT. WE PROVIDE ALL NECESSARY

TRAINING. COMPANY SEEKS APPLICANTS PREPARED TO START AT ONCE. \$50,000 STARTING SALARY PLUS A \$50,000 BONUS UPON SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF ASSIGNMENT. LIFE/MEDICAL INSURANCE INCLUDED. 100% REIMBURSEMENT OF ALL EXPENSES. REPLY TO

P.O. BOX 911, NEW YORK, NY 10801.

“It sounds like an attractive package to me,” said Brian. “Let’s see what happens.”

“All right. We’re up and running, gang.” Alan arose. “Let’s put our follow-up on the calendar right now.”

“I wonder if we could make it a week from tomorrow?” Herb suggest-ed. “I’ll be back from the intelligence conference in Paris, and I can report on what we might be able to expect as far as cooperation from some of the attendees.”

“Fine. A week from tomorrow it is.” Alan stopped at the door. “There’s one more thing all of us need to know. I’ve spoken with Aly and Imam Aziz. As far as they



know, we're going to hire and train Arabic-speaking agents to assist authorities in combating terrorists and no more—straight, covert information gathering. I thought it was best. Both Aly and the imam have accepted this explanation, so please use it when necessary, but only when asked.” Alan looked from Herb to Brain and finally to Marie. “As to our motivation. It's simple and straightforward. We're doing this as a means of protecting our employees around the world, and we're doing it because of what happened to Dan Millar.”

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

MOHAMMED OMAR AL-FAYEZ sat inconspicuously at a backroom table in the Oasis Café in the Iranian capital city of Teheran with Saad bin Laden and Mullah Orani Khamiz. This was a trio of considerable influence in a movement whose primary goal was world domination by the most radical Islamic leadership. Al-Fayez was second in command of Taliban forces gathering new strength in the mountains bordering neighboring Pakistan. He was an ethnic Pashtun and advocated nothing less than

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the strictest interpretation of Sharia law. Given a choice, he would have seen every woman in every country around the world covered from head to toe in a burqa, hidden from the world, deprived of an education, circumcised, and forbidden from any type of career pursuits. “A good beginning,” he would call it.

Saad bin Laden was considered by some to be Al Qaeda's most important military advisor. He was ruthless, brutal, and streetwise.

Imam Khamiz was a member of Iran's Supreme Islamic Shi'ite Council. He was Ayatollah Khomeini's personal military advisor and a man abundantly wealthy thanks to kickbacks and political favors accumulated over the previous two decades. The three men were talking heatedly about Iraq and how best to turn the turmoil eating away at the country to their advantage.

“The most important battle is that of Baghdad and the rising conflict between Sunni and Shia,” bin Laden was saying, his elbows anchored to the table. “Everyday our explosives instill more and more fear in the people. Every day the government grows more and more impotent. And every day the infidel Americans are closer to putting their tails between their legs and running home. The one thing we need to push the situation closer to the brink is more explosive devices. Many more.”

“Blessings upon you both for the many good deeds you perform in the name of Islam,” the Imam Khamiz said calmly as he put down his glass of tea. “You must understand that our factory owners have families to provide for, and they are

entitled to a small profit after they pay their workers. I'm sure you would both agree."

The imam waited for one of the men to refute this claim, but neither did. So he went on, saying, "Now you, al-Fayez, have not paid for our aid in a year, despite your assurances to the contrary. And you, Saad bin Laden, have paid nothing since Ramadan. Am I mistaken?"

Again, neither associate protested. "Our government cannot continue to provide for your movements without the compensation necessary. It is impossible."

"With all due respect, Imam Khamiz, have you forgotten the humiliation heaped upon us these last years?" demanded al Fayez angrily. "We have been driven from our homes and sacred Mosques and now live in the mountains fighting the infidel as if we were animals. I know the Prophet, peace be upon him, would favor our plea for more arms and more munitions. When we retake our country, we will pay your arms manufacturers with the profits reaped from the sale of abandoned American military equipment and from the ransoms we will collect. You must help. Our cause is your cause. And when we win, we will be as one nation, and no one would dare attack us. You must help. It is your responsibility in the name of Allah."

The man from Al Qaeda was calmer but no less adamant. "Our goals are the same, imam. We, too, wish to unite Iraq under your sacred flag. You know that. And you can foresee the benefits to Iran. We will pay you what we owe from ransom monies we are collecting today and from oil profits we will reap tomorrow. You have my word."

"I hear your pleas, my friends," the imam said. "And I will present them to the Ayatollah forthwith."

"How soon?" the Al Qaeda leader asked. "Our needs are urgent."

"If all goes well, I will give you his answer in two day's time. Let us pray that the Prophet, peace be upon Him, would approve."

## **BASRAH, IRAQ**

LATE ON A moonless night, five Arab men, their faces covered with lengths of head dress, hid behind rubble alongside a potholed dirt road not far from Basrah, the Persian Gulf gateway in the south of Iraq. They held captive a bound and gagged British Army sergeant named Keith Price. Despite the passing of a sandstorm, the men were patient. They knew that sooner or later a British search party would be along. The British were predictable that way: every man accounted for; no man left behind. It was a philosophy that played perfectly into the hands of guerilla fighters who were loathe to look their enemy straight in the

eye.

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A mile and a half up the road, two other members of the ambush team were concealed behind a broken down bus watching for any signs of activity. They carried AK-47s, water bottles, and a bulky portable phone that buzzed suddenly.

The senior member of the ambush team answered.

“Are you in position?”

“Yes, Ahmed, we are.”

“And the prisoner?”

“His legs have been broken. We have filled his mouth with stones and sewn his lips together.”

“Is the sled prepared?”

“Yes, Ahmed.”

“Good. Call us the moment the infidels pass your position.”

A half hour later, the phone buzzed again, propelling the men into action. They knew their job down to the last detail and relished what they were about to accomplish. Two of them positioned the makeshift sled along the side of the road where it could not be missed. The other three lifted Sergeant Price in their arms, carrying him toward the road, and laid him atop the sled. They secured him to the sled using lengths of rusted chain, and then disguised the sled and the apparatus attached to the bottom by placing rocks around the base.

By the time the British troop carrier rounded the corner a quarter of a mile away, the trap had been set, and the guerillas were well hidden among the rubble again, watching. When the troop carrier spotted a man frantically waving his arms lying along the side of the road, they drew to a halt. Two of them jumped out and moved with extreme caution toward the man on the sled. When they recognized he was one of theirs by the battle fatigues he was wearing, they broke into a sprint.

“He’s one of ours,” one of them called back to the troop carrier.

Sergeant Keith Price was barely alive, but he did everything he could to warn his comrades away. He shook his head and waved at them frantically. He tried calling out, but it was impossible. The first of his rescuers knelt down beside him.

“Hang on, man. Hang on. We’ll get you out of here,” he said.

Sergeant Price shook his head. Tears rolled down his cheeks. The man at his side started tossing aside the stones pinning Price to the sled. Suddenly his eyes widened, and Price knew why. He had spotted the tell-tale wiring of the bomb. Without a second’s hesitation, he turned to his companion and screamed, “My God! It’s a device! We better.....”

It was too late. By then, Ahmed had activated his cell phone, and it was the signal from the phone that detonated the device, causing an explosion that sent concussions through the ground for miles and ended the lives of three brave British soldiers.

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## 5 - PERSONNEL

### DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING

ALAN SAT IN his office facing the large picture window behind his desk, staring out through the light drizzle but not seeing it. He was thinking about his meeting with Imam Aziz. It wasn’t that he was dissatisfied with his last conversation with Aziz it was the answers to other unasked questions that he needed to resolve.

Alan only knew one way to deal with the shortfalls of life, big or small, and that was head on. In this case, pick up the phone, call the man, and ask for a repeat performance at his convenience, of course, and with all respect. Convinced it was the necessary thing to do, he used his cell phone and dialed the imam’s private line.

When Aziz answered, Alan said, “My good friend Mohammed. It’s Alan. Alan Davis. Did I catch you at a bad time?”

“Not at all, Alan. I can only assume you took my advice and are ready to convert,” the imam said, punctuating the words with good-natured sarcasm.

“Nothing so urgent, I’m afraid,” Alan joked in return. And then he said, “I hate to inconvenience you, Mohammed, but I have a couple more questions related to the subject of our last visit and was hoping I could stop by later today for a short visit—perhaps at your Mosque?”

“Of course Alan, you’re always welcome, but why not come to my home? It’s right next door to the Mosque. I’ll be in for the rest of the day.” Imam Aziz made certain that Alan had the correct address, and Alan said he would come by on

his way home from the office.

As it turned out, the house was not hard to find. Once Alan entered the modest neighborhood of like-designed Cape Cods in Levittown, he used the pencil-thin minaret towering above the mosque as his bellwether.

The houses were all built low to the ground with meagerly pitched roofs, as if Mother Nature would at some unsuspecting moment suddenly try to unearth them with hurricane-force winds. The imam's house was easily identified by the warm brown paint on the exterior, the absence of flowers or flowering shrubs, and the long shadow of the minaret.

Alan had opted for his own Mercedes today instead of a chauffeur-driven limo, which he eased into the curb in front of the brown house. He walked to the front door, and when he didn't see a doorbell, settled for the old-fashioned knocker.

Imam Mohammed Aziz answered the door himself. He wore a floor-length robe over a slightly protruding paunch. On his head, a black turban was wrapped in a flat, circular pattern that showed a fringe of white hair. Round wire-rimmed glasses perched on a truly Semitic nose.

"Ah! Alan, my friend, please come in," he said with a genuine smile. "How nice of you to drive out here to my humble digs."

Alan took the man's outstretched hand somewhat reluctantly knowing the imam's hand always seemed sweaty. "Good evening, Mohammed. Thanks for seeing me again."

"Come in, come in. Tea?"

"Tea sounds great. Thank you."

Alan followed Mohammed Aziz into a small sitting room. There was a porcelain serving set resting upon a small coffee table and two over-stuffed chairs. The imam gestured to the nearest of these. "Sit, please. Make yourself comfortable."

The tea was already made, and Mohammed Aziz poured for them both. "So, other than the pleasure of my stimulating company, tell me what brings you here this fine evening."

Alan sipped his tea, complimented the imam on its taste, and looked across the table at his host. "I have a couple more questions for

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you that have come up since we last met, and I was hoping you'd

indulge me,” Alan admitted.

“Of course, Alan. Fire away,” Aziz said.

“Just so you know, I’ve asked Aly some of the same questions, but I wanted your thoughts too.”

“You have my full attention,” the Muslim cleric assured him.

Alan wanted to phrase his question without putting the imam in an uncomfortable place, but he didn’t want to mince words either. He asked, “What do you think the average American Muslim believes about Al Qaeda and its activities?”

Mohammed Aziz raised his shoulders, shrugging slightly. “Probably that Al Qaeda misinterprets the Qur’an to suit themselves and their purposes and to justify their actions; that they’re basically criminals who murder innocent people, mostly Muslims.”

Alan pressed the point. “Are any of these killings in keeping with Qur’anic teachings?”

“No, they are not,” the Muslim cleric answered without hesitation but also without amplification.

“Do first-generation American Muslims share the same opinions about Al Qaeda as second- and third-generation Muslim Americans?”

“That’s a very good question,” Aziz said. “Personally, I think not. First-generation Muslims tend to cling to the popular ways and beliefs of their homeland. Second- and third-generation Muslims have adjusted to our modern society. If anything, they recognize the opportunities that lie before them in America. On the other hand, many ordinary Muslims view the ‘war on terror,’ as our current president is so fond of calling it, as a war against their religion and their values.”

“I see. And do you yourself feel members of Al Qaeda should be put to death?”

“The guilty ones should be severely punished,” Aziz said.

This interested Alan. He wanted the imam to qualify this statement without feeling he’d been thrown into a debate. “And what is guilt then? Is it a violation of some societal code or a set of ethical standards?”

“Can it not be both?” Aziz answered almost rhetorically.

“What about the Ten Commandments, for example?” Alan asked. “The way I understand it, Moses is recognized as a prophet as much by Muslims as he is by Christians and Jews. Given that, are the Commandments accepted by Islam?”

“The Qur’an does not codify the law, Alan,” the imam answered, sounding almost like a politician to Alan’s ears. “The Sharia is the accepted nonsecular law of Islam.”

“But isn’t Islamic law as set forth in the Sharia based on the Qur’an?” Alan asked calmly.

“It is. And as such it closely parallels the Ten Commandments in many ways.”

“If that’s so, then how can Al Qaeda claim an obligation to kill all infidels? Then they justify their actions by referencing the Qur’an, but only the Arabic version. Do you see that as hypocritical?”

“It’s quite simple. They interpret the sacred scriptures to suit their needs and to justify their actions; or rather, they misinterpret them,” the imam said.

Both men reached for their tea. Mohammed Aziz had not objected to Alan’s questions, but he had also answered in generalities. Alan wanted to pin him down if possible, so he asked, “And what about the seventy virgins a martyr is supposed to be rewarded with when he’s whisked off to paradise after killing himself and a couple of dozen innocent people?”

“This is absolutely not true, of course,” the imam answered easily. “It’s a recruiting tool. Can you think of a better way to convince a bunch of impressionable young men to commit suicide? Sick, but effective, I’m afraid.”

“On that we agree,” Alan said. He refilled their teacups, and both industry tycoon and Muslim cleric drank, one pondering, the other waiting. And then Alan set aside his cup and asked, “Let me ask you this, Mohammed. Are Christians and Jews infidels?”

“No, of course not,” the imam said quickly, “and they’re not pagans either. They are as monotheistic as we Muslims.”

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Alan sat back. He expected the imam to ask, “Why this question?” but he didn’t. He seemed perfectly comfortable having shared his point of view, and Alan was inwardly grateful. They finished their tea in silence.

“Well, I’ve taken up too much of your time, Mohammed. Thank you.” Alan arose and patted the imam on his upper left arm avoiding the proffered hand of the imam and said, “Dinner some time soon?” as he stepped quickly outside.

“That is the best idea I’ve heard all day, young man. Have Aly call me,” the imam cried out as Alan had about reached his car and waved in response.

## CASABLANCA, MOROCCO

IT WAS TWILIGHT in Casablanca. The last vestiges of the sun's omnipotent presence faded upon the western horizon, leaving traces of silver where minutes before gold and pink had reigned.

Inside a garage adjacent to an alleyway stinking of garbage, penury, and hopelessness, two men in Muslim dress worked relentlessly at a poorly lit bench creating a tool of destruction neither completely understood.

The first was called Mustafa Kifta, a man who believed in the rewards of paradise without question. He was pouring over sheets of written instructions taken from the Al Qaeda handbook as if the words, as confusing as they were, had been handed to them by Allah himself. His older brother, Ibrahim, a zealot who believed the quickest way to paradise was to kill as many infidels as possible in the shortest amount of time, worked feverishly over the device, a small screwdriver in his hand and a box of crude tools open at his side.

“We must make haste Ibrahim,” Mustafa said, beads of sweat pearling along his brow. “The great ship sails at midnight.”

“Yes, my brother, you've reminded me a dozen times in the last hour. But this must be done right. We follow the manual step for step and try not to blow ourselves up in the process,” Ibrahim told him patiently. “And when the time is right, we will make our mark on the world and win the favor of Allah forever.”

“The truth is, I don't really care about the virgins awaiting us in paradise, my brother. I am happy with my wife and child.”

“Who knows?” said Ibrahim laughing. “Our deed commands such courage and faith that Allah will probably reward me with more virgins than even my imagination can fathom.”

“Wishful thinking, my brother. Wishful thinking.”

The Kifta brothers carried their detonator down to the docks. They had already loaded the bow end of their fishing trawler with enough explosives to topple a good-sized building. Now, they were left with the task of connecting wires from a twelve-volt battery to the safety kill switch and then running them from the detonator to the explosives. They were excited and scared. More than anything, they were committed.

“We drop our mooring at 11:15 exactly,” Ibrahim told his younger brother. “That will leave us enough time to meet the great ship of the infidels in the deep waters beyond the breakwater.”



“Yes,” was all his brother said in reply.

The “great ship,” as they called it, was in fact the mammoth cruise ship *Jupiter*. It was scheduled to leave the port of Casablanca at midnight. The vessel’s destination, with a crew and passenger list of nearly three thousand three hundred human beings aboard, was the port of Gibraltar.

The brothers’ plan was simple. Well, it wasn’t their plan, but it was truly simple. They were to crash their tiny trawler into the hull of the cruise ship at full throttle, blowing a hole in its hull the size of an elephant, and sending the ship and its passengers to a watery grave. If everything went well they would undoubtedly be heroes to the terrorists of the world.

“Heroes, not martyrs,” Ibrahim reminded his brother.

The trawler was twenty-five years old. It was not equipped with an autopilot. The plan was for Ibrahim to hold the boat’s steering wheel until they were a hundred yards from the vessel, then lock the rudder; they had practiced the maneuver a dozen times, and experience told them a hundred yards would allow them enough time to activate the kill switch and jump to safety while their trawler, with its rudder locked, could only proceed directly into *Jupiter’s* side. It was perfect. The man who trained

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them and convinced them of the merits of the plan had said exactly that. “It is a perfect plan, and you are the perfect team to see it through.”

“It is time, my brother,” Ibrahim said, starting the engine and steering the boat into the harbor. “To sea the brothers Kifta sail—and to glory.”

“I am feeling truly wonderful,” Mustafa said as the wind cooled his face. “We will have accomplished that which most thought impossible, Ibrahim. This is truly Jihad. And our actions will gain us a new respect from our fellow Jihadists.”

*Jupiter’s* many passengers were giddy from hours of sightseeing and enjoying the nightlife, courtesy of Casablanca’s world-famous hospitality. The mammoth vessel slipped away easily from the dock with the help of both bow and stern thrusters and then headed to sea. Its main deck was filled with people enjoying the sea breeze as much as Mustafa Kifta who was not a mile away.

The great ship crept along the harbor channel and gradually picked up speed. The vessel was in good company, as colorful fishing boats of every size moved in and out of the harbor, their running lights twinkling like stars dancing across the water. Some of the boats were coming home, fat with fish, while others were anticipating a bountiful night.

The cruise ship passed the southern breakwater, and nothing but black water stretched out before it for miles. Had anyone taken notice, they would have seen one particular fishing boat that seemed on a collision course with the huge ship's starboard side.

Eventually, one woman noticed. She pointed, curious but unalarmed. "Look at that," she said. The man next to her shook his head as if fisher-men and stupidity went hand in hand.

The small trawler closed quickly and had approached to within a hundred yards of the great ship when a flash of blinding light rose from the sea an instant before a tremendous explosion caused the cruise ship to lurch sideways. The concussion knocked a hundred passengers off their feet and threw others against bulkheads and hatchways and guardrails. The ship's medical staff would remain busy for the rest of the night, and their arrival in Gibraltar was sure to be delayed, but there were no fatalities, and the ship sustained virtually no damage.

Word got around the back streets of Casablanca and other havens of terrorism.

"Have you heard?" One man was heard saying to another, "Rumor has it the Kifta brothers were trying to sink the great ship and kill all the infidels."

"Instead, they killed themselves." His companion shook his head. "Something must have gone wrong."

"True. But they are martyrs anyway, and no one can take that away from them."

"Yes," the other replied. "Martyrs."

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

NO ONE WAS irreplaceable; Alan knew that, but filling Dan Millar's position in the company and finding someone with his leadership skills was proving far more difficult than Alan had anticipated, his personal involvement notwithstanding. Headhunters and corporate recruiters had produced two dozen candidates they called ideal.

DII's director of human resources, Harry Neumann, had whittled the number down to three. Alan had interviewed them personally, and had dismissed each one of them out of hand. Instead, he had decided to throw Dan's deputy assistant to the wolves to see if he came out alive. If he did, Alan might give him the nod.

His name was Tim Pollack. He was part nerd, part human computer, and part prince charming; bright, personable, and a quick learner. Those were qualities Alan insisted on, but were they enough?

It was true that Dan had been grooming Tim to sit at the executive vice president's desk one day any way, so why not put him to the test.

The kid knocked at Alan's office door and waited. "Get in here," Alan ordered. He had decided on the rough and tumble approach to see how a twenty-six-year-old with a Harvard MBA would react.

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"Good morning, Mr. Davis," Tim said, apparently unfazed by his boss's brusque manner.

"How are you at taking tests, Tim?"

"Pardon me, sir?"

"Are you a betting man?"

"It's been a couple of years since Las Vegas, Mr. Davis, but I got out of there without getting married."

"Good. Then call me Alan."

"Alan. Thank you, I will," Tim replied, though not with a great deal of comfort. Then he filled his lungs with air and said, "I have the quotes for the repairs we'll need to implement for the Riyadh refinery, sir. Do you want to go over them with me?"

"Hell no, Tim. I don't want to go over them with you; I want to see how you handle it. I'm not paying you to talk things over. I'm paying you to make decisions and take action. If you mess it up you'll fail the test, and I may have to chew you out or kick your butt from here to the first floor, and it won't matter how many MBAs you have." Alan bit back a smile.

"Thanks for the confidence, Mr. Davis—Alan. Consider it done." Tim tucked the papers under his arm and prepared to leave. "By the way, word has it we may be looking at a couple of new business opportunities in the Arab world—anything I should know about?"

Everyone in the company had been speculating about the activities on the eighth floor and the new tenant, Millar Import and Export Co., that Marie Chavez and Brian Hall had been in and out of so many times. But Alan wasn't going to fan the fire by involving the likes of Tim Pollack.

"I'm not real keen on speculation, Tim. So let's focus on those quotes, shall we, and get that refinery back up and running, okay?"

“I’m on it, sir. Thank you.”

“Got a minute, Alan?” Harry Neumann said, peeking into Alan’s open door not twenty minutes later.

“I was just thinking about you, Harry. Come on in. Sit down,” Alan replied. This wasn’t a lie; Alan had been thinking about Adala on and off all day, and here in the flesh was the man in charge of their advertising campaign.

“Sorry to bust in on you, but we’ve been bombarded with calls and e-mails ever since we placed our ads for Arabic speaking people. I thought you’d want an update.”

“Excellent. Let’s hear it.” Alan leaned across his desk.

“We have a list of 612 inquiries already. More, actually, but a lot of the callers have refused to give their names.”

“That’s amazing,” said Alan, his surprise genuine.

“And what’s even more amazing is that we haven’t even tallied the written inquiries from our PO Box. We’ll have the results of that by this evening.”

“How are you handling the review process?”

“The answering service is keeping up with the calls just fine. I’ve got two shifts of three people each from my office sorting things out. So that’s under control. But I have feeling I’ll need some temporary help on the written stuff. I have our temp service ready to send over some experienced HR people once I get a count on the written responses,” Harry said. If he sounded slightly overwhelmed, there was also an element of excitement in his voice. “I say we keep up the advertising because we know we’ll probably end up rejecting most of these guys once we sort through their applications.”

“You’re right,” Alan said. “Get me that list by tomorrow morning, will you Harry? Let’s say Eight thirty. I know I’m putting the squeeze on, but I’ve got a meeting at 10:00, and our recruiting efforts are on the agenda.”

“No problem. Eight thirty.”

“Thanks for a good job, Harry,” Alan said. “Look for a case of Merlot in your Christmas stocking this year.”

Everyone in the company knew that Harry Neumann was a wine connoisseur of sorts and despised all the Merlot blends. “You really know how to hurt a guy, boss. Thanks a lot.”

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### KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

AT 3:10 THAT afternoon, the Associated Press released a bulletin that three American contractors had been kidnapped in the Afghan capital city of Kabul. The Taliban had already claimed responsibility.

According to a statement released by the terrorist organization, the three men were still alive. They would be tried under Sharia law for actions meant to undermine Islam and denigrate the teachings of the Qu'ran, this a result apparently of the schools the contractors were building in previously uninhabitable sections of the city. The kidnappings were a direct response to the bombing of the Shah Gush mosque in northern Afghanistan that had resulted in the deaths of fifteen Shia Muslims, including revered Taliban leader Mohammed Omar al-Fayez.

The U.S. Army command could not confirm al Fayez's death because the dead were still being removed from the rubble left behind by the bombing and because those bodies that had been recovered were virtually unrecognizable. Nonetheless, an Army spokesman speaking under a promise of anonymity believed the terrorist leader was in fact dead.

That was exactly what the Taliban wanted the Army and the media to believe, though nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, the terrorist leader was safe and secure and issuing orders much as he had been for the past decade.

"This is the best possible news. The infidels must believe I am dead," al Fayez said to his closest advisors that same night from a safe house outside of Kabul. "I cannot sleep in a different place every night of the year. It's impossible for me to continue the work of Allah and be hunted like a dog."

"On that we agree," the man sitting to his right said. "But we still have three hostages to contend with. Do we use them as bargaining chips or examples?"

"We make examples of them," al Fayez said. "Wait two days and behead them. Until then, treat them well. After all, we are not animals. When justice has been served, place their remains where their infidel comrades will find them."

"As you wish," the man said. "And what of your plans? Has the house in Kandahar been made ready?"

"It has," al Fayez said. "And now that I am no longer a hunted man, I will take on a new name for the infidels, and the Kandahar house will become my new base of operations."

## DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING

THE EIGHTH FLOOR offices of the Millar Trading Company and the covert gathering place for the Adala leadership was teeming with activity when Alan called them together in their refurbished conference room.

Brian carried a mug of coffee in and loosened his tie. Herb had just returned from France and looked as if he had slept the entire week in a rumped suit. Marie was a picture of loveliness and efficiency, a rare combination that all three men registered as particularly attractive.

“Good week?” Alan said.

“Very productive,” Brian said, a sentiment shared by Marie and Herb.

“Good. Let me bring you up to speed on our applicants,” Alan began. He needed a deep sip of his steaming hot coffee and then took in the members of his team individually. “It’s going better than either Harry or I expected. We have over 800 names already; all supposedly fitting the most elementary aspects of our criteria.”

“Eight hundred? Wow!” Marie said.

“Wow is right,” Herb agreed. “That’s outstanding.”

“Well, it’s a start. They still have to be vetted and screened. We’ll obviously need help with that task, and who knows what the results will be? Still, the results are impressive. The question now seems to be this. How large of an operation do we want?” He paused a moment, sipping his coffee and letting the question settle. Then he continued, saying, “Perhaps we should leave that question until we hear what everyone has to say. Brian? Why don’t you begin?”

Brian dug into his briefcase for a thin file folder. He passed a single sheet of paper to each of his teammates. “I spent a good part of the week

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looking for instructors: guys who can teach our applicants everything from infiltration to extraction; how to prepare mentally; how to perform physically; how to face death without caving; how to stay patient when the enemy seems to be closing in; how to play the game; but most of all, how to win the game. You know how many guys fit that bill?”

“A short list, my friend?” Herb said, knowing full well how short the list would be.

“It’s not just finding the right candidates; it’s finding candidates that are both

capable and available. I talked to fifteen possibles. They're all right there."

He allowed them a moment to peruse the list: three former Army Rangers, two Navy Seals, a former West Point drill instructor, two former members of the Israeli Mossad, an MI-6 agent two years into retirement, and six mercenaries with experience ranging from the Sudan to Bosnia.

"I don't like the idea of mercenaries," Alan said dubiously. "They're just guns for hire. Their God is the almighty dollar."

"Well, the truth is, mercenaries have the advantage of being totally objective," Brian reminded him. "But I've narrowed it down to three candidates, and none of the six mercenaries made the cut. Captain Jamie Whyte, the Navy Seal, can instruct in virtually all the areas we require. He'd be ideal. Same for Major Yitzhak Hardi of the Mossad. Not the most objective of the group, but committed. Dr. Peter Flue is my first choice. He's West Point, a tactical genius, and an expert in counter terrorism. We couldn't go wrong with any of the bunch."

"Yes, indeed." Herb said.

"Then we make an offer to all three," Alan said, "and let's make it worth their while, Brian."

Alan turned his gaze on Herb Bentz. "So how did you find Paris, Herb?"

"Paris was as expensive and as romantic as ever. Unfortunately, I was there without the benefit of female company, so who cares." He heard Marie chuckle and rolled his eyes. "Sad, isn't it? On the other hand, our intelligence meeting was a good one. There were representatives from forty-three countries. They were all pumped up after the Air France bombing and making lofty promises about being more open in exchanging information in the future. We'll see. The big guys were all there. The Russian FSB. Our CIA, MI-6, France's DGSE, The Mossad. I'm pretty confident they'll all pitch in on our operation, even if it's on the sly; however, there was a consensus among the men I talked to that we'll need two assassins for every target."

"Explain," Alan said.

"First, we'll need a front man, let's call him an OWL; someone who goes in ahead of time and gets everything set up for the arrival of the second man, also an OWL. Both men, however, are trained assassins. The second man comes in under the radar, very low key. He establishes contact with the first OWL, and together they plan the assassination. The man actually performing the assassination we'll call the HAWK.

When the plan is decided, the OWLs decide which of them, or perhaps both of

them, is to perform the killing. Whatever the decision, the OWL or OWLs selected are then referred to as HAWK or HAWKs. All HAWKs must be extracted immediately. All OWLs, if undetected, may remain undercover for future assignments.

“Makes sense,” Brian said. “Makes a lot of sense.”

“We can go into it more at our next meeting because I’m still putting together the logistics,” Herb told them, “but it’s worth keeping in mind.”

“Okay. Let’s do that,” Alan said. And then he turned the meeting over to Marie.

“How are things on the real estate end?”

“I’ve been meeting with our real estate department here, but they haven’t come up with a thing. I think it’s safe to say that Manhattan is not in the cards. The training site we’re talking about may require housing for as many as twenty-five. We’ll need instruction facilities, housing, equipment and storage, and remote facilities for things like explosives instruction and combat simulation. So far nothing we’ve found fits the bill,” she admitted. “But I have an idea. We could look out west where there’s a bit more space to spread out. I think we’ll need 10,000 acres. That sounds like

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a lot, but not if we’re talking about places like New Mexico or Texas. We use tents for housing and instruction. We can rent a couple of motor homes. We can also rent portable toilets and all the furniture and equipment we need. Ten thousand acres is enough for things like firing ranges, obstacle courses, and teaching explosives.”

“Good thinking,” Alan agreed.

“The property should be at least three miles from the nearest neighbor. Further is better. We discourage visitors and cover our tracks by putting up signage that says something like ‘DANGER—EXPLOSIVES TESTING AREA—TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED—XYZ CHEMICAL CO.’—that kind of verbiage.”

“In other words, scare anyone who gets within spitting distance,” Herb offered.

“Right you are, Mr. Bentz,” Marie added with a curt smile. Then she looked over at Alan. “If you like this approach, we would be looking at Texas, Nevada, Arizona, or New Mexico given things like weather, proximity to neighbors, and general privacy issues.”

Alan was already nodding. “Let’s move on that, Marie. Priority one.”



“As long as we’re moving in that direction,” Brian said, “why don’t I put in a call to an old friend of mine in Texas. Jonathan Byner. He’s an oil guy with probably 25,000 acres of land outside of El Paso. He calls it his private hunting preserve, but I know for a fact that he hasn’t picked up a gun in ten years. The land is just sitting there as far as I know. If he’s open to renting it, Marie and I could fly down there this weekend and have a look.”

“Byner? I know him.” Alan said.

“Byner Resources,” Brian said. “Not the nicest guy on the planet but a die-hard patriot. He tried running for Congress years back, and even his fellow Texans thought he was too hardboiled.”

“Two problems,” Herb said. “Will he keep his mouth shut, and will we be able to handle transportation to some no-man’s land in Texas?”

“I’ll know the answer to both those questions by the end of the week-end,” Brian promised. “If I’m not convinced, we’ll look elsewhere. What do you think, Alan?”

“I like it; let’s give it a shot. Call me from El Paso,” Alan said. “All right. So let’s back up a little and talk about our assassins. Let’s assume Herb is right and figure we’ll need two assassins for every target. The question then is how many targets will we have at one time?”

“A maximum of ten,” said Herb without a moment’s hesitation. “The other option we should consider is to pick a single target, someone important enough to have an impact but vulnerable. That way, we don’t get in over our heads. We have a chance to learn how the game is played.”

“You make a lot of sense, Herb. After all, we can always expand our operations,” Alan said. “How does that sound, Brian? One target to begin, a maximum of ten in the planning phase.”

“You’ve got my vote,” Brian said.

“Good. And for now, I want you to take a leave from your security chief position. I want you to go full time on Adala.”

Brian nodded. “I’ll have my deputy take up the slack. He’ll do fine.”

“Good. Let’s get our instructors on board this week, if possible,” Alan added, “and Herb, I’d like for you to bill DII for your consulting time and all your expenses. Let’s start by getting our recruits in order. Marie, you’ve earned the title of director of strategic services and the salary and benefits that go along with it. Hopefully we can make a deal on that El Paso property this weekend.”

“I’m flattered, chief. Thank you,” she said, sharing a wink and nod with Brian.

Alan was already on his feet. “Until Monday,” he said.

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## 6 - OWLS AND HAWKS

### AIRBORNE TO NEW YORK

EVEN AT THIRTY thousand feet, cutting through the smooth sea of air and with nothing else to do, Alan wasn't given to reminiscing. He didn't think of himself as an overly sentimental man because he knew that today, this moment, was all he had. Nothing could be done about the yesterdays, today had to yield the plans for tomorrow and satisfy its own demands. It was his job as a human being to make the most of it, to enjoy the people he knew and loved, and to do his best to make his little slice of the world the most productive and creative it could be. He knew there was nothing as permanent and constant as change. Change wasn't something a man fought; change always presented opportunities. It was something a man could use to his advantage.

Alan's long flight back from Houston found him reviewing the contracts he had just negotiated. The contract negotiations in Houston had been spirited, exactly the way Alan liked them, and the oldest man at the table was an attorney whose father had been a golfing buddy of Alan's great-grandfather, a towering, robust man named Jefferson Davis.

Jefferson was forty-two years old when he founded Davis International Industries in 1920. Back then, the company was called Western Drilling. The company grew and expanded, but the family never relinquished control, not a single share's worth. Drilling soon became only one of many energy-oriented enterprises they were involved in. They built refineries. They owned transport ships. They laid pipeline. They were totally devoted to the world's need for energy. Almost from the beginning, they set aside substantial resources for the maintenance of research and development in the area of alternative sources of energy.

The business was handed down from father to son. Alan was the last surviving son. He threw himself into his work right from the beginning, learning the business from the ground floor up, just as his dad had done. Although most people thought he was in the oil business, in his mind and in the minds of his predecessors, Davis International was in the energy business. He was quick to point out that, although today it was primarily oil, for ecological and economical reasons tomorrow it would surely be another source and Davis International would fill the needs.

There were always women around—he had the looks and the personality, and of course, there was the money—but Alan never met anyone who could fully capture his attention. And then Dan introduced him to his cousin Aly.

Aludra Millar, nicknamed Aly, was not merely beautiful and alluring; she was captivating. She was as kind and honest as she was intelligent and funny. Alan the businessman and entrepreneur didn't interest her nearly as much as Alan the man. Nothing could have been more refreshing. Alan could easily let down his guard in her presence and laugh at himself, something he rarely did.

In Lebanon, where Aly was born, she lived with her parents in the heart of Beirut, a place of constant turmoil. Like her mother before her, she was raised a Muslim. She studied the Qur'an with as much vigor as she did Arabic and English. She could speak both without a trace of an accent.

She was seventeen when breast cancer felled her mother. Devastated, her father, James Millar, an English literature professor at American University in Beirut, decided to return to the States. He accepted a professorship at New York University in Manhattan because it suited his esoteric teaching style. Aly enrolled at NYU, not because her father taught there, but because it was one of the only schools in the area with a comprehensive Islamic religious studies program.

She was in her first year of graduate school, then focusing on Muslim studies in the context of a capitalist society, when her cousin arranged for

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them to meet at a company function. It was all very clandestine. Aly didn't believe in blind dates. Alan didn't need his former college room-mate fixing him up.

To say they hit it off would be a gross understatement. He was the brash young businessman bearing the company's name. She was the graduate student who didn't believe a man's position meant a pauper's penny if the man couldn't articulate his principles.

“So what drives you, Mr. Davis?” she had asked him pointedly. “Power, money, position? All of the above?”

Alan had held her eye and calmly replied, “None of the above really. Those are byproducts of hard work perhaps, and I have nothing against hard work and the success it brings,” he had said. “The question for me is more a matter of figuring out how I can make the world a better place in which to live. Do I let my head do the talking and hope my heart follows along, or do I lead with my heart and let my head figure out how to get there? Give me door number two any day.”

That was the beginning. Three months later, they were engaged. Those three months were the most unforgettable of his life. Well, except for every day since, he thought with a wistful smile.

Alan gazed out the window as the company plane began its descent into New York's LaGuardia surveying the thousands of rooftops below and the vehicles filling the streets and avenues. He thought how different the vista would be without ample amounts of affordable energy.

## **AIRBORNE TO EL PASO**

WHILE THEIR BOSS was headed home in one company plane, Brian Hall and Marie Chavez were flying into El Paso aboard another. They had one weekend to investigate the proposed training site before the next meeting of the Adala planning group at Millar Import and Export Company. They only stopped in El Paso long enough to rent a Jeep Cherokee, grab a couple of tacos and a small cooler with a stock of bottled water and Corona beer. The hunting ranch owned by Jonathan Bryer, an old friend of Brian's, filled an entire valley 125 miles northeast of the city. Rugged and remote, it seemed to be nearly perfect for their purposes.

Marie and Brian parked on a hillock overlooking the valley. Mesquite, sage, and scrub oak stretched out before them for mile after mile.

Marie, a city girl born and bred, shook her head as if some sadistic god had plopped them on the dark side of the moon just for grins. "My heavens, Mr. Hall, your friend calls this a hunting refuge?" she said bleakly. "You sure about that?"

"All 25,000 acres of it."

"Okay, as hard as that is for me to believe, let me ask you this. What clear-thinking creature would actually find this suitable for habitation other than the occasional snake or lizard?"

Brian chuckled. He put an arm around her shoulder. "Open your New York eyes, girl. Look out there. It's beautiful."

"Beautiful, huh? All right, for the sake of our relationship, I'll go as far as to say it's daunting, if not awe-inspiring—as long as the ranch has a shower, clean sheets, and cable television."

"The cable television might be a bit of stretch," he admitted, "but there is a ranch house, an airstrip, a 20,000-gallon fuel storage facility, well water a plenty, a power generator, and a bunkhouse Jon says will hold twenty men comfortably. And, a bonus we should definitely not overlook, the nearest neighbor is a good five miles back down the road."

“Sounds good,” Marie admitted, “and he’s willing to rent it out no questions asked?”

“As he put it, at a price we won’t be able to refuse. He’s really interested in having us fix up the place, do whatever repairs are needed, and generally make the place habitable again.”

“Well then, let’s take the tour, shall we?” Marie suggested. “Let’s get some pictures and take some notes.”

They climbed into the Jeep again. Brian turned up the air conditioning, flipped the tops on two cold beers, and started down the road into the valley. Unless they were missing something, he thought, Adala had found a home.

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## **MEDINA, SAUDI ARABIA**

AT HER MODEST mud brick home in the holy city of Medina, Rida bin Mafti sat looking at her only son, Ishmar. Her expression betrayed a melding of both joy and sorrow, the way a well-painted seascape might portray both beauty and foreboding at the same time. Her sorrow demonstrated a clear and thorough understanding that she would never see him again in this world. The source of her joy was the fervent and unmistakable hope that he would soon be in Paradise.

She reached out and gently stroked his face.

“I am so happy you have made the video of your last will, my son,” she said of the practice now widely used by the misled youth of the Wahhabi schools, “For as long as I live, I will be able to view your precious face and hear the sound of your voice.”

“I rejoice in your comfort, my mother,” Ishmar said, sounding far more mature than his seventeen years. He kissed her cheek reassuringly. “I will be seeing your face and your smile at the very moment of my martyrdom.”

“I pray you will remember me in Paradise, my son,” she said, “and I pray I will join you soon, if that is the wish of Allah.”

“That will be a glorious day, my mother.”

“Have you packed all you will need for your trip to Baghdad?” she asked maternally.

“Yes. Everything is in order. I must leave now if I’m going to reach the bus

station in time.”

They embraced for the last time, and Rida bin Mafti watched her son until he was just a shadow among all shadows in a world she dared not question.

## **LAGUARDIA AIRPORT, NEW YORK**

ALAN CALLED ALY’S office even as his plane taxied along the tarmac.

“Hello, Professor. It’s your most ardent admirer,” he said.

“And how was my most ardent admirer’s trip?” Aly replied, her voice a perfect blend of sensuality and reserve.

“Lonely. And I’d like nothing better than to take the most gorgeous academic the world of higher education has even known out to dinner this evening. Can I talk you into that?” asked Alan.

“I’d love it,” she admitted, “I’ll meet you at the condo. I imagine we could both use a shower and a change of clothes.”

“See you in twenty minutes.”

## **NEW YORK, N. Y.**

IT WAS A few minutes after eight when the pair departed their East Side condominium, she in a cotton print dress that was both provocative and stylish and he in a light blue Polo shirt and Khaki slacks. He held open the door of their 450-SL, and Aly slid into the passenger seat.

“We’re improvising,” Alan said. “Any suggestions?”

“I’d love to go to Chez Pierre.”

“Your wish is my pleasure, m’lady. A fine choice,” Alan said in his best old English as he eased the Mercedes up the basement-garage driveway.

It was well beyond just a fine choice, of course, and they both knew it. Chez Pierre was more than a favorite restaurant, with one of the best chefs in America and an even better dessert chef; it was the place Alan had chosen to propose marriage that wonderful spring night.

The owner, Maurice Grojean, knew them well, and he greeted them as if an interminable amount of time had passed since last they had graced his restaurant.

“Your special table?” he asked, glancing knowingly at Aly.

“If it’s available, Maurice. Thank you,” she said.

“And even if it were not available, I would rearrange the entire restaurant to make it so,” he said, leading them to a particular corner table far from any traffic. It was like their own personal island; and Alan couldn’t deny the tremors of sweet nostalgia traveling along his spine.

“My beautiful and romantic Aly,” he said, grinning broadly. “I do so love you.”

“You love the fact that this table in this restaurant has a particularly amorous effect on me.

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“I love those kinds of odds, I can’t deny it.” Alan reached out for her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Wine?”

“Absolutely.”

Alan hailed their waiter and ordered a fine bottle of Argentine Malbec Gran Reserve. When the wine arrived, they took their time, savoring every sip. Aly talked about her classes. Alan listened, mostly to the sound of her voice but also to her love of life and all it offered. He didn’t bring up Adala; she did.

“How’s it going? she asked. “Any progress?”

“Good progress.” He told her about the group’s most recent meeting. “Brian and Marie are in El Paso this weekend checking on a possible training site. Herb is coordinating things on the international end and working with our HR guy on recruiting. The response has been remarkable.”

Aly was listening intently. “That’s great news. You know, I’ve been wondering if some of the associations I belong to could help with the recruiting in some way, but I’m a little leery about pursuing it,” she said. “It wouldn’t surprise me a bit if some of the more radical terrorist factions didn’t have informants inside these groups; just to keep tabs on what they’re doing.”

Alan breathed a sigh of relief. He didn’t want Aly involved any more deeply in the Adala project, and he already felt as if he had consulted with her more than he should have. Every time the subject came up, she became more invested in the project, if for no other reason than she could sense the depth of Alan’s commitment.

His energy when it came to Adala was contagious, and he had a hard time not bringing that energy home with him. What made it worse was the fact that he

was essentially lying to her about the bottom-line goal of the project: assassination. Lying was something he swore he would never do in their relationship, even if his ultimate goal were to protect her. It frightened him to think that she had been thinking about the project of her own volition. That was the last thing he wanted.

“I wholeheartedly agree,” he said, “and to be honest, I’d rather keep this thing as close to the vest as possible. I think the fewer people who know the better.”

“I think you’re right,” she said, sensing his relief. “I’m glad I talked to you first.”

“I’m glad you trusted your instincts,” he said, and they set the subject of Adala aside.

Dinner was beautifully served to be sure, but their thoughts had traveled beyond the food and the wine to the possibilities of a night spent in each other’s arms, much as they had that enchanting night so many years ago.

They held hands on the drive home, and Aly shared a playful smile with him. “What are you thinking, young lady?” he wanted to know.

“Want to do something fun?”

“Fun as in wild and romantic?”

“Oh, yeah,” she said flirtatiously. “How about staying at the guest house tonight?”

The guest house! They had used the guest house their first night together. Now it was their special getaway, and Aly always kept it made up, just in case.

“I might have to propose to you all over again,” Alan said.

“I might just have to ‘yes’ all over again.”

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

THE NEXT MEETING of Adala began the following Monday morning in the eighth Floor offices of the Millar Trading Company.

Alan wanted everyone to have a clearer understanding of the logistics needed to support their objectives of terrorist assassinations. He had been pondering the subject all weekend, but he also wanted to broach the subject as if they had only scratched the surface last week.

He took the circuitous route and asked Brian to open the meeting. Not



surprisingly, the former MI-6 man also had been concerned about the same issue and took the words right out of Alan's mouth.

## OWLS AND HAWKS

"I think the first thing we need to come to terms with is how many assassins we want to assign to each target," said Brian. "A lot of our preparations will depend on that, I think."

"You read my mind," Alan said with an ironic nod. "Herb, you mentioned last week that the consensus among your colleagues was that we should work in teams of two. Where do you come down on that now? Still thinking the same way?"

"It's the theory of the OWL becoming a HAWK. It's not as mysterious as the lone-wolf assassin going deep undercover and doing the job from A to Z, but it makes more sense from a pure espionage point of view. The way it works is this. All our assassins are designated as numbered OWLs; OWL #1, OWL #2, and so on. Almost every assignment requires two OWLs. The first OWL infiltrates a target area and gets settled: rents an apartment, gets a car, learns the lay of the land, does whatever preparatory work is needed, and makes contact with anyone we deem important to the operation. He is the one who handles any and all communication to and from headquarters.

"The second OWL follows, contacts the first OWL, and together they gather information, plan the assassination, and decide who will be the assassin. That person, the assassin, is thereafter referred to as the HAWK. He's invisible. If he can't be made, the plan can't be foiled. That's the theory."

Herb drank coffee and shrugged. "If we go with the OWL and the HAWK, we must train them as a team. Two assassins. The better they know each other, the better their chemistry. The better their chemistry, the more they can depend on each other."

"And once the job is done?"

"We always extract the HAWK first thing. Same day, if possible," Herb said rather adamantly. "This is an absolute must. The OWL, on the other hand, we might keep in place if his cover isn't in jeopardy. That might be the smartest thing to do. It gives us a knowledgeable undercover agent in enemy territory. That's a game-day decision."

"I like it," Brian said, his head bobbing in agreement. "What do you think Alan?"

Alan nodded. "We go with the experts on this one. The OWL and the HAWK it is. Two man teams. One target. How does this affect our selection process,

gentlemen?”

“It adds an additional step, to be sure,” Brian said, “we’ll need additional criteria once we get around to interviewing potential candidates. Naturally, we’ll need to look for qualities that favor a team player over a lone wolf. I’ll work with Harry Neumann on the new profile, and he can run the initial evaluation. Once we have that number pared down, Herb and I will get involved in putting together a working list. That’s when we bring you in, Alan, for the final calls.”

“I’ll have Harry set this recruitment operation up here and set up a private call center. Time to put some faces with some names,” Alan said. Then he looked across the table at Marie Chavez. “How’d you and Brian do this weekend in El Paso?”

“It’s not paradise, but I think we’re onto something,” Marie answered. “Take a look at these.”

She passed around three well-organized stacks of photos taking Alan and Herb through the training site, facility by facility, parcel by parcel. “It’s got most of what we need, including a fairly well-maintained airstrip and plenty of excess acres for firing ranges and high explosive training. The nearest neighbor is 5.2 miles away and hidden by rolling hills and enough mesquite to populate Rhode Island. The question is, do we really need 25,000 acres? If we’re kicking this thing off with ten or twelve potential candidates and three or four instructors, we could probably do with a lot less.”

“The spread has been vacant and unoccupied for a few years. The owner, Jon Byner, is primarily interested in us doing some repairs and maintenance. From what we saw, that’s only a low-six-figure expense, nothing to really worry about,” Brian added.

“No argument there,” Marie agreed, “and better too much acreage than too little.”

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“It’s a go,” Alan said. “Let’s go ahead and do it.”

“Done,” Brian said.

“Let’s get to the most important part, Herb. What about a target?” Alan wanted to know.

“My choice is Mohammed Omar al-Fayez,” Herb said after a lengthy attention gathering pause.

“Come again?” Brian asked. Everyone at the table knew that Mohammed Omar al-Fayez had been reported dead in the Mosque bombing. “Don’t keep us in

suspense, mate. You know something we don't?"

"He's not as dead as everyone thought. Or maybe it would be better to say he's not as dead as the Taliban would like us to believe." Herb said. "Kudos to your buddies at MI-6, Brian. They've got a very well-informed mole in the Taliban who says al-Fayez is alive and well and raising havoc just like in the good old days. If he's alive, I put him at the top of our hit list."

"I second that," Brian said.

"I say kill him, the sooner the better," Marie said.

No one blinked. Marie had put into words what they were all thinking.

"How do we find him?" Alan wanted to know.

"We'll find him," Herb said. "Leave that to me."

"Okay then. We've made some decisions. Now we need the man-power."

"I'm on my way to Harry Neumann's office right now," Brian said.

"I'll have us the deal on the El Paso site by the end of the day," Marie promised. "I'll start to put together a supply list and any construction issues we might be facing."

"And I'll have our instructors on the payroll by midweek and settled into their Texas digs by Friday," Herb said.

"Good. Well done." Alan shook their hands. "Keep up the good work. Adala's not just an idea anymore."

WHEN ALAN RETURNED to his office, his assistant secretary handed him an envelope with his name and the words "For your eyes only" neatly printed across the front. There was no postage. "A courier delivered it exactly three minutes ago."

Alan closed the door to his office and tore open the envelope. A sticky note said, "From the desk of Imam Mohammed Aziz." A handwritten note read, "You might find this interesting."

The sticky note was pinned to an article from *US News and World Report*. The article introduced the reader to a crusading Shiite imam named Bani Beheshti and highlighted the English translation of one of his recent sermons. It read:

"I want to tell you, the few will contaminate the many if we permit them to do so. The Wahhabi have contaminated Saudi Arabia. They teach in the Madrassas to

hate Jews, Christians and all Muslims not subscribing to their extremist views. In fact they instruct 14-year-old children that it is a good thing to kill these innocent people they describe as infidel. They are active throughout Islam, and it must be our work to oppose them. We must realize that each time these murderers act, the blame is heaped upon all Muslims. The Prophet Mohammed, may peace be upon Him, has taught us that we are one, that there is but one God, and those that believe in the one God are not infidels. It is for us to show the rest of the world the dignity and righteousness of true Islam.”

“An ally,” Alan said out loud. “Good.”

Now if we can just convince the rest of the Muslim world to jump on Imam Beheshti’s bandwagon, he thought, this war will be over in no time.

“BRIAN!” HARRY NEUMAN called enthusiastically. “Good to see you. Come on in.”

Harry Neumann’s Human Resource office looked like a war zone. Three members of his staff had set up makeshift desks in a semicircle next to one wall; papers were piled high on every conceivable surface; and three phones were ringing at the same time.

## OWLS AND HAWKS

“Harry, you look buried, my friend,” Brian said though the two men were little more than acquaintances. “Is this all for us?”

Harry knew that “us” referred to the remarkable recruiting efforts taking place at the Millar Import and Export Company, and he also knew that Brian was running the nuts and bolts of the operation.

Harry spread his arms out. “Every last piece of paper,” he said. “The inquiries keep pouring in. We’ve had nearly a thousand, including e-mails and phone calls.”

“You’ve done an amazing job,” Brian told the bespectacled HR director. “I think even Alan’s a bit in awe.”

“That’s the guy we’re trying to please, right?” Harry said. “Now if we can just narrow the field down and get some bona fide candidates in here, we can get this show on the road.”

“That’s why I’m here, Harry. It’s time to put together our application. You up to it?” Brian asked, though he could see how eager Harry Neumann was to get started.

“Ready and willing. Pull up a chair.”

While Harry cleared a space for them at one end of a small conference table equipped with brand new laptops, Brian began thumbing through his briefcase.

“Once we get the application in order, we’re going to need a Web site to refer applicants to. I want to make it as easy as possible for them to complete the application and return it to us electronically. Bang, bang.”

“Way ahead of you,” Harry said. “I’ve already got our programmer laying the site out. Very generic, but very functional. As soon as we have the app done, we’ll get it on upload. We should be able to go live by midweek at the latest.”

“Outstanding.” The two men rolled up their sleeves and got down to business. “Bear with me if some of these questions seem slightly out of character, Harry. I can’t explain every aspect of the job, other than to say it’s a very specialized overseas operation.”

“You talk, I’ll write,” Harry said with a businesslike nod toward his computer, “no explanation necessary.”

“Thanks. I appreciate your understanding.”

It took shape far quicker than Brian expected, in part because Harry had composed dozens of applications over his career. When they had the first draft roughed out, they each read through it in silence:

**APPLICATION (MUST BE COMPLETED IN ENGLISH)DO NOT ANSWER ANY QUESTION YOU CONSIDER IMPROPER**

LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME \_\_\_\_\_ MALE \_\_\_\_\_  
FEMALE \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
HOME PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ CELL PHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_ PLACE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_  
MARITAL STATUS \_\_\_\_\_ NO. OF DEPENDANTS \_\_\_\_\_  
HEIGHT \_\_\_\_\_ WEIGHT \_\_\_\_\_ DO YOU HAVE A BEARD? \_\_\_\_\_  
SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS? \_\_\_\_\_  
HOBBIES \_\_\_\_\_  
FAVORITE SPORT \_\_\_\_\_ EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_  
NO. YRS. COLLEGE STUDIES \_\_\_\_\_ USA STATES VISITED \_\_\_\_\_  
COUNTRIES VISITED \_\_\_\_\_  
LANGUAGES SPOKEN \_\_\_\_\_  
ARE YOU FLUENT IN ARABIC? \_\_\_\_\_ YRS. AT PRESENT ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
AT PRIOR ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CURRENT EMPLOYER & ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
PRIOR EMPLOYER & \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CURRENT JOB TITLE \_\_\_\_\_  
DO YOU SUPERVISE OTHERS? \_\_\_\_\_ CURRENT YEARLY SALARY \$ \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER BENEFITS \_\_\_\_\_ ARE YOU: MUSLIM \_\_\_ CHRISTIAN \_\_\_ JEW \_\_\_ OTHER \_\_\_ IF MUSLIM: SUNNI \_\_\_ SHIITE \_\_\_ OTHER \_\_\_ DO YOU ATTEND MOSQUE, CHURCH, OR SYNAGOGUE REGULARLY? \_\_\_\_\_ DO YOU KEEP CURRENT WITH NEWS? \_\_\_\_\_ HOW? \_\_\_\_\_ DO YOU OBJECT TO PSYCHOLOGICAL OR HONESTY TESTING? \_\_\_\_\_

## OWLS AND HAWKS

**WHEN ARE YOU AVAILABLE FOR EMPLOYMENT?** \_\_\_\_\_  
**ARE YOU AVAILABLE FOR OVERSEAS ASSIGNMENTS?** \_\_\_\_\_  
**HAVE YOU EVER SERVED IN THE MILITARY?** \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. CITIZEN? \_\_\_ GREEN CARD? \_\_\_ TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF (USE BACK OF APPLICATION)

BRIAN LOOKED OVER the top of his monitor at Harry and asked, “What are we missing?”

“It’s pretty thorough,” Harry had to admit. “I’ll get it tidied up a bit. Then we’ll get it uploaded onto the Web site and direct all of our inquiries there.”

“Priority one, Harry,” Brian said, closing his briefcase. “I guess that goes without saying.”

“What about a punch list?”

“What’s a punch list?”

“Keywords that automatically kick an application into a ‘reject’ or ‘accept’ pile. We program them into the computer, and it sorts the apps accordingly.”

Brian was nodding. “Excellent. I’ll work on it. Give me until the end of the day.”

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## 7 - EULOGY

**GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT**

THE POURING RAIN symbolized the feelings of so many attending the tribute and farewell to Dan Millar. When his time came, Dan had wanted his final resting place to be beneath the same oak tree that shades the remains of his parents. But that wish could never be granted. There would be no known final resting place for him, no place for Betty, his girls, and all the other mourners to celebrate his life or pray for him on his final voyage.

Alan had no intention of using Dan Millar's memorial service to expound upon the world crisis that was at the heart of his senseless death. It would have been a perfect time to remind people that Dan's death had not been some unavoidable accident but rather a deliberate act of murder perpetrated by evil men in pursuit of goals that were nothing short of criminal. It would have been the perfect time to remind the Muslim community how many of their own innocent followers had been murdered in the commission of that devilish act. The perfect time, perhaps, but hardly an appropriate forum, Alan thought.

Yes, there were some of the most important oil industry executives in the world in attendance today. There were some of the government's most influential men and women waiting to hear what Alan would say. There were even two Saudi Princes symbolically dressed in royal robes in the second row and a minister from Kuwait right behind them. Alan could not have asked for a more influential, more captive audience. All he had to do was raise his voice and shout, "Wake up! Don't you get it?"

Alan couldn't do it. This was a morning to celebrate Dan's life and the gifts he had left the world, not a morning to explore impending threats.

So when Alan approached the pulpit at Saint George's Episcopal Church and looked out at the overflowing crowd of mourners, seeing hardly a dry eye, he made sure they knew exactly the kind of man that had been stolen from them. In the end, maybe that was the best way to get his message across in any case.

Alan began his eulogy of Dan Millar by saying, "We have come together on this day to remember a good man, a respected man, a man who always put the well-being of his fellow man ahead of himself. Dan was a loving husband and a devoted father. Those are not just clichés; those were roles Dan took more seriously than any other. Nothing meant more to him than Betty and their beautiful daughters, Elizabeth and Anne. I will always anguish over your loss," Alan said, peering down into the pew where Betty sat with her fatherless girls. "I will do whatever I can to make your loss a little easier to bear. And I know everyone in this church today shares that sentiment."

Alan could feel a swell of emotion in his chest, and he drew a deep breath, hoping to contain it at least for another minute. He pressed on, saying, "Dan was as kind as he was honest, as intelligent as he was funny, as compassionate as he was loving. He was the best friend I ever had. This beloved and special

person was taken from us in the most unspeakable way, but the gifts he gave to me and you and so many others will live on. We must see to that.

“Dan not only provided for his own family in the best way he knew, he also gave his unqualified support to any number of underprivileged families wherever he found them. He was known to the children of these families as the wonderful Santa Claus who brought dolls and bicycles, books and computers to their door step, but he was also the one who created work-study programs at our company for high-school students and provided a scholarship fund that has already seen two very special youngsters enrolled at New York University. We won’t let these programs expire, I guarantee you that. In fact we will expand them. We’ll treat them as if Dan were still here making them happen.”

“Dan was a happy man. How many of us here called him our friend? How many of us knew Dan would give the proverbial shirt on his back to any one of us, just for the asking? He may have been my right arm at work, someone who could deal effectively and fairly with the most difficult of tasks, but he was first and foremost my friend. And I miss you so very much, my dear friend.”

A tear rolled down Alan’s cheek, and he made no attempt to brush it aside. “I would like all of us to take a moment of silence to remember Daniel Francis Millar. Some of you will focus on something personal the two of you shared. Some of you may wish to say a prayer of thanks for having known him. As for me, I will weep unashamedly whenever I remember Dan and the all too brief time we had together. Good night my friend. Sleep well in your new home. I’ll be seeing you. Let us bow our heads.”

## **GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

THERE WERE ADVANTAGES to being the CEO of a highly successful, multi-billion dollar company. One of them was having a company jet available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Alan rarely used company transportation on a lark, but the day after the memorial service for Dan was one of those times. He and Aly had the weekend to themselves, but to lounge around Eden unable to dismiss the memorial service or cease their sorrow was not what was needed. The prescription was a generous dose of new and different surroundings.

“I know West Texas doesn’t sound like the perfect place for a picnic,” Alan told her, “But...”

“But El Paso is something I need now and you do too. I’ve never been there, so I’m curious, not only about El Paso, but the training site Brian and Marie selected for Adala as well. If you’re brave enough, I’ll scrounge around the kitchen and pack us a picnic lunch. Wadda ya say, big boy?”



“It’s a date,” Alan said.

He called ahead for the plane and packed a bag. Aly raided the kitchen and came away with roasted chicken, salad, French bread, wine, and fresh fruit. She threw it all into a cooler. The Gulfstream was fueled and ready to go, and they were in the air and heading southwest just after 10:00 am.

They gained two hours heading west and arrived in El Paso in plenty of time for a quick tour of the city. Aly marveled at the Mexican influence in architecture and services. It seemed every store had a Hispanic name and sold Latino products. The city was absolutely bilingual and reminded her of Montreal in that respect. Alan had rented a Lincoln Town Car with enough air conditioning to stave off the oppressive South Texas heat. Brian had provided the northeasterly route and directions to the Adala camp.

THE RANCH AND its starkly beautiful landscape were exactly as Marie had described it. The valley and its montage of mesquite, sagebrush, and cactus, however, didn’t strike Aly as desolate or forbidding, two of the words Marie had used; it struck her as remote, powerful, and mysterious. She stared at the surrounding hillsides and the tinges of red, yellow, and ochre that bled through the gray soil, and it brought to mind a Georgia O’Keeffe painting. For some reason, it also made her think of the memorial service.

“That was a beautiful eulogy, Alan,” she said, as the asphalt highway gave way to a dirt road that plunged headlong into the valley. They had to stop briefly to push aside a rickety gate festooned with a wooden sign and the words “Private Property—Do Not Enter” printed on it. “I could see how touched Betty was.”

“She’s got a long road ahead of her,” Alan said as a flock of frightened game birds took flight just ahead of them. “Thank God she has you and the rest of her family...Now let’s try to forget yesterday and have some fun today.”

“I only have this to say before the fun begins. Betty’s not the kind of girl to mope for very long, not with those two girls to look after; but she thinks Dan’s killers are going to walk away Scot free,” Aly said. “I bet most of the people in that church yesterday think the very same thing. The girls need to know that this sort of thing isn’t going to happen to them if they step on an airplane. Maybe you should tell her about Adala.”

Alan glanced across the seat at his wife. “Maybe I will someday, but I don’t want her thinking about revenge and retribution for the rest of her life, Aly. I want her to be thinking about her daughters and what they need.”

“What’s that crossing the road there?” said Aly pointing at a scraggly looking critter just ahead.

“Now that’s a very much misunderstood animal that’s sometimes a bit noisy, a coyote looking for lunch. A very much misunderstood animal that’s sometimes a bit noisy.”

He pointed to a flat stretch of ground bisected by a swatch of black asphalt. At one end stood a huge fuel-storage tank; at the other end, the remnants of an orange windsock fluttering in the breeze. “That’s our landing field. A good pilot could land a twelve seater out there, I’m guessing, maybe even a small cargo plane.”

“Well, it looks like it’s been maintained better than this dirt road,” Aly commented, “though that’s not saying much.”

“Let’s look over the rest of the property before we check out the house, if that’s okay with you,” Alan suggested.

“The full tour, if you wouldn’t mind, driver,” Aly said, with a touch of Cockney; “and if you could find an idyllic place for our picnic, I will make it ever so worth your while.”

The road wound through the valley and morphed into an almost indistinguishable trail that skirted chains of reddish rocks and curled in and around broken ground that was probably not as deserted as it looked. Tumbling out of a stand of tall cottonwoods, a stream took pause in a series of deep pools before coursing further south, and Alan parked next to the largest and what appeared to be the deepest of these.

“It’s like a miniature oasis, isn’t it” Aly said as they ventured out.

The walls of the pools were formed by slabs of limestone, and Aly climbed to a ledge overlooking water as crystal clear as a gemstone.

The view to the south was expansive, and the stream seemed to carry on forever. “Hey, mister!” she called back to her husband. “Care for a swim?”

“A swim? I thought we came out here for a...a...picnic.”

Alan turned in time to see Aly standing at the edge of the ledge, stark naked, and smiling at him with that touch of mischief that never failed to raise his temperature a few degrees.

She turned and stepped off the ledge and into the pool. When she resurfaced a moment later, she called, “Come on in. The water’s perfect, it’s plenty deep and enormously refreshing”

Alan could hardly get undressed quickly enough. He tossed a shirt here, pants there, and socks somewhere else, and then jumped from the ledge with an

unabashed whoop. When he surfaced, he took Aly in his arms and kissed her. They splashed and kicked and played like children without a care in the world.

After a while, Aly said, "I'm starving. Ready to eat?"

"That depends on what's on the menu," Alan said, leading her to the edge of the pool and up to the ledge again.

"You'll just have to wait and see, won't you?" Aly said. "Now, darling, you did bring the towels, I know."

In response to this dash of sarcasm, she received a playful swat on her behind. "Towels? Who needs towels?" Alan replied. "That's what the sun is for," he argued, as the sun was beginning its descent behind the mountain tops without losing much of its heat or intensity.

They stretched out on the ledge, and as they relaxed in the almost medicinal warmth of the midafternoon sun, Alan confessed, "You have no idea how much I need this. This last week has been a roller coaster."

"I have just the thing for you," Aly said. She took a bottle of wine from the cooler, opened it, and filled two paper cups. "Here's to having someone special to get through the tough times with—you for me and me for you."

"I'll drink to that every day of the year," Alan said.

When the roasted chicken, bread, and salad had been consumed, they packed the car and headed for the ranch house.

It was an impressive sight sitting out here in the wild, all adobe brick and rambling roof lines, and Alan parked the Lincoln in a huge circular drive out front. There was no sign of life, and Alan hadn't expected any. Brian had shared a front door key and the alarm code, and it was com-forting to hear the entry signal from the alarm that was quickly silenced allowing them inside moments later.

"I like a man who comes prepared," Aly had to admit.

"I even know where the wine cellar is," Alan said with a wink and a smile.

He took Aly's hand, and they began their tour. The living room, they discovered, was a tribute to man's eagerness to shoot anything that moves. The walls were adorned with the stuffed heads of deer and wild-cat, coyote and rabbit, and even the taxidermic remains of eagles and hawks posed in their attack positions, wings out and razor sharp talons grasping prey.

"Some people call those trophies," Aly mocked. "I say we make a room just for the hunters and see how they like having their heads pinned to slabs of

burlwood.”

“A fine idea, but who in the world would want to sit in a room surrounded by the mounted heads of a bunch of insensitive buffoons.”

They found two rooms stacked with country-styled bunk beds and six bathrooms, all still harboring the faint scent of cedar. The kitchen was large enough to make a banquet chef happy with enough refrigeration and freezer space to preserve the rewards of any hunt. The dining hall looked like a school cafeteria except for the trophies mounted on the walls.

They went upstairs and inspected the three guest-overflow bedrooms along with three additional bathrooms. At the end of the hallway, two solid inlaid-mahogany doors stood curiously inviting.

“I’m betting it’s a throne room or a dungeon,” Aly joked. “Any bets?”

“Let’s check it out,” Alan suggested. He pushed open the door, and they stepped into a master bedroom suite that would have fit nicely in the pent-house of their New York City condominium except for the furnishing, which appeared to be out of the Playboy Mansion. The bathroom offered twin multi-head showers, a tub built for eight, shell-shaped sinks aplenty, and several imaginative porcelain toilets.

THEY BOTH KNEW that the Adala project was leading Alan down a path that would change him forever. Adala didn’t present the sort of do it or don’t do it decisions that were the daily challenges of Davis Industries. Instead Adala was a passion. It was easy to justify its creation in pursuit of a safer work environment for his employees in the Middle East, but Alan knew better, and so did Aly.

Not surprisingly, Aly had also been taken by the fever. Part of it was the way Dan had died, to be certain, but it was much more involved than simply wanting to see justice served. Aly was Muslim. No one suffered more from terrorism than her fellow Muslims. It was more than sad and more than ironic. It was flat out wrong.

As much as Alan was trying to protect her from the fallout from Adala, she was involved, and she didn’t want to be protected. It seemed as if one door was opening on their lives and another was slamming shut behind them. They had one thought in common at that moment—they were in this together, and as long as they were, they must shape their own destiny.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

THAT SAME DAY, the recruiting efforts behind Adala made significant strides. Harry Neumann and his team—now five in number with the addition of two

temps—had taken up permanent residence on the eighth floor of the Davis Building. They all worked out of the same central area, with a contagious energy affecting them all. Their lanterns were lit well into the night.

They had even set up a desk by the window for Brian Hall, now head of operations for Adala, but Harry and his team discovered very quickly that Brian rarely sat down. When he was in the office, he moved around the room like a pinball darting from desk to desk, glancing over people's shoulders, and writing copious notes on the pad he carried in whichever hand wasn't holding his cell phone or a cup of coffee.

The application Brian and Harry had finalized two days earlier had been posted on their web site for less than twenty-four hours, and a curious Brian was asking every twenty minutes whether any had yet been received. The temps had been told the position they were recruit-ing for was a vague start-up business in the Middle East.

“Patience,” Harry advised, “once they start pouring in, we'll have plenty to keep us busy. In the meantime, we're getting more inquiries by the minute, and most of those are planning to download the application the minute they hang up the phone.”

“I'm just waiting for that first one,” Brian said, filling a ceramic mug with coffee nearly four hours old.

“Wait no longer, Mr. Hall.” One of the temps shouted, “Got one. It's an Internet response. Downloading right now.”

“Atta girl,” Brian said, the excitement bringing out his English accent and causing him to spill his coffee.

“We're in business,” Harry crowed as the two men crowded around the temp's desk and watched the finished application materialize on her screen. “Let's pull up Mr. Hall's punch list, ladies. Time to find ourselves a worthy candidate.”

## **PAKISTAN, NORTHWEST OF PESHAWAR**

IN THE RUGGED mountains of Pakistan, some sixty-five miles north and west of Peshawar, a dirt road pocked with holes and ruts branched off the main highway. An army jeep was parked there obstructing entrance to the road. Two men carrying Kalashnikov automatic weapons sat on the vehicle's hood tracking everything and anything that moved. They may have looked like military guards in their olive green and khaki uniforms, but the uniforms, like the jeep, were only part of the façade.

Their job description was simple: discourage by whatever means necessary any

curiosity seekers hoping to glimpse the covert Al Qaeda training facility located at the end of the dirt road. At the top of their list of potential “curiosity seekers” were members of any Pakistani police or army unit, but the list also included journalists acting on a tip or under-cover agents acting at the behest of the American CIA or British MI-6. They were not instructed to ask questions. They were instructed to maintain the privacy and security of the road at all times and to do whatever was necessary to carry out their assignment.

HAD THE GUARDS been inside the training camp at that moment instead of guarding the entrance, they would have heard one of the instructors shouting at three Al Qaeda “brothers.”

“Move quickly. Never hesitate. Kick the door open and enter with your weapon at the ready and prepared to fire.”

One brother did exactly that, darting into the makeshift room, crouching low, and randomly spraying the interior with bullets. Two other trainees rushed in an instant later and dissected the room as if the enemy might be lurking behind every door and every piece of furniture. The unmistakable sound of ricocheting bullets could be heard all over the facility creating the clamor of a war zone.

When the instructor was satisfied, the trainees were sent to the obstacle course for the third time that day. Like their fellow trainees, these men were lean and sinewy, agile and determined.

At sunset, they prayed. Later when their prayers were completed, they sat forming a circle under the stars with their group leader, absorbing word for word the rules and regulations dictated by the Al Qaeda training manual.

Their physical training was complimented by instructions in the use of weapons as conspicuous as rocket launchers and as subtle as razor blades. They studied ambush and handled high explosives. They learned strategy and mastered tactics. They were instructed in the art of espionage and covert operations.

They spent much of their time learning how to become inconspicuous. They were taught the best use of travel documents. They studied communications. They learned how to act if arrested and what to say when questioned.

They were told what to wear and how to dress. Their faces were always covered with a scarf or a headdress. It was the most basic rule: hide your identity not only from the enemy but from each other as well.

THAT SAME NIGHT, word reached the camp that one Assim bin Muzzein, a wealthy merchant in Peshawar and a supplier of contraband arms and munitions to Al Qaeda, had possibly received payoffs from the Pakistani Army. If Muzzein was receiving funds from the government, what service did he perform in

exchange? Coincidentally three top-secret Al Qaeda positions had come under surveillance recently. How did the army know?

On the one hand, Al Qaeda paid handsomely for whatever Muzzein supplied in exchange for his absolute confidentiality. There could be no breach of this understanding no matter how minor. On the other hand, if the understanding was not upheld, retribution would have to be exacted. It was vital, of course, to stop the leak of sensitive information, but it was equally important to send a warning to other would-be informants.

IT WAS THE PERFECT assignment for the three trainees. Find the man, question him, and determine his guilt. If guilty, dispense the appropriate punishment.

The trainees were Kawati, Musa, and Khafi.

Kawati, the team leader, was given the task of renting a room in an inconspicuous neighborhood in Peshawar, providing transportation, and mapping out their escape route. Musa and Khafi were charged with discreet surveillance of the target and his place of business, the Pakistani Trading Company. The company was located in a busy commercial district on the lower east side, and conveniently they were able to utilize a deserted warehouse across the railroad tracks from which to conduct their surveillance. Musa manned the warehouse from 6:00 in the morning until

2:00 in the afternoon when Khafi took over until 10:00 at night. Their instructions were to follow any identifiable member of the local or state government having any contact with the Pakistani Trading Company.

Ten days passed. At 7:00 a.m. on the eleventh day, an army colonel stepped out of his military vehicle and entered the premises. He remained for an hour and ten minutes, then left. Forty-five minutes later Muzzein was observed leaving the premises and heading up the main avenue glancing now and then over his shoulder. He stopped in front of the Industrial Bank of Peshawar, looked around one last time, and entered the bank through the front door.

Musa followed him inside. Muzzein, he noted, proceeded directly to a teller's window. It was clear even from a distance that the man was making a sizable deposit. Musa carefully studied the face and features of the teller involved.

THE NEXT DAY, Musa and Khafi waited outside the bank until the same teller came out carrying a lunch bag and a thermos of tea. They followed him to a small park and hailed him just before he sat down to eat.

Khafi introduced himself and Musa as members of the Foreign Intelligence Department, and they produced counterfeit credentials to prove it.

Musa said, "Excuse us, but as you can see we are here on government business, and we must have your full cooperation. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir! Yes, of course," the teller answered nervously.

"We have reason to believe a certain Assim bin Muzzein was at your window yesterday morning and made a large deposit. Is that not so?"

The teller shook his head, genuinely confused. "No. I know no one by that name. The only large deposit by an individual was made by Karim Husada."

"You're certain?"

It occurred to Musa that perhaps Karim Husada and Assim bin Muzzein were one and the same person.

"What time of day do you recall that Karim Husada made his deposit?"

"Let me think...about nine thirty in the morning."

"We believe you," Musa said. "But I will say it again. You are to tell no one, absolutely no one, about our investigation. And rest assured, we will see that your cooperation is brought to the attention of your superiors."

"Thank you," the teller replied.

"However, we will need a copy of all the banking transactions made by this Karim Husada over the last year," Khafi told him. "We will meet you here at 2:30. Do not keep us waiting."

"I have a break at 3:00," the teller said.

"Three o'clock then. And of course you are aware of the penalty for failure to cooperate."

THAT NIGHT, THE three Al Qaeda trainees reviewed the paperwork given to them that afternoon by the bank teller. It was clear that Karim Husada and Assim bin Muzzein were, in fact, one and the same person and that person was making regular bank deposits. And when shown a photo of Muzzein, the teller readily identified the face as that of Karim Husada.

"The dog must be punished," Musa said.

"And we must also leave a message for any others who would consider turning on us," Khafi added.

They both looked at Kawati. His words were succinct and to the point. "Tonight



we visit the dog.”

The brothers knew by then that Assim bin Muzzein worked in his office late on Thursdays, and so they were waiting for him concealed behind piles of uncollected rubbish not fifty feet from his business's front entrance. When he appeared, briefcase in hand, a weary step betraying a long and fatiguing day, they waited for him to lock the door and lower the burglary screen. They followed his footsteps as he crossed the parking lot to his car.

He was reaching for the car door when Khafi appeared suddenly, grab-bing his jacket and pressing the blade of a knife against his throat.

“What is this?” the merchant protested.

“Be silent or I will kill you,” Khafi snarled. “Someone wants to speak with you.”

At that moment, Kawati and Musa materialized from out of the shadows. It was Kawati who spoke.

“We have a problem, Assim bin Muzzein. One of our suppliers is giving valuable and damaging information to the army. Do you know who might do such a thing? Do you know a man named Karim Husada?”

“No, No. I know of no such person,” said Muzzein, feeling the loss of his bladder control.

“An army Colonel was observed at your place of business yester-day. How do you account for this?”

The terrified bin Muzzein began to stutter and tremble.

“You must understand my problems...In order to eke out enough to put food on the table for my family, I must hide certain income.”

“An army officer visits you regularly and each time he does you make a deposit into the Husada account.”

“They are always asking questions about my customers, but I give them valueless information.”

“If you had given him a little harmless information under threat from the military because he was aware of your dealings, then we might understand. Are we hearing the truth, Assim bin Muzzein?”

“I swear I said nothing.”

“And the bribe you received? How do you account for that?”

“Only useless trivia. I swear.”

“Then how is it that you went directly to the bank and made a very fat deposit under a false name? I warn you for the last time, you must tell us the truth. If your indiscretion was small, we will understand.”

Assim bin Muzzein began to cry.

“I had to tell him something,” he mumbled. “He was threatening to have me arrested and tortured. I only gave him a few pieces of innocent information, information that could hurt no one. I swear.”

Kawati nodded to his two brothers. Musa gagged the merchant, and Khafi swiftly and mercilessly plunged a knife into bin Muzzein’s belly, twisting the blade and then slicing open his abdomen. They removed his clothing, exposed his genitals, and severed his penis. They stuffed his organ into his mouth, dragged him to the front door of his shop, and propped the body up for all to see. An unmistakable warning understood by all Pakistanis.

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## **8 - TERRIFIED WOMEN**

### **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

THE APPLICATIONS FOR the Adala position poured in.

This didn’t surprise Harry Neumann, the director of human resources for Davis Industries, or at least not nearly as much as the remarkable response to their initial advertising had. Harry knew that once an interested party saw the pay scale and benefits Alan was offering, filling out the application would be a no brainer.

Now the real work began. Pulling viable candidates from the pool required a systematic means of paring the huge numbers down to a manageable size. They began the process by implementing Brian Hall’s “punch list,” as Harry called it.

There were certain answers that led to immediate disqualification, and these were to be programmed into the computer.

“We’re only looking for males at this time, males between the age of twenty-five and forty. We’ll get to the women some time down the road,” Brian began, and the computer programmer fed the information into his “reject” and “accept” lists. “Also any one under five feet, five inches in height or over 260 pounds in

weight.”

“Exceptions?” the programmer asked.

“No exceptions.”

“Got it.”

“All non-Muslims are out. Anyone indicating a lack of fluency in Arabic is out. Anyone objecting to psychological testing is definitely out.” Brian peered over the man’s shoulder. He paced, drank coffee, and tried not to smoke. “Doable?”

“Doable.”

“We’re looking for U.S. citizens or men with current green cards only. Anyone unavailable for overseas assignments is out.”

“Good stuff,” Harry said. He was staring at his own computer screen as the “punch list” started sorting “rejects” from “accepts.” He looked across at Brian and said, “Anyone who lands in the acceptable category will be immediately screened for a criminal record or publicity file. We don’t need anyone who’s been in the news lately.”

“Quite right,” Brian said, chewing the end of an unlit cigarette.

“Then the minute we get them on the phone we dump anyone who shows any reluctance in talking about himself or sharing information. That will be the interviewer’s call, and either you or I should conduct the first batch,” Harry said, comfortable with his HR expertise while not stepping on the Adala director’s toes.

The computer raced through the first batch of 112 applications and immediately scrapped 83 of the potential candidates.

“Let’s run one of these babies up the flag pole, Harry, and see what kind of response we get,” Brian suggested. “You take the lead on the interview, and the rest of us will give a listen. With luck, we’ll learn a thing or two.”

“Pick one,” Harry said to one of the temps, and the woman punched in the telephone number for Ara Beldoon. She put the system on speaker phone. When a man’s voice answered, Harry introduced himself as John Young, from the Human Resource Department of the Millar Trading Company. “I’m trying to reach Mr. Ara Beldoon please.”

The man replied, “I am Ara Beldoon”

“Mr. Beldoon. How are you?” Harry asked. “I’m calling about the application you

submitted yesterday regarding our client's overseas management position."

"Ah, yes," the applicant answered. "I'm very interested."

"Good. And we thank you for your interest. May I ask you a couple of questions?"

"Yes, of course."

"Are you affiliated with any Muslim organizations here or abroad?"

"Yes. I am a member of the American Society of Islam," Mr. Beldoon replied.

"Please don't take this personally, but do you find yourself treated poorly by non-Muslims when you're traveling, for example, or in public places based simply on your appearance?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Do you believe this lack of respect or discrimination is directly attributable to terrorist acts perpetrated by Islamic radical extremists?" Harry asked pointedly.

"It may be," the applicant answered.

"So, Mr. Beldoon, as it turns out, our client has many assets in the Middle East. And it is not uncommon for these assets to be threatened by the activities of radical Islamic groups."

"I see." Harry and Brian detected a note of caution.

"How would you feel if your job required you to aggressively oppose these groups?"

"I don't know." Beldoon answered. Then he hesitated. "I don't get involved in that sort of thing."

"I understand. Thank you for your time, Mr. Beldoon," Harry said politely. "We'll be in touch."

The temps had already set up three files for first-interview applicants. File #1: IMMEDIATE FOLLOW UP. File #2: POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP. File #3: REJECTED. The moment Harry laid the phone down, Brian pointed to the REJECTED file, and the application of Mr. Ara Beldoon disappeared forever.

Brian and the temps listened to Harry conduct five phone interviews. They listened to his questions, but they also listened to the tone of his voice, his inflections, and his general demeanor.

Five interviews, five rejections, and oddly, neither Brian nor Harry were dejected or even the least bit disappointed.

“It only takes one, ladies,” Harry said to his team.

“And when you have a real prospect on the line, you’ll know, believe me,” Brian added.

Then he picked up the phone and ordered take-out Chinese for the entire group. He laid the phone down again, looked around the room, and asked, “Shall we get down to business?”

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

“LET’S TALK BUSINESS,” Aly said, looking up from her roast lamb dinner. She hadn’t eaten a bite, and Henry’s roast lamb was one of her favorites. “You’re going to need someone extremely versed in both English and Arabic to test your applicants for dialect and syntax. You’re going to need someone who knows enough about the Middle East and the Muslim communities of Europe to decipher where your applicants will best fit in. You send them someplace where they stick out, and you could cost them their lives.”

Alan was looking over the rim of his wine glass. “Good point— excellent point; you know someone for the job?”

“You’re having dinner with maybe the best person for the job on the entire planet,” Aly said.

“No, Aly,” Alan said, his wine glass hitting the tabletop louder than he anticipated. “No. I’m not involving you.”

Aly stared at him, and if ever a stare conveyed a message far stronger than any words, this was it. Not challenging or arrogant, not frustrated or put out; this was the kind of look that said simply, “Please don’t pretend I’m not involved, we both know I am.”

“Okay. Sorry. That was dumb,” Alan said. “I know we’re pretty far past that, but I still can’t help being protective.”

“And I appreciate it; I feel protective toward you too. I guess that’s what being partners is all about,” Aly said. “So when do I start?”

“You tell me.”

He could see by the look on Aly’s face how much she appreciated this small gesture, though it wasn’t really a gesture at all; it was good business.

She could help, and Adala could use her unique talents. No need for concern over her safety in simply conducting an occasional telephone interview. He saw her considering.

Then she said, “As soon as you narrow the field down to a manageable size and most of the preliminary testing and background investigating is finished, I’ll be able to do my thing.”

“In Arabic, as in most languages, the accent announces the nation influencing you the most. I’m interested in whether the accent jibes with the application. A ten-minute conversation with each candidate should be enough I would think, even if we’re just discussing the weather.”

Alan nodded. “Welcome aboard, Mrs. Davis,” he said, questioning himself at that moment for ever having begun the project and thrilled at the same time that Aly was with him all the way. Now if he could just bring himself to tell her the truth about Adala.

## **A VILLAGE, AFGHANISTAN**

IN THE GREATEST of all ironies, the five men who formed the tribal counsel for this warlord state were all killers, thieves, and terrorists. They thrived on violence and manipulation; they didn’t believe in honest work; all they wanted was the subjugation or elimination of the infidel, meaning any person not accepting their twisted and convoluted version of Islam. They existed by taking from those who had little enough and giving nothing in return, and yet they stood in judgment of these simple people only because they wielded the power of men with guns and had an unquenchable thirst for yet more power.

Chief among these five was Mohammed Omar al-Fayez, who was very much alive despite the propaganda spread by his less-than-effective disinformation machine. He and the four senior Taliban leaders had set up their version of a court in the mosque of a small village fifty miles from Kabul. Here, they adjudicated disputes and determined appropriate punishments for any person accused of conduct prohibited by the Sharia—prohibited according to their jaundiced interpretation of the Qu’ran, the Hadith and the derivative Sharia.

The five could say anything and rule in any fashion they chose with-out regard to human rights, dignity, and fairness; three of the Prophet’s most prominent teachings—those most widely distorted by the current band of extremists were calling themselves followers of the Prophet. The Qur’an is replete with Allah’s messages extolling mercy and forgiveness. From this “court” there were no appeals, no mitigation of the judgment, nor any representation for the accused.

To the left of this so-called court stood five trembling wives, daughters, and

sisters, all in burqas, huddled closely together as if their bond might prove some protection against the impending madness. To the right of the “judges” stood a dozen men who should have been the women’s protectors, but instead, these husbands, fathers, and brothers were the accusers bringing charges ranging from inciting gang-rape to reading science and art books; from prostitution to refusing to obey Islamic law as it was interpreted by the court.

These accusations would be the only evidence necessary in determining the appropriate punishment. There was no CSI delving for truth in this mountain village, nor is there any in the largest of cities under Taliban control.

With a wave of his hand, as if he were Caligula signaling the games to begin, al-Fayez opened this session of Taliban “justice.”

A tall, thin woman was dragged before the five terrorists. When released she stood reverently, head bowed, before the judges.

Al-Fayez motioned for the accuser to come forward. A short man stepped out pointing at the woman and said, “This woman is my wife. She has aroused lust in men by exposing her uncovered skin in public.”

This was extremely serious business prompting the great Al-Fayez to ask, “What do you mean when you say uncovered?”

“Parts of her legs and ankles were exposed for all to see.”

“How do you respond, woman? Is this true?”

“Sometimes I must lift my burqa slightly to avoid tripping,” she answered. “Other times I must lift my garment when there are puddles of water. Only my ankles could possibly be seen because I wear leggings beneath my burqa.”

“Is this the first time she has shamed you like this?” one of the Taliban officials asked pompously.

“It is the first time I have found out about it,” was the man’s accusatory response.

Al-Fayez bent forward to confer with the others on the panel. Words were exchanged ending in affirmative nods. Al-Fayez then spoke.

“Take her to your home and give her no food or drink for three days. Do no harm to her for Allah is merciful. As for you, woman, should you humiliate your husband again, you will be flogged.”

And, just like that, the case was closed. Al-Fayez hardly blinked. “Who comes before us next?”

“We do,” cried an angry man as he culled out a very frightened young woman from among the group of burqas and led her before al-Fayez and his all-powerful council. Beside them stood a sullen young man who seemed almost oblivious to the events. “This is my daughter, Sweeta, and this young man is my son, Amahl. He can tell you of finding his sister reading books and studying matters not allowed to her. Matters of science and art. Matters of...things we know nothing about.”

“Is this true woman?”

“Yes,” she answered. Thank Allah he couldn’t see the tears of frustration welling behind the eye-screen in her burqa. Sweeta took a deep controlling breath and continued, her voice steady and calm. “I must learn for I wish to become a teacher. Our country must join the modern world and learn of the wonders that abound everywhere. How else can we flourish?”

Al-Fayez clambered to his feet, his face burning, and loudly admonished her. “Those ideas are forbidden. All that you have to know is written in the Qur’an. The Prophet, peace be upon him, tells us what is needed and what is not. It is written that your concerns only be the satisfaction of your husband and the care of your children. You must learn this lesson and learn it well. You will submit to flogging and receive twenty lashes this night. I warn you, do not come before us again. We will not be as lenient in the future.”

Her father’s fingers tightened around her arm and with a sharp jerk; he turned her around towards home, where she would be confined to contemplate her punishment—punishment for being born with a curious and agile mind—twenty lashes for studying so she could help bring the wealth of the world to her people.

A large burly man came next before the court, dragging a burqa clad woman by the back of the neck and beating her all the while with his free hand. “This is my wife. She struck me in anger.” That was the sum total of his accusation.

“Why?” one of the court’s lesser members asked as if discussing a goat that had strayed from the herd.

“A devil within her. I know no other explanation. She had not prepared my meal properly, and I was punishing her when she did this.”

The Taliban looked at the accused, saying, “Is this true, woman?”

The woman was too afraid to speak and too afraid not to. Who knew what the penalty might be for not answering this court of high men? All she could do was nod her head.

Al-Fayez spoke, slightly put out now. “Your husband, the injured party, will



decide your punishment. You must be flogged. The number of strokes will be decided by your husband since he is the injured one. At each stroke he will read a sura from the Qur'an concerning your obligations to your husband and the obedience you must show him."

A young man with his head bowed as if in sorrow and seeming to regret being in this place at all led a young, extremely terrified woman before the panel. She could not have been more than eighteen and looked as if indiscretion was beyond her. Just days before, she had been forcibly taken on the street, just after midday prayer, into a bombed-out building, held down, and raped by the three men who now stood on the right as her accusers.

"I am next, holy one. My sister here has had sexual relations with these three men for money." He pointed to three men standing with bowed heads and forlorn expressions. "They have confessed to me. I have forgiven them, but my family and I will always bear the shame."

This was the most serious of all crimes to this point. It was not a matter that called for an explanation by the accused. This was a matter that lay only in the hands of men willing to admit their part. For that al-Fayez looked to his right and asked them straight out, "Do you three affirm these deeds?"

All three nodded in agreement.

Al Fayez spoke then, saying, "There is but one punishment for your act, woman. You shall have no food or drink for one week so that you may pray to Allah for forgiveness, and then you shall suffer public stoning."

The woman didn't protest as her brother led her away. She had lived her life with nothing, and with nothing was how her life would end. She didn't credit Allah as the court had, nor did she blame him. Allah was nothing if not merciful, but Allah was only a name these men evoked, not a teacher they truly followed.

Next before the court came a man weeping uncontrollably and once again leading a woman.

"I am the husband to this woman, counsel," he managed to say. "Malika refuses to allow us to circumcise our daughter as she will readily admit."

This seemed to take the court by surprise. One of them asked, "But why woman? This is a tradition respected by all in our society. Islam is the sacred and true religion led by good men who practice the teachings of the Qur'an to set examples for all. Are men not circumcised? Your child must submit."

The woman cried out. "Oh, great one, please do not do this. I was spared this mutilation when I was young and, praise to Allah, it is one of the very few joys in

my life.”

If the woman thought her argument would be greeted with understanding, she was sadly mistaken. This was not a house of common sense; this was a house of darkness. They did not understand desperation. They knew not of pleasure. They understood only submission.

“You have refused to abide by the holy law and even argue for us to ignore it.” The entire court was in dismay, but al-Fayez was a man who drummed up justice from a well of dismay. He said, “We have but one answer. Both you and your daughter shall submit.”

The woman fell to her knees, but no one took notice. Outside, the flutter and roar of an approaching coalition gunship called a temporary end to Taliban justice. Five women, five lives, five worlds had been irrevocably altered in a matter of thirty minutes!

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

MARIE WAS SADDLED with the task of digging through paper work and smiling at Jonathan Byner at the friendly informal lease signing for the Texas training site. No lawyers were needed to muck up the thing. Only the boxful of random unsorted papers and documents from the closing held when Byner acquired the property thirty-five years earlier served to describe and identify it. While Jonathon dozed off in an arm chair, Marie developed a lease form, simply copying another current DII lease. It only took her four hours to complete the unfamiliar task. The upside for her was that after a folksy chat with Byner and the signing of the lease, Marie found herself convinced that Byner would keep the transaction strictly confidential because it was his nature.

ON ANOTHER FRONT, Brian Hall had made an offer to three instructors. Only two had accepted, and he and Marie agreed that two was probably enough for now. Captain Jamie Whyte, a longtime Navy Seal before becoming an instructor in the covert operations section of the CIA, could take a raw recruit and turn him into a killing machine the way a good chef turns a raw piece of meat into an epicurean delicacy. Dr. Peter Flue, Brian’s first choice, was a West Point guy, a tactical genius, and an expert in counter terrorism. He was also a master mechanic, a genius in weaponry and high explosives, and a physical fitness fanatic. Again it was the one who had said no to the offer that worried Marie.

Major Yitzhak Hardi of the Mossad hadn’t fully explained his decision. He just said “No,” and that he might be needed in Israel. Would he give up Adala for any reason? Who really knew?

But Marie didn’t have time to worry about it. A construction crew of thirty men

had descended on the valley twelve hours ago, and they had three days to have a functioning camp up and running, including a firing range, gym, and communications center.

HERB BENTZ RETURNED from Europe with a dozen solid contacts set up to advise and prep the Adala team for the first assignment.

Brian recruited Herb to help evaluate applications that continued to pour in. While the rejection pile grew steady, the follow-up stack had but six names in it. "That's not a heavy load of possibilities," Herb said when he and Brian were seated across from each other in the private offices at Millar Trading. "But if we get three or four more bona fides, we can get the ball rolling as far as I'm concerned."

"If you wouldn't mind cross-checking me on the qualification list I put together, I'd appreciate it," the former MI-6 man said to his former CIA contact.

"Will do, and one thing I'd like to throw your way is the makeup of our incursion teams."

"I don't see a huge issue there. We still need to send one OWL in before the other to make preparations and begin planning espionage. Don't forget both OWLs will have been thoroughly trained in assassination techniques so that either or both of them could act as the HAWK," Brian said.

"Another question that occurs to me is exactly how does the second OWL conduct himself when he arrives?"

"Same as the first OWL: find a place to live, gather his own intelligence, and make his own preparations, all the while working covertly with OWL number one just as they would have initially and using the same communications set up with El Paso," Brian explained. "The upside being that we now have two men gathering information independent of each other while

sharing all intelligence covertly with one another. Am I right?"

"That's how I see it."

"And when El Paso thinks a target can be successfully dispatched, the OWL in the best position to make the hit becomes the HAWK."

"Exactly," replied Herb.

Brian felt good about this application, and he carried his phone to the far side of the office as if there was better karma over there. He lit the cig-arette he'd been dying to smoke.

“Hello, I would like to speak with Mr. Hamud Khalid please,” he said when a man answered after the second ring.

“Yes. This is he.”

Brian introduced himself in a most professional manner and told Mr. Khalid he was calling regarding his application for the overseas position with the Millar Trading Company. When he felt the applicant relax on the other end of the line, he asked, “And you’re fluent in Arabic, are you not?”

“Yes. I was born in Saudi Arabia.”

They talked about how and why he had immigrated to the United States before Brian got to the heart of the call. He said, “I have a question for you, Mr. Khalid. It seems to me that when radical Islamic terrorists strike, really anywhere in the world, it appears to cast a shadow on all Muslims. How do you feel about that?”

“Terrorists are not true Muslims,” he replied. “They twist the meanings of the sura in the Qur’an to try to justify the murder of innocent persons, mostly other Muslims.”

Brian could hear the pain in his voice. Good, he thought. “It sounds as if you’ve been directly affected.”

“A terrorist bomb was responsible for the death of my mother and my sister two years ago in Pakistan,” Khalid answered. “I will never forgive them.”

“I’m sorry about that. I truly am,” Brian said. “I’m looking at your application, and it says you live in the Detroit area. I’d like to send up one of our most experienced interviewers to talk with you and run a few tests, that kind of thing. When would it be convenient to meet us? Would Monday be too soon?”

“Anytime. I am a mechanic. I work for myself. Monday is fine,” was the answer.

“I’ll have someone call you with the time and place,” Brian told the applicant, “but if you could plan on giving us the whole day, we’ll hope there is a job offer when all is said and done.”

“Got one,” Brian said after he hung up the phone. “Our first face-to-face.”

Then he called Alan with the news.

Alan was elated after he hung up with Brian; his first call was to Aly. “Hey, Professor. How’s the most beautiful educator in all New York?” he asked.

“You sound like you’re in a good mood,” she said. “Me? I’m sitting here staring at two dozen essay finals and haven’t been inspired yet. Makes me wonder what

I've been teaching these kids all semester long."

"We have our first real bite," he replied straight away, "a mechanic from Detroit. If your offer's still open, I'd like you to do a follow-up call with him. Check him out under the guise of setting up the interview."

"I'm all over it. What's his name and number?"

Alan shared Hamud Khalid's Detroit phone number and then gave her some specifics about the interview. "Brian Hall will be doing the face-to-face at the offices of Century Investigations at 9:00 Monday morning. Century will be handling the background checks and the polygraph, but only if our boy impresses the hell out of you. That's step one."

"I'll call you back as soon as I'm done," Aly said.

And she did, not an hour later. "He's got a chip on his shoulder that you might have to take the edge off, but that's only because his mom and sister died in a suicide attack two years ago. They were a month away from joining him in the states when it happened, so he's motivated. His Arabic is flawless. He's Sunni. Perfect for Saudi Arabia, but he'd do just fine in Iraq or Afghanistan."

"Excellent," Alan said. He didn't know whether to say "good work" or "well done" or what, so he said, "Thanks for doing that. See you back at the house for dinner."

## **DETROIT, MICHIGAN**

IF FIRST IMPRESSIONS meant anything, and they certainly did to Brian Hall, then Hamud Khalid got off to a good start. He wasn't just on time for his interview at Century Investigations; he was five minutes early. His grip was firm and sure when he shook Brian's hand, and he held the former MI-6 man's eyes the entire time, a practice sometimes considered rude in the Muslim world.

Hamud Khalid was something less than average height, but he had broad shoulders, erect posture, and a confident stride.

They huddled in a small conference room. Brian had coffee delivered. They talked for twenty minutes, and then Brian introduced him to the psychological profile, a written test that Khalid hammered out in forty-five minutes flat.

That done, Brian ushered Khalid into a second room and introduced him to the man who would conduct the polygraph.

"I'll wait outside," Brian said. "Let me know when you're done."

Of course, Brian watched the whole affair through a one-way mirror and listened to Khalid answer the list of questions Brian and Herb had composed for the test.

“I’ll have to run a short test before getting started, Mr. Khalid,” the polygrapher was saying with a smile, “just to make certain we’re hooked up properly.”

This was an old trick many good polygraphers use to convince the subject of the futility of lying. Khalid was asked to pick a slip of paper from ten identical pieces of paper with the numbers 30–39 written on them.

“Once you’ve got your number, just put the paper back in the jar,” the technician instructed his subject.

The number was 37.

When the paper was back in the jar, the polygrapher played it out, saying, “Now I’m going to start the polygraph machine. I’ll call every number from 30 to 39. I’ll ask you if the number is 30, 31, and so on. You must answer NO to every number I call, even the correct number. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I understand.”

“Was it 30?” the polygrapher asked, staring at the dials on the machine’s instrument panel.

“No.”

“Was it 31?”

“No.”

The machine did its job perfectly, reacting only when Khalid replied “no” to the question, “Was it 37?”

“Everything seems to be working well,” the tester said casually.

“Your number was 37, wasn’t it?”

“How could you tell?” Khalid was astonished and wanted to know, just like they all wanted to know. “That’s amazing.”

“It’s the machine. It never makes a mistake.”

Brian smiled when he heard this. Works every time, he thought.

Hamud Khalid was given three tests and passed them all with flying colors.

When he and Brian were seated across from one another toward the end of the day, Brian said, "All of the tests went well, Mr. Khalid. Thank you for your patience. The only other thing we need to do today is have a bit of a man-to-man chat about a couple of critical issues. That okay with you?"

"Sure. Ready when you are," Khalid replied.

"Good. Question number one. Have you ever killed anyone?"

"Killed anyone? No. No, I haven't."

"Do you believe members of Al Qaeda should pay for their terrorist activities?"

"Yes, I certainly do."

"Even a death penalty for murdering innocent people?"

"Absolutely."

"And who should be responsible for executing such a penalty given the fact that they rarely go to trial?"

Hamud Khalid thought about that a moment. "I don't know; anyone who has the opportunity, I suppose."

"I agree with you," Brian said intently. "In fact, Mr. Khalid, my background is in British Intelligence, where we were trained to kill when necessary. I have had to kill on occasion, always when innocent lives were at stake, and I'm proud of the fact."

"Now let me ask you this. How would you feel if I told you that the job you have applied for could require you to kill a known terrorist?"

Khalid didn't think very long before saying, "I would have no problem with that, but only if the intended victim was without question a known terrorist."

"All right then. The job's yours if you want it."

"I'll take it," the Muslim mechanic answered without hesitation. "When do I start?"

"We would like you to start on Wednesday, the day after tomorrow. An air ticket for the 8:00 a.m. American Airlines flight number 459 to El Paso, Texas, will be waiting for you at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport when you get there.

"When you arrive in El Paso, you'll be met by one of our team and driven to our training facility." Brian handed him a business card. "You can reach me at that phone number day or night. Don't hesitate to call."

Then he handed Hamud Khalid an envelope containing two hundred dollars for any incidental expenses. “You’ll get your first paycheck a week from next Friday in keeping with the salary we discussed. Oh, yes, and it’s hot in Texas, Mr. Khalid, so pack accordingly. Any questions?”

“No, not yet.”

“Then welcome aboard and good luck.” They shook hands. “I’ll see you in Texas.”

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## 9 - RECRUITING

### DETROIT, MICHIGAN

HAMUD KHALID TRIED going back to work after his interview with Brian Hall—he had two cars in the shop, and he had promised the owners they would be fixed and on the road again by midweek—but he could barely hold a wrench in his hand much less repair a transmission or install a new clutch. He was too excited about the prospects of a new job and too eager to share the news with his brother.

By 3:00, he was locking the door to his south-side garage—a process that required a deadbolt and two padlocks given the number of vagrant people roaming the neighborhood. Soon he was behind the wheel of his 1998 Toyota heading home.

The one bedroom apartment he shared with his brother Fahd was on the second floor of an apartment building, turned into a tenement, built in the 1950s. Ugly and foreboding, it reminded Hamud of the apartment building his mother lived in the last few years of her life in Pakistan.

The tenement house here on Detroit’s south side was no better. It was occupied almost exclusively by immigrants, and most of the immigrants were Muslim.

Hamud parked his car a block away and locked it even though the only thing the most desperate thief could possibly find to steal were the seat covers, and they were almost ten years old. He walked in a semi-daze back to the apartment and used a hide-a-key to let himself into a space not much bigger than a two-car garage. Hamud walked straight into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator door, and prayed there was at least one cold beer inside. Thanks be to the Prophet, he thought, smiling as if there was still some justice left in the world: there were two. He cracked one open, carried it into the front room, and threw himself on



the room's one couch.

He was holding an empty beer bottle and staring up at the blades of a broken ceiling fan when Fahd let himself into the apartment with a briefcase in one hand and a six-pack well hidden from the prying eyes of neighbors in a large brown paper bag. None of their Muslim neighbors should know the brothers violated the prohibition on alcoholic beverages which, by the way, was not their only departure from scripture.

“Well,” he said. “How'd the interview go?”

Hamud stood up and spread his arms. “Got it!” he proclaimed. “I may never come home with greasy hands again.”

“Wonderful. Congratulations, my brother. We must have a toast.” Fahd dropped his briefcase, gave his brother a bear hug, and opened two beers.

The sound of clinking beer bottles filled the apartment. “To new horizons.”

“New horizons,” Hamud agreed and drank heartily.

“Tell me about the job. I want to know everything.”

“I don't know all the details. In fact, I know none of the details now that I think about it,” Hamud answered truthfully. “Kind of hush-hush stuff by the sounds of it.”

Fahd studied his brother. “You didn't ask what am I being hired to do?”

Hamud smiled sheepishly. “I didn't want to be pushy. I fly to Texas this Wednesday. I'll know more then.”

“Texas, huh?” Hamud's older brother finished his beer and shook his head as if someone had just mentioned the dark side of the moon. “Oh, yeah, they just love Muslims down in Texas.”

## **RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

IMAM DAWUD AL-SANIE, the universally accepted leader of Wahhabism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, arrived at Khatban Palace in Riyadh feeling on top of the world. He had been picked up at the airport in a Bentley, a very nice touch, though not surprising given the decadence that drove his hosts to the extremes of excess. He looked beyond the window of the car, admiring the architectural extravagance of the palace and the flowing Islamic arches that rose above seemingly endless Italian marble terraces.

He couldn't feel envy or jealousy because so much of his hosts' money flowed into his own treasury and the bank accounts of his fellow fanatical extremists throughout the Muslim World. Dawud al-Sanie didn't consider himself an extremist or a fanatic; quite the contrary, he viewed himself, his followers, and the very theology underlying Wahhabism as the inviolable sacred word of Allah as it is written in the Qur'an.

Prince Abdul Azim and Prince Abdul Salam stood on the elegant front portico decorated with the most colorful imported mosaics, portraying the crest of the royal Abdullah line inlaid in the vertical supporting columns. The two men of royalty greeted al-Sanie with the sort of warm embrace reserved for only the most important personage, even though they loathed the Wahhabi devil as they might a snake in the parlor. The princes were chameleons; they could change demeanors as easily as they did their clothes, just as they had following a weekend of unparalleled debauchery on the French Riviera. They were masters of the game, and the Wahhabi leader was a rather more important chess piece than the normal pawn.

"May the blessings of Allah be upon you," said Dawud al-Sanie.

"And upon you," replied the princes almost in unison.

Any listener would have been dumbstruck listening to the greetings and pleasantries exchanged between men who detested one another nearly as much as they distrusted one another.

"There is much to discuss," Prince Salam said. "Let's retire to the salon for some refreshments."

The reception salon was even more elegant and ornate, and Imam al-Sanie could not miss the gold leaf applications adorning every wall and every pillar. Nor could he fail to grasp the significance of the less opulent chair offered to him.

The princes sat in great chairs framed by a fragrant water fountain circulating waters blended with essence of jasmine; silken cushions raised their heads above that of the imam.

Once the customary offering of tea and sesame sweets had been served, they turned to business.

"We are an underpopulated state, and we are losing too many of our young men to suicide bombs and utter insanity. Let the jihadists provide their own martyrs," Prince Abdul Azim began rather unceremoniously. "We have sacrificed enough Saudi blood."

“If only that were possible,” lamented al-Sanie. “There is no greater need for heroic individuals, willing and able to carry out the works of Allah, in all of Islam. The need is both great and essential. I am sure your highnesses would agree. We produce just such individuals, students mostly, all eager and willing to sacrifice their lives to gain everlasting Paradise. The jihadist groups carry out our work for us, and we provide them with brave soldiers in exchange. It is a fair and necessary exchange.”

“But who will remain to protect our sacred land if the infidels would wage war against us? It is our responsibility to guard Mecca and Medina and all the places of the Prophet, peace be upon him,” Prince Salan added rather vigorously.

The imam shrugged. “You worry too much, my Prince. Our Wahhabi schools will produce thousands of young soldiers each year. The villages are full of willing volunteers. And each of them will be trained to strike fear and death into the hearts of our enemies.” Now he graced the young royals with a knowing smile. “This foretells of but one conclusion, the final defeat of all infidels everywhere.”

The princes bowed slightly. This was the answer they had been hoping to hear: keep the mindless Wahhabi coming forward with dreams of teen virgins and visions of paradise, no matter how far fetched, as long as the Arabian Peninsula would be defended, even by zealots, and the royal family maintained its standing. Peasant deaths meant nothing to these two.

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

ALAN GLANCED UP from the dossier. He rarely brought work to the dinner table, but this was news he wanted to share with Aly. “Our first trainee arrives in El Paso tomorrow.” He raised his wine glass in a toast and felt a little silly; nonetheless, he was excited. A month ago, the Adala project was a concept racing through his extremely active imagination. Today, it was a reality. “He’s the fellow you interviewed on Monday.”

“Yes. Hamud Khalid,” Aly replied touching Alan’s glass. “I was impressed by him. I have to admit it.”

“Apparently Brian was impressed as well. He offered him a job on the spot.”

“But I honestly didn’t know the El Paso facility was that far along. It seems like yesterday that we were making love in the master suite and pretending the Wild West was our own private dominion,” Aly said, half teasing, half sincere.

Alan smiled, pleased that the memory was as strong for his wife as it was for him. “The place is a work in progress, I have to admit, and probably will be for quite a while. The airstrip won’t be ready for another week. But the gym is up and running; we have a firing range built; and one obstacle course in place. It’s

far enough along anyway for a couple of trainees, and besides, I'm already paying two instructors full-time wages. They might as well have someone to instruct."

"I can't help but agree with that," Aly said.

"Anyway, I want to sit in on a couple of sessions myself, just to get a feel for the program, so Brian and I are going to fly down there as soon as I get a few things in order here in town. You're welcome to join us," Alan told her. He saw her smiling. "What's that smile for?"

"You want to go down there to make sure no one's goofing off and to see if you can keep up with the competition. I know you," Aly said as if she was reading his thoughts.

"Better than eighteen holes of golf and a three-martini lunch, don't you think?" Alan said.

"When you put it that way," Aly said. "Just come back in one piece if that's not asking too much."

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

ALAN MET WITH Davis International Industries' department heads the following morning. It was an intense three-hour session that covered operations from the U.S. and Mexico to the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Alan wanted a fire lit under his management team while he was away, and he wasn't shy about sharing the fact.

"I could be out of touch for a couple of days or a couple of weeks," he said to them. "I want to make sure the company is three steps ahead when I get back, not two steps back."

"Where you headed, boss?" Jim Pollock, his VP of international development asked. "Chasing polar bears?"

"Nothing quite so romantic, or so cold." Alan knew this group was too professional to probe further, so he said, "As soon as my plans firm up, I'll let you know. In the meantime, Mr. Pollock has the helm."

## **MILLAR IMPORT AND EXPORT CO.**

THE ADALA TEAM met that afternoon and finalized their first target. "Herb's got more info for us on Mohammed Omar al-Fayez."

“He’s our man. Turns out he had been gunning for a certain Hassim Bin Arabi for a very long time, and it turns out that Hassim Bin Arabi was sitting in first class aboard the same Air France flight that went down over the Alps with Dan Millar aboard. It’s terribly difficult not to put two and two together.”

“Has this been confirmed?” Brian wanted to make sure, not that it would make al-Fayez any less of a desirable target.

“The passenger manifest didn’t show Bin Arabi as a passenger, but then who knows how many people flying in and out of Saudi Arabia use their real names,” Herb said. “But the MI-6 team in London put their heads together with Afghan Intelligence and, lo and behold, they recognized one

of Hassim bin Arabi’s aliases.”

“Who is this Bin Arabi guy?” Marie wanted to know.

“A real sweetheart of a guy actually, at least in the arena of world politics,” Herb said. “He was the leader of an Afghan political movement opposing the Taliban, not a very healthy position to be advocating in any case, but then word got out that Bin Arabi was cooperating with the CIA and naming names. The Taliban knew he had to go and swore revenge. The head man in their revenge department is none other than Mohammed Omar al-Fayez.”

“That’s the devil who was supposed to have been killed in that Mosque explosion, right?” said Marie. “Or at least one day he was and the next day he wasn’t.”

“He wasn’t killed because he wasn’t there,” Herb said. “I mentioned last time we met that a British mole felt pretty strongly that the whole thing was a ruse, and he was right. Now MI-6 has found al-Fayez living in a cozy little house on the edge of Kandahar and using an alias. Thanks to the British, we now have photos of this murderer and samples of his script.”

“I think murderer describes him nicely,” Brian Hall admitted. “So now what? Do we make this guy our official number-one target and start our detailed planning for entry, execution, and extraction now?”

“Alan,” Herb said. “The rest is yours.”

“Thanks.” Alan stood up, coffee cup in hand, and began circling the room. He nodded at Herb. “Let’s take a look at those photos, shall we?”

Herb switched on the digital wall monitor at the back of the conference room and punched two keys on the key pad of his computer. The bearded, brutish face of Mohammed Omar al-Fayez filled the screen. It was a grainy, crude photo, but there was no mistaking the lack of emotion in his eyes or the intensity of his

gaze. This was a dangerous man, and he clearly knew it. He wore a black scarf coiled around his head and a rifle over his shoulder. A second and third photo showed him in the mountains of Afghanistan, one with three other Taliban soldiers and one posed in front of a bombed out Mosque in the center of a devastated Afghan village.

“Makes me shudder,” Marie admitted.

“Most cold-blooded killers have that effect,” Brian assured her. “He killed Dan Millar and hundreds of others just to get to this Bin Arabi character, just because the guy was making things a little uncomfortable for his group of cutthroats. I say we go after him.”

“There’s just one thing,” Alan said, “that’s been seriously bothering me.”

“If it’s more proof you need, boss...”

“No, Herb, I’ve got all the proof I need.” Alan admitted. “My problem is that I’ve never in my life asked anyone to do anything that I wouldn’t do myself. That includes sending a man into a foreign country to kill some-one just because I deem it acceptable, even desirable.”

“I don’t get it,” Marie said.

“What I mean to say is that the proposed action targeting al-Fayez or any other terrorist creates a dilemma for me.”

“Boss, this guy deserves a bullet in the head,” Herb assured him.

“On that we agree completely, Herb,” Alan said, “but I simply cannot ask another man to go out and kill someone if I wouldn’t do the same thing myself.”

“What?” Brian said, anticipating Alan’s next words.

“We know we have sufficient reason to execute this guy. We know that, and I have no problem pulling the trigger myself.”

“Hold on. Are you daft?” Brian protested. “This is folly.”

“I have to become a HAWK or I can’t go on with the project. I’m sorry. I’ve been anguishing over this for the last week, and I can’t do it any other way. I feel that strongly about it.”

“Forget it,” Brian said. “That’s not the way this business works, boss. Some people make the decisions; other people carry out the decisions exactly the way it’s done in real life and exactly the way you run Davis International.

“Seriously, Alan, Aly would never allow you to do such a thing in a million years, even if you were trained to the hilt,” Herb said.

“Aly would never know,” Alan said. “She’ll never hear it from my lips and you three have given me your...”

“No way!” Marie said. “Just no darn way, Alan.”

“Now would everyone calm down a little, please,” Alan said, more firmly than he intended. “First off, I wouldn’t be going to a country with a hostile government.

“Second, I’d be working with an OWL who would do the tough work. He would locate the target, set up the logistics, and draw it up to the last detail, including my extraction.”

“Third, I’ll spend whatever time is necessary at our training camp to get up to speed: every aspect, every skill, every piece of the puzzle. I’ll know exactly what to do when I get to Afghanistan—every detail.

“Fourth, we have the element of surprise on our side. The target doesn’t even know we exist. The target isn’t even aware that we know he’s alive. I’d be gone for a week tops. In and out. The company is in good hands. In fact, I already told my department heads I might be incommunicado for a while.”

“Oh, I see. So let me get this straight,” Marie said argumentatively. “You’re more concerned about the company than your wife?”

“That’s not what I said, Marie, and you know that,” Alan said gently. “I’ll work it out with Aly. Maybe I’ll take her with me. A husband traveling with his Muslim wife in a Muslim country, that’s pretty good cover.”

“That’s the first sensible thing you’ve said in the last ten minutes,” Herb said to him.

## **DETROIT, MICHIGAN**

HAMUD KHALID AND his brother Fahd talked long into the night about the job Hamud had accepted after his interview and testing at Century Investigators. Fahd wanted to know every question they had asked and every answer his brother had given them. They talked about the polygraph tests and tried to figure out what the nature of the job would be based on those questions.

Fahd read the advertisement that his brother had answered from the *Journal of Muslim Affairs*. He went through the application. He was excited for his younger brother but was also feeling a little protective. He also realized this was a wonderful opportunity, and after they had finished one six-pack of beer and

trekked to the liquor store for another, he and Hamud began to wonder if this new company might not have other openings. Fahd was at least as smart as his little brother and was surely more worldly. Perhaps two Khalid brothers would be better than one.

“I can mention your name to my new employer,” Hamud said excitedly. “He gave me his cell phone number and urged me to call any time.”

“Any time may not have meant 1:00 in the morning, my brother,” Fahd said, warm from the alcohol. “What about tomorrow? Would you do that for me?”

“I would gladly give you my position in fact,” Hamud assured him, and they both took this to mean they were kin who would do anything for one another.

“Wouldn’t that be great? The two of us working side by side for some big international company.”

They drank to this prospect. Not once, but a number of times.

## **MILLAR IMPORT AND EXPORT CO.**

BRIAN WAS TYPICALLY cautious about meeting with Hamud Khalid’s brother Fahd without going through all the formality of an application, the screening process, and the phone interview with Aly Davis, so he was pleased when Fahd insisted on taking the same steps his brother had.

“I don’t want any special consideration,” he said. “If I’m right for the job, great. If I’m not, I don’t want any special favors just because you hired Hamud.”

Brian had two other interviews scheduled with Century Investigation that week, so after Fahd’s application passed muster, they scheduled him for that Thursday afternoon.

“All I know is if he’s anything like Hamud, he’ll make one hell of an OWL,” Brian told Marie that night over dinner. Now that the El Paso training facility was up and running and a general contractor had been hired to oversee the project, Marie was the logical choice to take over the interview process at Century, and she was eager to get started.

## **AIRBORNE TO DETROIT**

ON THEIR FLIGHT to Detroit the next morning, Brian gave her his impressions of the three applicants.

“Fahd Khalid is more intense than his brother and more assertive. He harbors as



much hate for terrorists as anyone I have ever met, but then he and his brother lost their mother and sister in a car bomb. He talked a lot about revenge, and I didn't really have to probe."

"A ready-made HAWK," was Marie's comment.

"I'll be interested in his psych profile, but off the top, I'd say you're right."

"And the other two?"

"Good prospects," Brian said. "We'll work them together in the inter-view, and then you can keyhole the polygraph tests."

"And the assessment for Alan?"

"The assessment and evaluation will be in your handwriting, but we'll make our recommendations on these three together," Brian said. Then he looked over and winked. "After that, you're on your own. It's sink or swim, kid. Working without a net. Do or die."

"I get it. I get it. Thank you for painting such a vivid picture," said Marie as she cringed and Brian laughed.

Naturally, when all was said and done, it seemed as if Marie was tailor-made for the business, and Brian was thrilled with her instincts. It was her idea to come straight out and tell the remaining applicants that part of their job description could easily include the assassination of terrorists.

"Let's see how they react. Can you think of a better way to test their mettle, not to mention their willingness to carry out a mission? If they can't handle it, we remind them about the confidentiality agreement they signed and send them on their way. If they embrace it, we know we've got a bona fide prospect."

"Why not?" Brian agreed.

Two days later, all three applicants had passed the psych test and the polys with flying colors, and the Adala project had three more viable candidates.

## **ADALA TRAINING CAMP, TEXAS**

FAHD KHALID ARRIVED in El Paso on Tuesday, three days after his brother's indoctrination and a day before his two colleagues, Sayd Khatami and Razi Khan. He was met at the airport by Dr. Peter Flue, the man who would teach Fahd tactics, counter terrorism, guns, and high explosives. Flue would also have the Muslim man in the best physical condition of his life within thirty days.

Fahd rode in silence. Peter talked. Not about training or fighting terrorists but soccer. Soccer was a tactical game, subtle but complex, according to the West Point doctor. Peter didn't judge Fahd by his love of the game but by his understanding of the game's subtleties. When Fahd started arguing the logic of centering the ball whenever the offense was begun, Dr. Peter Flue knew he had a trainee with leadership skills.

The minute they entered the 25,000-acre tract of barrier land Adala was renting from Jonathon Byner, Fahd took note of the signs that populated the road every 500 yards. Demolition in Progress—Stay Away. Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted. Firing Range Ahead.

“Friendly place,” he mumbled.

“Let's just say we discourage tourists,” Flue said.

When they arrived, Fahd Khalid was issued an armband that read: OWL #2. He imagined correctly that his brother was OWL #1. He was relieved of his cell phone and pager and issued bedding material, toiletries, and combat fatigues. He was assigned a bunk in an empty barracks. The latrine turned out to be a private toilet and shower room for twenty men.

Two days later, following the arrival of candidates Khatami and Khan, the training began in earnest. They were the first members of Adala, an organization destined to battle terrorism in the trenches of the enemy. They would train without complaint from 7:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. seven days each week.

“You will train hard, learn fast, and question nothing,” Navy Seal Jamie Whyte told them simply. “You will learn to survive, to kill, and to become one with the night. This is your new reality.”

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

THE LYING CONTINUED when Alan invited Aly to El Paso once again to see the progress they were making with four actual trainees in house. He called the ranch and discussed their visit with Captain Whyte, the guy in charge of teaching their newest employees how to kill in the most effective manner possible.

“Can we confine things to the classroom while my wife is there, Captain? Espionage and self-defense? Things like that? I'd rather not have to explain the firing range or the high-explosive depot.”

“No problem, Mr. Davis. You're the boss. Give me your flight arrival and we'll pick you up.”

For Alan, sleep was impossible that night.

But a man who finds it necessary to lie to the most important person in his life deserves more than one or two sleepless nights, Alan thought miserably. How did that happen? Why had he let it go on so long?

Aly was more than his partner and his wife. She was his best friend, his confidante, and his refuge, and if that was true—and Alan knew it was—then wouldn't she understand the truth behind Adala?

He knew that assassination was a far cry from espionage. Gathering information about the enemy, no matter how evil their deeds, was not the same as putting a bullet in their brain and ridding the earth of their loath-some existence. Alan saw it as a solution, fighting fire with fire. Wouldn't Aly understand that?

Alan draped an arm loosely around her waist, kissed the nape of her neck, and listened to her rough, steady breathing.

He couldn't stop the voice that chastised him for having started the Adala project in the first place. He wanted to blame Dan for getting him-self killed, but that was silly. No one had twisted Alan's arm. He was responsible for his own decisions, and creating a band of cold-blooded hit men was his idea and his idea alone. Maybe the hardest part of all for Alan was the realization that ridding the world of terrorists was not his only motivation. It was more than just a good deed or one man standing up for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This was one man thirsting for revenge and the sheer, blissful comfort it might bring him—an eye for an eye, or one eye for many, even hundreds of eyes if need be to quench his thirst. No, he could find no justification for refusing to share his dilemma with Aly.

So wake her up and tell her, you fool, he thought. Tell her you're doing your part in putting a stop to rampaging terrorism. Tell her you're doing what most of the world would like to do but can't muster up the courage. Tell her you're recruiting assassins and teaching them to kill without remorse.

Alan squeezed his eyes shut. He knew her answer only too well. Morally and ethically she could not condone killing anyone unless they were found guilty under the law by a recognized judicial panel and with the benefit of counsel.

But, he wanted to shout, Dan never had any of that!

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## **10 - TEXAS AND FUND RAISING**

KANAKIN, IRAQ

LIKE SO MANY covert meetings of terrorist groups sharing no country and no allegiance, this one took place in a dark, dank cavern hidden in the mountains outside of Kanakin in eastern Iraq. Saad bin Laden found it ironic. Not far away ran the muddy waters of the Tigris River, called by some the cradle of humankind, yet his people were left to meet like this, hidden and hunted. Anger was not the emotion that Saad bin Laden felt as he entered the stone edifice with his bodyguards; resolution described it better. When he heard the cheers of the Al Qaeda members assembled there, he felt pride. He was a warrior, and a warrior brought the fight to his enemy by whatever means necessary; this was not about convention. There were no rules of engagement. The goal was to win, and it mattered not to this gaunt and bearded man how victory was attained.

While the terrorist basked in the adoration of his conscripts, he waited for their absolute silence before addressing them. Eventually, he raised a hand and then spoke.

“Blessings of Allah be upon each of you. Our work here in Iraq has been difficult, but it has also been successful, as we knew it would be. Still, there is much yet for us to accomplish before Islamic rule takes its rightful place in this sacred Muslim land. Our goal is simple and just. We must defeat and kill all infidels who inhabit and pollute the sacred places of Allah with their presence. We must kill them one by one until their numbers cease to be.”

This most simple proclamation raised the ire and fury of the men gathered in this rock sanctuary, and their cheers echoed off stone. Saad bin Laden quieted them with the slightest gesture of his hand.

“Know this, my brothers. The filthy Americans will quit Iraq soon and run home with their tails between their legs just as they did in Lebanon and Somalia.”

More cheers, more angst, more bellicosity.

“Yes! And you and I must hasten that day and kill as many of these dogs as possible.”

Bin Laden had them eating out of the palm of his hand; this is what they lived for. This was all they lived for. He went on, his quiet voice a pitch more prominent.

“Sunni and Shia here in Iraq have joined to form an impotent government, and it favors us to see them drowning in their own helplessness. We have killed Sunni, and Shia are blamed. In return, Sunni then seek Shia blood. This is a weapon we must continue to wield. Every day the infidels kill each other and the futile government can do nothing. This also favors us.”

Saad bin Laden clenched his fist. He stared out at his Al Qaeda forces, and his voice reached a fever pitch.

“My brothers, we must kill more, for it is only then that Allah will be pleased. Remember the glorious conquests of the Prophet, peace be upon him, which long ago gathered these sacred lands under the protection of Islam. Go now, each of you and do what must be done to resurrect those glorious days.”

## AIRBORNE TO EI PASO, TEXAS

THE PLANE RIDE to El Paso was filled with turbulence, but Alan fell asleep within minutes of takeoff. He rarely slept in flight, mostly because he loved the sensation of being airborne, and he was enthralled by the view 30,000 feet in the air with the earth and all its glory stretched out before him as if it were an endless canvas shifting and changing under the patient brush strokes of a master artist. Alan found the farms nestled in the fertile valleys formed by the Allegheny Mountains and the myriad of greens that moved like water as enchanting as he did the endless golds and browns of the Oklahoma panhandle. He just had that kind of imagination.

Today was different. A sleepless night had finally caught up with him, and the vibrations of flight had a somnolent effect to which his exhausted body could only succumb.

While he slept, Aly read and wrote and contemplated how strangely overwhelmingly the Adala project had affected her husband. She rarely used the word obsession in assessing Alan’s commitments; sure, he always threw himself into his work and his philanthropy, but she saw that as passion and enthusiasm, not compulsion. Adala was different. There was something personal about his dogged determination. It worried her in the same way she worried when one of her Muslim students confessed a fascination for her class that she knew was adversely affecting his or her other school work. That was not the point of Islamic studies; the class was meant to broaden the students’ view of the world, not limit it. She worried that Adala was having similar repercussions with her husband. Now he was talking about wanting to personally experience the training regimen his recruits were enduring. This was part bravado, to be sure, but it was also a matter of wanting to taste what they were tasting, to walk in their shoes, to think like an OWL or a HAWK. It was disconcerting, even a little frightening.

Alan stirred when their pilot came over the intercom and announced their approach into El Paso. “I want to make sure everyone is buckled up back there. Mr. and Mrs. Davis?”

Alan yawned. “Did I sleep?” he said. He saw Aly’s amused expression. “I guess I did.”

“Dead to the world,” she informed him. “You needed it.”

“Listen, Aly, about our trainees. I don’t want them being in a position to identify you.”

“What?”

“Just as a precaution.”

“Oh, I see. So what does that mean, oh mysterious one? Do I stay in the kitchen the entire time we’re there or lock myself in the bathroom?”

she asked with less amusement in her voice than she had hoped.

“Don’t be a smart Alec. I just don’t want you going up and shaking their hands, making small talk about their favorite ice cream, or talking Islamic philosophy.”

Aly wasn’t through being a smart Alec. She said, “What about a disguise? I could wear a Groucho Marx mask or dress up like Chewbacca or Obi Wan.”

“I was thinking of something a little less drastic actually, like sunglasses and a hat maybe,” Alan countered.

“Right. And why not a fake beard?”

“I’m not kidding,” Alan said seriously.

“I know you’re not, darling,” she retorted. “Wanna tell me why?”

“Because one of these guys might just get captured while they’re snooping around in Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia. And if someone puts a knife to his throat and he starts naming names, I don’t want him describing a beautiful woman with amazing green eyes and perfect Arabic. Okay?”

Aly sat back in her chair. She gazed out the window momentarily as the El Paso skyline, such as it was, broke across the horizon. She finally looked back, reached over and touched his arm, and said, “I just happened to bring my sombrero. Think that’ll work?”

She smiled, and so did he. “You in a sombrero; now that I can’t wait to see.”

CAPTAIN JAMIE WHYTE, the former Navy Seal turned physical trainer and killing instructor, met them at the airport. He looked like a forty-year-old linebacker with not an ounce of fat on his body and not a hair on his head. He wore fatigues and a muscle shirt. The tattoo of a Marine bulldog had been etched on his right shoulder. The outline of a Joshua tree had been tattooed on his left.

Very businesslike, dead serious, he called Alan “sir” and Aly “ma’am.”

They piled into the cab of a pickup truck that ran like a top, and Whyte cranked up the air conditioning.

“Give me a run down,” Alan asked as they left El Paso behind them.

“So far so good. It’s a good group. Not over-the-top talented but committed as can be,” he said of their trainees.

“I’ll take that any time,” Alan said.

“Likewise,” the Navy man said, “the first thing we did was give them the complete Al Qaeda training manual—Arabic version first, English translation second. They all seemed fine with both languages,” Whyte said. He reached into the glove compartment and extracted a version of each manual for their inspection. Aly thumbed through the Arabic. Alan took a cursory peek at the English. “Verbally, it’s a little tricky. I don’t speak Arabic, and Dr. Flue won’t speak anything but, so they get a dose of both tongues.”

“Discipline?” Alan asked.

“They crave discipline. They crave direction,” Whyte said.

“Many Muslims do,” Aly assured them. “Sometimes that’s good. Sometimes it’s real bad.”

Jamie Whyte looked across the seat at her and nodded. “I’ll keep that in mind. Thank you.” Again, dead serious.

“What kind of shape are they in?” asked Alan.

“They will be in a lot better shape in a few weeks,” Whyte replied. “I’ll give you a copy of their training schedule. I think you’ll be impressed. If they survive that, they’re over the hump. If they don’t, we send them packing.”

“And how soon will they be ready to ship out?”

“In six weeks I want to see them packing their bags for the Middle East,” Whyte said. “Sooner if possible.”

“Good. Very good,” Alan answered.

“Not to sound like a tourist, Jamie,” Aly said when the ranch and its 25,000 acres appeared on the horizon, “but what have you arranged for our sleeping quarters? Not bunk beds, I hope.”

“No bunk beds, Ma’am.” Whyte almost smiled...almost. “We’ve got you set up in the master bedroom. You won’t have cable television, but you won’t have any

roommates either.”

“No cable?” Alan complained. “What kind of outfit are you running here, man?”

When Aly saw the dire look on Jamie Whyte’s face, she started laughing. “He’s kidding, Jamie, really he is.”

## ADALA TRAINING CAMP, TEXAS

CAPTAIN JAMIE WHYTE and Dr. Paul Flue may have afforded Alan and Aly the comfort of a master bedroom in a ranch house built by a man with more money than he knew what to do with, but the pampering ended Saturday morning before the sun rose.

They didn’t eat with the trainees, but they ate the same processed breakfast: powdered eggs, canned meat, energy bars, and coffee with artificial cream and no sugar.

“Army rations essentially,” Flue told them. “Not that they’ll be subject-ed to such culinary delights if and when they infiltrate a terrorist cell in Iran or Yemen. Nope, if that happens, they’ll be eating stuff that would make a Billy goat puke.”

“Be prepared, that’s our motto,” Whyte said, sharing a grin so crooked that Aly did a double take.

“Was that a smile I just saw, Jamie?”

“The guy’s a bloody comedian,” Dr. Flue said with a wink. Then he looked at Aly’s tray, and the glee disappeared. “Eat every bite, Mrs. Davis, if you would please, every bite. You’re going to need the calories.”

When breakfast was over, they went into a facility classroom, and for the better part of the morning, they pored over the Al Qaeda training manual.

Jamie Whyte began their session by introducing them both to the espionage side of the OWL concept, and then he explained that espionage was in many ways the art of blending in with the environment and letting the information, as he put it, “come to you.”

“An OWL’s middle name is inconspicuous, and he or she has to be unremarkable and nearly invisible every minute of the day—not hiding out, but flat out uninteresting, so much so that it would be an unpleasant experience for anyone to take notice. Believe me when I say that life or death often depends on who recognizes you and why,” the Navy Seal said.

Aly and Alan were issued passports and work permits in the names of Somaya



Jemael and Reza al-Wahidi. “Every piece of identification an OWL enters a country with will be forged and forged so well that his or her mother couldn’t tell the difference. Take a look.” Aly and Alan studied their new papers. The faces in the photos were theirs. The handwriting on the signatures was theirs. How the instructors had come by it, Alan didn’t know and thought better of asking.

“Well done,” he said. “I’m impressed.”

“Better than well done actually, Mr. Davis,” Whyte said soberly. He handed them each twenty-page biographies that sketched out the lives of Somaya Jemael and Reza al-Wahidi from birth—she in Teheran and he on the Gaza—to their current stations in life—she a maid and he a mechanic. “You will memorize each detail of your new life until it becomes the life you have led all these years.”

“Now get dressed,” Flue said.

When Aly emerged from the dressing room in the back, she wore a tattered burqa stitched with care many times over, hard-soled shoes, underwear purchased at a bazaar in Palestine, and not one lick of make-up. Alan was fitted out in a long-sleeved white shirt, faded black pants, laced shoes, and a scarf wrapped like a turban around his head.

“Optional,” Flue said of the scarf, “but for a man your age, I’d say yes. Look the part. Plan on growing a beard.”

“Get some sun on your face and grow a moustache,” Aly said, eyeing him with a smile, “and you might be able to fool a six-year-old from the Bronx; otherwise, you’re in trouble, my love.”

The two instructors didn’t find her comment amusing.

“Always wear muted colors, and never wear jewelry of any kind...” He glanced at Alan. “...except a watch, and not the watch you’re wear-ing—something cheap, but not stolen; something inconspicuous but not hidden.”

The lessons went on and on:

“Always sit in the rear of the theater and at the back of the restaurant.”

“Never walk too swiftly.”

“Try to never carry packages unless they come from the market or the local bazaar.”

“Speak only when you’re spoken to.”

“Your eyes and ears are the most important tools you have. Use them every

minute of every day. Whatever you see or hear you must not forget.

“Be prepared to die. You’re in enemy country now. But remember, dying doesn’t do anyone a bit of good—living wins wars.”

DR. PETER FLUE had a solution to the question of protecting Aly’s identity. She wore her burqa that evening at dinner in the mess hall next to the barracks. The trainees—six of them by this time—were all there. The instructors introduced her as a language consultant, which wasn’t really a lie so much as it was a slight exaggeration.

Aly took the part seriously, engaging each one of the six in Arabic conversation that struck Alan as rapid-fire exchanges with absolutely no meaning. He, on the other hand, studied their faces, their inflections, their postures. They both came away from the dinner with the same conclusions: these were six genuine candidates willing—and hopefully able—to engage in the art of espionage, and they were showing no remorse about joining the Adala project.

After a cup of thick black coffee that everyone laughingly called “dessert,” OWL #1 engaged Aly in a private conversation that proved both enlightening and educational.

He began by offering her the blessings of Allah, and Aly returned the gesture. Then he said, “My brother and I know Muslims in America who detest Al Qaeda and their terrorist allies as much as we do. They believe the terrorists are the source of the problems we face in successfully assimilating here. I think they would approve of our mission in the Middle East. Some would probably be willing to join us.”

“Really?” She could see that he was eager to speak with someone other than his instructors, someone who spoke his language and understood his plight as a Muslim. “Please, tell me more.”

“Many of us have relatives and friends living in the Middle East. I’m sure this is no surprise to you; but most of them hate the terrorists and their activities as much as we do. Some of them live in fear, but others are eager to fight back. I believe they would be willing to aid our cause.”

Aly acknowledged his use of the word *cause* and then asked him very carefully, “And this information, may I share it with Mr. Hall, the man who first interviewed you? I would only do so in complete confidence.”

“Certainly. We want to help. This is our opportunity,” OWL #1 told her. This is more than a job to us; it is a way to avenge those of us who have died and those of us who have suffered because our religion has been turned against us.”

THAT NIGHT, ALY shared the information she had collected from OWL #1, Hamud Khalid, and Alan realized they may have stumbled on the best recruiting tool of all: word of mouth.

“I’ll have Brian sit down with each of our trainees next time he’s here. If we can start to put together a discreet list, we may be able to start recruiting directly, even putting one of the OWLs in charge.”

“Muslim to Muslim. It’s a good idea, Alan,” Aly said.

The next day they were given their introduction to the physical training regimen every trainee in camp would be required to complete and master. It was the most rigorous six hours of Alan’s life. He loved it.

The next morning, two company planes landed at the Adala landing field one after another, the first time the resurfaced airstrip had been successfully navigated. Aly boarded one plane bound for New York. Alan headed to Houston and a meeting of the Oil Refiners Association. That afternoon, he would be introduced as the day’s featured speaker.

## HOUSTON, TEXAS

ALAN DIDN’T HESITATE to use the event as a platform for his newfound advocacy.

“Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen,” he said to the overflow crowd. “While there are plenty of industry concerns that require our attention, I must ask your indulgence in exploring one I’m beginning to think supersedes all the rest. I view it as a real, very immediate threat to our industry—not just to our job security, but to our very existence. This is a threat far more critical than we have been led to believe by even the most vocal politician.”

Alan saw half the audience lean forward in their seats. He went on, saying, “Many of you know that Davis International recently lost a very capable executive. Many of you know that this man was one of my dearest and closest friends. Dan Millar’s death was not just unnecessary and avoidable; it was unconscionable. He died at the hands of Muslim terrorists. No, Dan was not the target. The airplane he was flying in was bombed out of the sky because a man sitting in seat 6-A was perceived by these terrorists as an enemy, and this enemy had to die. It didn’t matter that Dan Millar and nearly 200 others became part of something called collateral damage.”

Alan paused. “Dan Millar was made of flesh and blood. He was a father, a husband, a lover of life. He was also an extremely valuable corporate asset. This is not a cold assessment, my fellow colleagues; this is a fact. And we, as corporate managers and directors, are shepherds of our business assets. We

have employed risk managers to insure our property. We have built walls and fences to protect against the elements and against criminals who would steal from us or vandalize valuable equipment, but we have not done enough independently to protect our assets, both human and physical, from Muslim fanatics seeking our destruction. We have dutifully paid taxes, and we have expected the money or the results of that money to provide insulation against such destruction. It hasn't worked. There isn't a nation in the world that has been able to stop these fanatics. Even nations acting together, or nations acting under the banner of the United Nations, have been shown to be impotent. So where does that leave us, my friends?"

Alan searched their faces. "The time has come for American business and industry to unite against the common threat and take independent action. We, at Davis International, have begun independent efforts and have pledged whatever funds necessary. I am inviting all of you to join us now. I think you will be amazed and excited at the progress we are making. All or any of you may participate. Please contact me personally for details, and I will treat each of your inquiries confidentially. Thank you for listening."

Alan didn't get far before the first inquiry was made. After the formal agenda of the day ended and all the participants were invited into the banquet hall for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, Alan was cornered by three of the industry's more powerful executives. Jackson Leyland was the CEO of Dalton Oil. Kenneth Weidler chaired the board of Castlebeck Shipping and Refinery. Newt Hanson founded Hanson Drilling and Exploration nearly forty years ago and was now located in sixty different countries.

"Gutsy talk, Alan," said Newt. "Very gutsy."

"We'd like the inside scoop on these 'independent efforts,'" Leyland said, sipping single-malt Scotch and holding Alan's eye.

"What about a meeting later this week? Thursday or Friday?" The Castlebeck executive suggested. "Got time?"

"I'll make the time," Alan told them. "Let's make it Thursday. How about coming in time for lunch?"

"Three for lunch," Newt replied, and his colleagues nodded. Their excitement was palpable. Alan had struck a chord.

## DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING

ON WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, the Adala team met in the conference room of Millar Trading. Everyone was on hand. The excitement Alan had felt in Houston was no less electric in this room, but it was also tempered with an orderly

professionalism that Alan had come to expect from his people.

“We may have a recruiting pipeline that could possibly eliminate any need for advertising and bring us a level of recruits that requires a whole lot less screening. Listen to what Aly learned while we were in Texas.” Alan replayed the conversation that had taken place on Saturday night between Aly and Hamud Khalid. “He and his brother aren’t the aberration we thought. Apparently there are plenty of young Muslims who hate Al Qaeda and the ideology they stand for as much as the Khalid brothers do!”

“And he and his brother are willing to help us contact these people?” Brian asked.

“Apparently so. And they’re willing to talk with you about the idea. Aly asked Hamud about that straight out, and he was emphatic.”

“Imagine that. Muslims recruiting Muslims to fight the bad apples making a mockery of their religion,” Brian said, shaking his head and smiling.

“That’s what I call movement,” Marie said, sharing his smile.

“And if what Hamud said is true about the mindset of these people, and if they really do harbor as much resentment and animosity toward terrorists as he suggests, we’ve got the makings of who knows how many Class A-1 OWLs,” Herb offered. “For that matter, a whole slew of potential HAWKs.”

“I better get down to El Paso ASAP. Run this down while the iron is hot,” Brian said. “I’d like to get this up and running as soon as possible. Any objections?”

“Go,” Marie said. “Everything’s under control here.”

“And the airstrip at the ranch is finally usable, so you can bypass El Paso altogether,” Alan added.

“Tomorrow morning then,” Brian said with a quick, decisive nod.

“What else have we got, boss?” Herb asked.

“More good news I hope,” Alan said. “Monday I was in Houston for a shindig with some industry bigwigs. I was the keynote. I went for the jugular and talked about how the private sector had to step up to the plate and start doing their part in countering terrorism. I told them Davis Industries had something cooking, and three pretty well-placed execs want to know more. They’re flying in for a discussion tomorrow. Herb, I’m hoping you’ll join us.”

“You bet I will.”

“Lunch in my conference room. Come ready to play hardball.”

“I always do,” Herb said tugging at his tie. “You know that.”

EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.

IT WAS A MEDIA fest. The press and the television news channels were all over a story about two car bombs that had somehow failed to detonate in the streets of London, and they were positively giddy over the Jeep Cherokee that had crashed into the main entrance of the Glasgow International airport and exploded.

Scenes of the Jeep burning wildly were everywhere. The media pundits and terrorist “experts” they drag out every time such an event occurs, couldn’t agree on whether it was the work of Al Qaeda, associates of Al Qaeda, or simply disgruntled Muslims. The speculation swayed this way and that until it was learned that the perpetrators were actually medical doctors, all Muslim, all angry, disgruntled, and dangerous.

“What is this? Some sort of Muslim medical conspiracy?” Aly asked, her voice filled with disgust. She and Alan were sprawled on the couch in the living room of their Manhattan condo, drinks in hand, and utterly fascinated by the fiasco. Aly could hardly contain herself. “What in the world do they hope to gain?”

Alan looked at his wife and said, “What the difference? If any one of those bombs had detonated, the street would be full of dead people, and the last time I looked, dead is dead. Who cares what their agenda was? Why aren’t the streets filled with English men and women screaming for action from their elected politicians at 10 Downing Street or the Home Secretary or whomever? The rabble-rousers are on television making speeches, and all that’s doing is riling up mobs of fanatics. The police know who they are and where they are. Sorry, Aly. I just don’t get it.”

“Listen, Alan. If I were you, I’d be worried about what’s on your plate at the moment. Adala is beginning to bear fruit. Keep the ball rolling. If anyone can do it, you can,” Aly said, an empty glass serving as a prop and punctuating her words. “But I have to say this. I want you to remember that whatever you or your group does, you have to protect the rights of the individual. You have to; or we’re just as bad as the terrorists.”

“I’m not saying you have to crack eggs to make an omelet,” Alan argued, using a saying so old he couldn’t remember where he had first heard it or why it had popped into his head at that moment. Still, it seemed appropriate. “What I’m saying is that no one has the right to call for anarchy within a country that protects his or her right of free speech. Likewise, no one should seek to tear

down the laws that protect him and at the same time agitate for the replacement of those laws with laws that would restrict his very right to agitate, to say nothing of replacing them with laws that combine church and state and turn women into slaves. Am I being too simplistic here? Are people that blind?"

Aly leaned over and kissed his forehead. "I think you're the most brilliant man in the world, my dear, and if you're looking for an ally, there's one sitting on the couch next to you and about thirty seconds from dragging you to our bedroom."

## ADALA TRAINING CAMP, TEXAS

AT THE RANCH the next day, Brian Hall met privately with Hamud and Fahd Khalid, OWLs #1 and #2 respectively, two young men he found very likeable and extremely committed. They talked about Hamud's conversation with Aly and his contention that there were any number of young American Muslims who thought exactly as he and his brother did about the ravages of terrorism and the evil men perpetrating it.

"You can imagine how far this would go to help our cause," Brian told them.

"I'm glad you said 'our' cause," Fahd said to him. "because that's exactly what it is. This opportunity that you've given us, it's more than a job to us; it's a cause."

"So this is what I'd like to ask you both," Brian said, looking from brother to brother. "Would either of you be willing to interrupt your training here and help us recruit these men we're talking about?"

"Yes. Either or both," the older brother replied, and Hamud nodded his agreement.

"Excellent. Let's do this before we make a decision. I'll come up with a game plan. It may take several days, so in the meantime, I'd like you both to continue your training as if you'll be heading overseas according to our original schedule. I'll get back to you as soon as I can."

## NEW YORK, N. Y.

BOB GRANT, THE New York-based talk-radio host with a following a million strong, was sponsored in part by a group called Inspiration Tours.

Inspiration Tours used Grant's show to advertise the various tour packages they organized every month. A good number of these ventures explored the wonders of Israel, but not all. And these days, with the ever-present terrorist activities so prevalent in the Middle East, Inspiration Tours oriented their tours toward historical sites both outside and within Israel. It was just good business; if people

wanted to use their off-days to stand at the Wailing Wall or visit one of Jerusalem's many temples, so be it.

Sam and Sarah Weiner not only owned and operated Inspiration Tours; they were also the tour directors. Their philosophy was, why not enjoy the fruits of their labors to the fullest? Their spring tour this year offered their clients something new and different and less contentious than their usual Middle East jaunts. Two weeks on the island of Sicily, a jewel set in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea and one that had been invaded and conquered by more civilizations and armies than any other place on earth. It was a great sales pitch, and the response was robust. The Sicily tour sold out in three days.

## AIRBORNE TO SICILY

THE ALITALIA FLIGHT to Italy left the last official day of spring with forty tourists, Sam and Sarah.

"I've been waiting for this trip all year," Sarah said to her husband as the plane settled over the Atlantic Ocean. "Two glorious weeks in Sicily, our first time there. I'm so proud."

"Just two weeks out of the office is enough for me," Sam said, squeezing her hand. "But I do have to say how much I am looking forward to seeing Taormina."

The planned motor coach tour began in Palermo, proceeded south-west to Trapani, then east to Agrigento and Syracuse, north to Taormina, and then west along the north coast through Cefalu. The scenery was incomparable.

On the way from Syracuse to Taormina, Sam narrated a few minutes of island history and ended by saying, "We'll be in Taormina in about twenty minutes, and I guarantee you'll find it one of the most beautiful places anywhere. Except for the tour we have planned to the old converted synagogue on the Corso, you'll be on your own for two days, so enjoy it."

"I will say this, the Corso is exceptional. There are no cars allowed, only pedestrians. It overlooks the Mediterranean facing to the east. You know, Winston Churchill always said Taormina was his favorite place on earth. Our tour of the old synagogue will begin at 9:00 a.m. tomorrow morning in the lobby of our hotel. Don't be late. You don't want to miss this one."

The group assembled the following morning promptly at nine. A bus dropped them outside the Corso. The tour was casual, and Sam's commentary was sporadic. The group strolled past the many boutiques and eateries for which the Corso was so famous.

At the end of the Corso stood an ancient structure of questionable origins. Sam



and Sarah had enlisted the assistance of a local guide for this part of the tour, and the man began with a chronological explanation of important events and dates that had affected the structure over the centuries.

“If you look above the entrance, you can see that the Star of David remains there even after all these years,” said the guide in accented English. He used an open hand to invite the group inside. It was a stately, immensely sacred structure, and it was easy to understand why the guide spoke with such pride.

In a hushed tone, he said to them, “Please take note of the wood holding up the ceiling and shaping the dais. It’s hundreds of years old. And the tile there is...”

Those were his last words. A tremendous explosion suddenly blew through the structure and ensured that no human being would ever again enjoy the old synagogue. It simply existed no longer.

The headline in *La Sicilia* the next day proclaimed the deaths of fifty-seven people on the Corso in Taormina, forty-two of whom were American Jewish tourists visiting an important historical site. They were killed by a powerful explosion, believed to have been detonated by Muslim terrorists, which demolished the structure of an ancient synagogue.

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## 11 – TRAINING - SLAUGHTER

### NEW YORK CITY

DESPITE THE OPPRESSIVE heat of a July day in midtown Manhattan and the mass migration of vacationers headed for the beaches at the Hamptons, Montauk, the Catskills, or the New Jersey shore, three very powerful oil executives flew into the city Thursday morning for a much anticipated rendezvous with a highly respected colleague who had struck a chord with them only four days before with his speech at the Refiners Association in Houston.

Actually, the heat was hardly a factor for these three. After all, they were picked up at the airport by temperature-controlled limousines and taken directly to the Davis International Building, where they were met by the sort of youthful escorts that take the sting out of any weather, inclement or otherwise, and rode a private elevator to the eighth-floor offices of the Millar Trading Company.

The conference room inside was a temperate seventy degrees. Lunch was catered by the five-star Imperial Elixir restaurant and served by Chef Theo Blaze himself. First class would not have come close to describing it, but then, Jackson

Leyland, the wily CEO of Dalton Oil; Kenneth Weidler, the chairman of the board of Castlebeck Shipping and Refinery; and Newt Hanson, founder of Hanson Drilling and Exploration, were accustomed to luxury. A smoothly operating organization was an expectation.

There were five chairs and five place settings. The fifth was occupied by Herb Bentz, whom Alan introduced as “the former deputy director of the CIA and a close friend.” Leyland, Weidler, and Hanson were not in awe; what they were was impressed and pleased. The involvement of a man with Herb’s credentials signaled the depth of Alan’s commitment to take a stand against the terrorist factions creating havoc with their organizations and damaging their business interests.

“Herb has been a longtime consultant to Davis Industries, gentlemen, and I respect his knowledge of the intelligence world because of his understanding of the people with whom we’re dealing. Herb’s also got a list of contacts in the intelligence world that can’t be beat.”

Herb made the rounds, shaking hands and fielding the usual niceties that he so thoroughly despised. “Thanks for coming,” he said three times and spiced it with a couple of “heard a lot about you” type accolades.

Lunch was served with iced tea and sparkling water; no one requested alcohol, and Alan didn’t offer. They talked sports and politics, and when no one could agree on the fate of the Yankees so early in the season or who the Republican nominee for president would be, they pushed aside their plates and got down to business.

Alan began by saying, “By now you are all aware that we suffered some pretty significant sabotage at our Riyadh refinery. You may have guessed that the culprits were radical Muslim fanatics, and you probably don’t need to be told that no one has been arrested or charged or ever will be.”

“Saudi security has about as much teeth as my ninety-year-old mother,” Newt said.

“Tell me this. How did the bulk of the world’s oil supply end up in the hands of a bunch of spineless wimps who can hardly blow their noses without an American engineer holding their hands?” Weidler queried rather bluntly.

“A question worthy of the ages, my good friend,” Newt replied.

“After the attack,” Alan continued, “I needed someone to assess the damage in Riyadh, and Dan Millar already had arranged his plane ticket before I could even think of suggesting someone else, not that I would have.”

“Dan was murdered, collateral damage when the plane he was riding in was blown out of the sky.”

“Dan was a good egg, Alan,” Jackson Leyland said, “smart and funny and way too young to die, much less die like that.”

“Second that,” Newt said, and Weilder pursed his lips and nodded.

“Thanks, gents. I appreciate that,” Alan said, “and Dan was more than just a good egg; from a corporate perspective, he was an invaluable asset.

I believe we have a right to protect our assets, gentleman, no matter where they are, and on behalf of all stockholders, we have an absolute OBLIGATION to do so. I have to think the three of you agree since you’re here today.”

Alan allowed their server to pour coffee before sending him out. When the door closed behind him, Alan nodded toward Herb and said, “Now I’d like Herb to tell you about the real world as seen through the eyes of a man who’s been a little closer to the trenches than we have. Herb?”

“Thanks, Alan.” Herb rocked forward in his chair and anchored his elbows on the table. He looked from man to man and said, “Gentleman, if you take nothing else home with you today, I think it’s vital as hell that you recognize that America is at war today as much as we were in Korea or in Vietnam. There’s a difference, of course. We’re not doing battle these days with another nation, one with a flag and borders and uniforms. The enemy in this war is a bunch of suicidal fanatics without a country or nationalistic pride or family back home to fight for. What do these people want? They want to impose their ideology on an entire planet.

“They want to impose the kind of law that gives them the right to kill anyone at anytime for any belief or any deed that is opposed to their constantly fluctuating interpretations of their own law no matter how far afield those interpretations may be from the truth as seen by most ordinary Muslims. Amazingly, they seem to have an unlimited supply of Muslim fanatics willing to commit suicide in the name of murder and mayhem and Allah. They call their victims infidels. And what’s an infidel? An infidel is anyone not agreeing with their warped interpretation of the Qur’an— pretty simple, absolutely nefarious.”

Herb let the words sink in before he slapped the tabletop with his palm and went on. “Are they organized? Yes, they are. They even have their own schools. They call them Madrassas. Madrassas originated in Saudi Arabia, but now they’re popping up all over the Middle East, Europe, North Africa, and Southeast Asia. It’s a pretty simple curriculum really. They take a bunch of young, dirt poor kids and promise them eternal bliss in paradise with an endless supply of virgins, and to attain this paradise, all they have to do is give themselves up to something called martyrdom. What better way to manufacture murderers? You convince a

boy he has nothing and promise him everything. You tell them Allah thinks this martyr gig is the best thing since sliced bread. You tell them the Prophet approves wholeheartedly, and it's like leading a horse with a carrot on a stick."

Herb went on. "Strangely, if not surprisingly, most of their victims have been the good, law abiding Muslims who just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"So what's the best way to fight this threat? You fight it with the very people it's hurting the most, good, law abiding Muslims who hate Al Qaeda and everything terrorists stand for as much as you and I do.

"We must find these Muslims and, believe me, they exist aplenty. Those who see the light but are hesitant to join with us might need to be motivated. You try to make them realize they and their families are the real victims today and that they have the most to lose tomorrow; failing this, simply move on to the next candidate. You must compel the Muslim world to stand up against the very people who are mocking their exis-tence every single day."

Herb sat back now and wrapped his hands around his coffee cup. "The good news is that Alan has come up with a strategy to do just that. It's a strategy that's in operation right now, and it could very well help to turn the tide."

"Thanks, Herb."

Alan saw that his three guests had hunched forward in their seats, and he mimicked their position without being too aggressive. Then Alan said, "I hate to use the word *confidential*, my friends, but this is that kind of conversation. I hope everyone's comfortable with that."

"Say no more," Newt Hanson replied. "I think the three of us are counting on that as well."

"Lunch with a colleague and friend," Jackson Leyland said.

"Yankee talk," the Castlebeck chairman added.

"I appreciate it," Alan said. "Okay, so the fanatics we're talking about come in all shapes and sizes, but the umbrella name we all know is Al Qaeda. So we have chosen an Arabic name for our organization to counter that. We call our operation Adala, which means 'justice' in Arabic."

"Apropos," Weidler said, nodding his approval.

"Our aim is to put as many terrorist leaders as we can find behind bars or out of commission. If they happen to end up six feet under ground, we won't complain," Alan said as he watched their faces for signs of shock, apprehension, or

hesitation. If he saw anything at all that a good psychiatrist could identify, it was genuine interest.

Good, Alan thought. “Here’s how it works. Adala is recruiting young American Muslims who have come to abhor the work of terrorists and the shame they have brought to followers of Islam. We are training them to act as espionage agents abroad. Their mission is to travel where needed and to gather the kind of incriminating evidence about terrorist activity that can be given to foreign intelligence agencies for purposes of counter terrorism, to aid in any investigations they may be conducting, and even to aid in successful prosecution.”

“You’re recruiting and training spies, in other words,” Newt Hanson said straight out.

“Full time, fully committed spies. That’s right.”

“We call them OWLs,” Herb said, “and let me tell you that the Western world is desperate for such operatives. You can pose the question to any-one in the intelligence world, and they will tell you just how desperate they are for exactly the kind of infiltration units we’re training.”

“And we intend to fill the void or at least a part of the void,” Alan added. “We have gotten hundreds of inquiries. We go very deep before we even mention a job description, and when we decide to make an offer, we make sure it comes with a compensation package that makes it worth their while.”

“We’ve started small,” Herb said. “We now have six OWLs in training full time at our facility in Texas.”

“Texas!” This was the first sign of genuine surprise on the part of any-one in their audience, and it was Texas-based Newt Hanson who expressed it. “Where?”

“Out in the middle of nowhere, believe me.”

“You just described the entire state to a tee, Herb,” Newt assured him. This caused a ripple of laughter, and the laughter defused the tension. Alan was glad to see it.

“Herb and I will try to answer any and all of your questions, gentle-men,” Alan assured them, “but first the sales pitch. Yes, I asked you here to aid Adala. I know you won’t be surprised when I say one of the ways you can do that is financially. It’s not an inexpensive proposition, but I intend to keep our supporters small in number and very private. You can also help our cause by getting your own people overseas more involved. How? Just by being more aware and more alert and by giving them someplace private and secure where

they can go to pass on any information they think might be relevant. ”

## **ADALA TRAINING CAMP, TEXAS**

AT ADALA’S TEXAS training ranch northeast of El Paso, Captain Jamie Whyte and Dr. Paul Flue were deep into the instruction of six OWLs, including the Khalid brothers. The six were slowly morphing from ordinary men with average jobs and normal dreams into soldiers and technicians, agile men viewing the world through the eyes of spies and infiltrators. They didn’t talk about the things that once occupied their minds, like work and women, bowling or pool, food or religion. They talked about deception and safety, the art of lying, quiet manipulation, strength of body and mind, and most of all the excitement of going “under,” as Jamie called it.

“An OWL must be invisible at all times; a HAWK must never be seen,” he was telling them after two hours on the obstacle course. “Your life may depend on it. We can see from the Al Qaeda manual how much they emphasize invisibility; the Adala techniques must be even more subtle. They require intelligence, and you have been chosen because you possess that. An OWL is a thinking man who sees three steps ahead of himself at all times. An OWL is an intuitive man who anticipates opportunity as much as he does potential problems or danger. A HAWK is no less diligent.”

He looked at them one by one and was impressed with how attentive they were becoming, even with rivers of sweat pouring down their faces and aching muscles. “You do that from here on out every moment of your lives. You live as OWLs. You think as HAWKs. You never let your guard down at dinner, or when you’re under the covers in your bunk, or when you’re in the latrine relieving yourselves—Never—Is that clear?”

He was pleased at the nods. “On some assignments there will be two OWLs playing out their parts, gathering information, living the life of a native from the moment you enter the badlands. You will only see your fellow OWL when you must work together in order to accomplish your assignment. If you see him at other times—he does not exist.

“Each of you is being trained to act as both OWL and HAWK. You are learning to infiltrate seamlessly. You are learning to kill skillfully, confidently, and successfully every time. And you are learning to kill without remorse. So this evening, starting right now, we are going to discuss the art of killing. We are going to discuss a dozen ways to kill with your hands, with a blade, with a gun, with explosives, with fire, with a stick or a rock or a pillow; quietly, effectively, efficiently, and most importantly, with utter deadliness.

“And since we’re almost two miles from a hot dinner, we jog,” Dr.

Flue exhorted them. “We jog with clear minds and free spirits, right men? Let’s do it.”

And so they set out running, eight shadows blending in with the setting sun and the coming of evening.

“Pop quiz,” Flue called to them. “OWL #1. Give us one efficient way to kill the enemy.”

“By gunfire,” Hamud Khalid called back. “Shoot the target.”

“Good,” Flue replied. “And what do we need to learn about the art of gunfire?”

“First, we know our weapon—know it as well as we know our-selves. Whether the weapon is a rifle, pistol, or automatic weapon, the shooter must be well trained for accuracy, range, weather, versatility, and best use.”

They started up the hill in the direction of the ranch house. Heavy breathing filled the air. “What else, OWL #2?” called the doctor, a superbly conditioned athlete who had yet to break a sweat.

“The weapon must be of the highest quality and in excellent condition,” was the OWL’s answer.

“Good. OWL #3! What can you add?”

“Nothing, sir.”

Suddenly Jamie Whyte was in his face shouting, “Have you learned nothing? You have to be able to kill with one shot. You must know the body so well that one shot is all you need. Is it the head? The heart? The torso? Tonight you will spend two hours after dinner with the manual, OWL #3, and you will recite the kill points in your sleep. And in order to kill with one shot, you need what, OWL #4?”

“The target must be within your range of accuracy.”

“Exactly. The head, the heart, and the torso. In that order. Are we clear?” Flue shouted.

“Clear, sir,” they responded as one.

“Pistol, rifle, automatic weapons, it makes no difference; the rules always apply.”

“Yes, sir!”

Now the former Navy Seal called out, “OWL #4! Give us another method of assassination.”

“Accident, sir, or at least what appears to be an accident.”

“Example.”

“An accidental fall of more than seventy-five feet, drowning, a fire, stepping in front of an oncoming train or heavy truck.”

“Very good, #4. Remember this, HAWKs, if you choose an accident as your killing method, you must plan every detail down to the last split second because you will likely never get another chance, and failure is unacceptable. Plan the kill, plan the exit, plan your extraction from the country—everything down to the most minute of details.”

They jogged. Dinner was a half-mile away. Dr. Flue shouted, “OWL #5. Another method, please.”

“An edged weapon such as a knife, dagger, ax, or foil; pointed weapons such as an ice pick, screwdriver, spike, or spear. Any or all are able to inflict a mortal wound if used properly, sir,” the trainee called out.

“Sounds as though you’ve been reading from the manual, #5. Very good. Tomorrow we will review where on the body the cutting edge is most effective and how best to make the enemy a dead enemy using pointed steel. One strike—it’s all you get—one chance to put a terrorist out of business permanently!”

Jamie Whyte fell in next to OWL #6, their newest member. “Okay, Owl #6. Another method, please.”

“Drug overdose, sir.”

“Best drugs?”

“Morphine and heroin, sir.”

“What about poisons?”

“Arsenic, strychnine, cyanide, or even ethylene glycol or antifreeze, sir.”

“Exactly. You use what’s available. You use what the situation provides. You seek opportunity.” Jamie Whyte emphasized every word.

“You must know what constitutes a lethal dose. You must know how to inject the



target. Needle, dart, capsule.” They reached the gate to the house and the former West Pointer called to them. “Now quickly, one more each without hesitation.”

“Heavy object,” OWL #1 shouted. “A club or hammer.”

“Electrocution,” #2 called.

“Suffocation,” #3 offered.

“Chemical gas,” #5 declared.

“Brass knuckles,” #4 said.

“Strangulation,” #6 ended.

“Good—very good,” their instructors said as they slowed to a walk.

“Now get some dinner and some rest,” Jamie Whyte ordered. “We start again at dawn.”

## **NEW YORK CITY**

THE HEAT WAVE embroiling the eastern seaboard pushed temperatures into the high nineties. The humidity was so palpable that the only escape was someplace fully air conditioned or a rooftop swimming pool like the one above Alan and Aly’s penthouse suite.

Alan rarely used it, but an invitation from a gorgeous woman in a bikini was not something he intended to resist. Alan changed into his suit, and Aly led him up to the roof and into the water.

“So? Any cooler?” she asked.

“Like a new man,” Alan had to admit. “This heat has been enough to drive a man to drink. It’s as hot here as it is in Texas.”

“Let’s hope this heat wave doesn’t last too long,” Alan said, leading her into the family room. “Cocktail?”

“Love one—vodka on the rocks, if you would, please.”

“Why don’t you go to the bedroom and dry off? I’ll bring your drink in,” Alan suggested.

The television in the bedroom was on when Alan arrived with matching drinks in

each hand. Aly normally preferred CNN, but tonight she had switched on FOX NEWS.

“Listen to this,” she said, a robe belted around her waist, and her hair pulled back from her exotic face.

They stood in front of the television, sipping vodka on the rocks, and listening to a live report from somewhere along the Afghan-Pakistan border. The reporter was gesturing toward the rugged mountains stretching far into the distance and describing how Al Qaeda had re-grouped en masse in northwestern Pakistan and were, in his words, “At least as strong as they were when 9/11 occurred and better organized.”

According to the reporter, the terrorist group had supposedly formed an alliance with a number of local tribal leaders, had organized and equipped training camps, and their numbers were growing rapidly.

Alan swept up the remote control and muted the sound. He perched on the edge of the bed and sipped pensively on his drink. “You know, if Adala performs half as well as I believe it will, we won’t be a moment too soon.”

“You won’t have any trouble finding places to send your OWLs, that’s for sure,” Aly said, running a comb through her hair. “The crazies just seem to be multiplying, aren’t they? There’s no end to it. What about those misguided screwballs in New Jersey? The ones who were planning an assault on that army base? The fools didn’t even have weapons, for Heaven’s sake. But I don’t think guys like that are part of Al Qaeda, do you?”

“Look at what happened in England with those medical people— doctors, for Heaven’s sake—and they couldn’t even get their car bombs to detonate,” Alan said.

“Al Qaeda wannabes.”

“Probably. And they’re springing up all over the place desperate to share in the misguided glory of killing infidels, I guess.”

“Scary.”

“Scary—scary and dangerous.” Alan swallowed the rest of his drink. He carried his glass into the bathroom and studied his reflection in the mirror. “But those people in Jersey and London weren’t core Al Qaeda.

They wouldn’t make the sorts of mistakes those guys did. They call themselves Muslim, but they don’t give care about the Muslim people. They give their organizations clever names, but the names all mean the same thing: ‘Martyrs of

Islam.’ ”

“Tough to combat,” Aly said, as she pulled a nightgown over her head and filled a glass with water.

“That’s the problem. The modus operandi up to now is to wait for them to slip up or miscalculate and then pounce. It’s like waiting for an accident before you take proactive measures.” Alan turned away from the mirror and leaned on the counter. “In the meantime, we can’t tell the good guys from the bad guys, so we end up profiling all Muslims.

“Alan, that’s the absolute worst solution there is. It’s arbitrary and discriminatory!”

“You’re right, it’s terrible. Profiling isn’t even a good last resort, and we all do it. That’s one of the reasons I created Adala, Aly, to show the world that there are plenty of good, law abiding Muslims out there who hate what’s going on as much as you and I do.”

“The object is to have Muslims get up and take a firm stand. They’re silent because they’re afraid,” she replied.

“Well, time to stop being afraid. Hopefully we can help change that. When the world sees a handful of good Muslims taking the fight to the Al Qaedas of the world, things will be different.”

Aly faced him. “I hope and pray you’re right.”

Alan turned back the covers on his side of the bed and stacked two pillows against the headboard. “By the way, the day after tomorrow I’m going to the ranch to see how things are going. I might be down there a while; we have six OWLs in training and more on the way.”

“And how’d your meeting go with your oil buddies this afternoon? Did they put their tails between their legs and run for cover?”

“They did just the opposite. They broke out their checkbooks and pledged five million bucks each in support of Adala; and that’s just the beginning.”

“That’s great!” Aly was pleasantly shocked. “So they got it? It made sense to them.”

“It obviously made a lot of sense to them. You fight fire with fire, and the guy with the most fire usually wins.”

## **MANCHESTER, ENGLAND**

“IT IS TRUE that we are citizens of the United Kingdom, my brothers, but we are Muslims first!” Abdul bin Afari said to the group huddled in the basement room of the mosque on Perrimore Avenue. The room smelled of curry and jasmine tea, but the air was also tinged with hostility and uncertainty. “We must remember always that we are on jihad! The time and place are not as important as the message. England is no less important a battleground than Iraq. Striking against the infidels has no boundaries. We must do the same here in the birthplace of imperialism and colonialism. Allah expects no less of us. But we must pick our targets wisely; we must gauge a man’s importance and the impact of his death. We must also gauge the recognition it will bring us in the eyes of our brother jihadists.”

“Targets? Who are you talking about, Abdul?” asked one of the group. “A politician? A minister? A scholar? These are men who travel with guards and escorts, and men of our color can’t get anywhere near them.”

“Not to mention that we are only nine in number,” said another. “Not an overwhelming force.”

Abdul bin Afari was furious. He was almost shouting when he said, “The Prophet, peace be upon him, faced the impossible in Medina, did he not? Unbelievable odds—but he was doing Allah’s work, and thus he prevailed.”

“And we will do the same,” the youngest of their group said with unabashed conviction.

“That we will, little brother,” the leader of this unnamed cell said. “Our first task is to select our victims carefully. When our victims die, they must not die quietly. Their deaths must raise Islam to the level of worship demanded by Allah and bring us the recognition we deserve. We must choose carefully and plan precisely.” Abdul bin Afari stood up and spat. “It may be true that Ayman al-Zawahiri, may Allah bring him blessings, and all the other brothers in Al Qaeda don’t yet know we exist, but they soon will. So from this day forward, my brothers, we will call ourselves Messengers of Islam. Let us begin making our plans.”

## **TOULON, FRANCE**

NOT FAR FROM Toulon, just off the main coastal highway along the French Riviera, stood the once hallowed convent of St. Julienne d’Paix. Its gray, quarry-stone chapel displayed one of the most magnificent stained glass renditions of the Rue d’le Croix ever created. In the past, pilgrims seeking the blessings and indulgences of St. Julienne visited the chapel yearly during the Octave of Easter.

Declining donations coupled with the greatly diminished interest on the part of young women to devote their lives to charitable service and celibacy led to the conversion of the property into a private school for young women. The school had earned a reputation for achievement that drew only the most gifted young women from all parts of France. Among them were the twin daughters of the French foreign minister, Simon Paradis.

On this bright Sunday morning in late July, the choir of soprano voices rising up from the nave of the chapel carried to the surrounding cliffs overlooking the placid blue Mediterranean below. The twelve-year-old twins, Alexis and Portia, stood side by side in the front row, concentrating intently on their choir mistress.

Outside, sound and nature melded together like sea and sand, and there was nothing to mar the beauty and tranquility of this splendid pastoral scene.

In fact, not until a landscaper's van appeared snaking up the road in a cloud of blue exhaust fumes did the scene reduce itself to the ordinary.

There was no one to witness the van as it turned into the school's private driveway, nor did anyone notice the four gardeners as they removed their tools from the vehicle. Had anyone been present, he or she would surely have wondered about the need for landscaping on the Sabbath, would surely have asked why the men were entering the chapel with their tools in hand and why the four positioned themselves so strategically along the rear wall of the venerated building.

No one noticed the Russian Kalashnikovs that suddenly materialized from among their tools because at that moment, the moment of Consecration of the Host, all heads were lowered in submission and prayer. The first burst of gunfire struck the priest in the chest and face, and blood splattered over his vestments and rained down on the altar behind him. The startled young women in the choir turned in the direction of the gunfire, confused and terrified. Alexis took hold of Portia's hand.

"Run," she shouted to her sister. "Run!"

Run they did, but like the rest of the congregation, they made it no further than the exit before their bodies were riddled with gunfire. They died hand in hand, along with one hundred and ten other innocent men, women, and children, a terrible price exacted by Al Qaeda on that day in the name of Allah.

## **ADALA TRAINING CAMP, TEXAS**

THE HEAT AND the humidity of west Texas was less oppressive than what Alan had been experiencing in Manhattan. Perhaps it was the open space or the freedom or the scent of cordite in the air as he drew a bead on the target 150

yards away and hit it dead center.

“Nice shot, Alan. That’s ten bull’s eyes in a row; not bad. Something tells me you have more experience with a rifle than you let on.” Jamie Whyte was smiling, or at least as much as Jamie Whyte smiled at his most ebullient moments. “But enough kid’s play. Let’s take it back to 300 yards and see if that bull’s eye gets a little smaller.”

Alan was just getting used to the Nor-Cal Precision 700 BDL. It was a good gun. A little on the heavy side, but the balance was perfect. He marched alongside the former Navy Seal until they reached the 300-yard marker. Then he settled into a prone position along the side of the hill, nestled the stock against his shoulder, and peered through the sight. He drew a bead on the target, waited for the cross hairs to align, and gently squeezed the trigger.

Jamie watched through high-powered binoculars as the bullet pierced the target. “Well done,” he bellowed, “Let’s see another.”

Alan fired another dozen shots, his rhythm growing with each round, and all fell within the circumference of a salad plate.

“Good shooting. You’re a real technician with that weapon in your hands. We’ll make you a HAWK yet.” That was high praise coming from Jamie Whyte, who was already stomping back down the hill and calling back over his shoulder. “Move it, soldier; let’s see what you can do on the pistol range. You think some Al Qaeda joker is going to invite you to take potshots at him from three hundred yards and then just let you waltz away? What happens if you meet one of those thugs in an alley? Think you can pull the trigger from three feet away as calmly as you can from three hundred? Let’s find out.”

## **LONDON SUBURBS, ENGLAND**

HERB BENTZ FLEW to London to meet with Lord Byron Chesney, head of covert operations for England’s Secret Intelligence Service, commonly known as MI-6.

The nondescript home of MI-6 was on Edgerton Lane flanked by equally nondescript government buildings and overgrown gardens. Herb went through the usual cloak-and-dagger procedures at the entrance and was finally ushered into Lord Chesney’s office on the second floor.

The two men shook hands, and Herb was impressed by the strength in the old man’s grip. “How are you, old boy?” the elder man asked.

“Hello, Edmund. It’s nice to see you again,” said Herb.

“Likewise, Herb. How’s retirement?”

“Not very restful,” Herb admitted.

“I assume you’re here about the French school?”

“What do we know?” Herb asked as if he had never left the world of intelligence.

Lord Chesney invited Herb to sit and poured them both black tea. He grimaced at the taste, set his cup aside, and said, “Our information is that an Algerian Al Qaeda cell led by Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar is responsible. Bin Shizar is as nasty as they come, Herb. I guess that goes without saying after the slaughter of 110 people with hymnals in their hands. We have a pretty good line on him and his henchmen. One day I hope we get the green light from Downing Street to take him out.”

“You know, Edmund, I know some people who don’t answer to Downing Street on such matters, and they don’t answer to Pennsylvania Avenue either. Interested?”

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## 12 - THE OWLS TAKE WING

### EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.

HENRY, THE DAVISES’ long time chef, served a dinner of Syrian stewed chicken with cous cous and marinated vegetables. He insisted on pouring the wine, a task Alan normally enjoyed.

“How nice of you Henry,” Aly said with a touch of curiosity. Henry had been more attentive than usual these last few weeks, and he had even gone out of his way to make conversation, this from a man who rarely spoke about anything other than food, and then only the week’s menu. Aly smiled and allowed a note of sarcasm to creep into her voice. “Are you bucking for a raise, Chef Abbas?”

“No, madam,” he said quite seriously, his Lebanese accent just a shade thicker than usual. “I know you and Mr. Davis have both been working hard of late, and I thought a little added service was in order.”

“I’m just joking, Henry; we appreciate the added service. Thank you,” said Aly as Henry turned to leave.

“Well, he’s right about that. You have been pushing it pretty hard lately; and I

can't really say what's gotten more of your attention, Davis International or Adala," Aly commented.

The Syrian dish struck her as a shade bland this evening, and she traded her fork for her wine glass.

"Imagine, two interests of equal importance. That sounds like you, the woman who somehow manages to balance a full load of students and twenty hours of foundation work every week," Alan said with a coy smile.

"Touché," Aly conceded. "Which reminds me, some of our hard work in Egypt looks like it might be paying off."

"Tell me." Alan leaned forward, genuinely interested. The Davis Foundation had long been aligned with such groups as the World Health Organization, and Alan was proud of Aly's involvement.

"The health workers in Egypt walked out in protest over the circumcision of a twelve-year-old village girl—she died as a result of this butchery. Even though Egypt has outlawed circumcision of girls, it still takes place."

"Circumcising young girls." Alan shook his head. "Such exceptionally cruel Dark Age thinking; please, don't get me started."

Aly took a long drink on her wine.

"Speaking of Egypt," Alan said, "have you heard the name Haji Mustafek?"

"Yes, he's a first-rate Islamic radical doing his best to turn the entire world against ordinary Muslims," was how Aly described him. "Why do you ask? As far as I know he's in jail awaiting trial. Isn't that right?"

"No such luck. He was released three months ago on some nonsensical technicality. He walked out of jail and took the first plane to Pakistan. Rumor has it he had a pow-wow with his old co-conspirator, Ayman al-Zawahiri, while he was there."

"That can only make for trouble," said Aly, shaking her head.

Now he's back in Egypt and up to his old tricks again," Alan explained. "Herb told me only today that Mustafek was likely responsible for the murder of those two French Embassy attachés who were found with their throats slit last month."

"It just never ends, does it?"

"We're thinking about sending one or two of our OWLs down to Cairo to look into



this guy.”

“Oh, Alan, if Adala could help get a guy like Mustafek off the streets, the world would be a better place for it,” Aly said. And then a thought occurred to her. “If you need someplace for your guys to stay while they’re getting settled in, let me know,” she said.

Then she asked, “Do you remember Fadil Sammut and Paki Maloof?”

“Sure—from your masters program, right? Good guys.”

“And now they’re both full professors at Cairo University,” Aly continued. “I’ll bet they could recommend someplace safe and out-of-the-mainstream.”

“Your guys could pose as students from one of my classes wanting to spend a semester at Cairo University.”

Alan didn’t know whether to be grateful or mortified, but he knew by now that he could not segregate Aly from the Adala project even if he wanted to. “You sure about that?”

“Alan, if I can help rid the world of someone like Haji Mustafek, I’d call the man on the moon and pay him a personal visit in my underwear.”

“Hopefully that won’t be necessary.” Alan smiled. “All right then; I’ll let the team know.”

THE “TEAM,” AS Alan called the Adala group, met the following day at the Millar Import and Export Co. offices. Brian Hall opened the meeting with the news that the Adala training camp was now host to sixteen trainees. “We’re bursting at the seams; sixteen is about max for our two instructors. We’ve got six OWLs winding up their training even as we speak, which means we’d better start finalizing plans to see them in the field.”

“That is the whole idea, isn’t it?” Herb said.

“It’s a big step,” Marie said. “If we send someone out there and they aren’t ready, it could blow the lid off the entire operation.”

“There’s always that risk, sure. But we have to begin somewhere,” Herb replied. “If the instructors we hired say we’ve got six guys ready to earn their keep, I say we let them test the waters.”

“Alan?” Brian said. “Any thoughts?”

“Herb’s right—time to rock ‘n roll, team.” Alan stated.

There was a moment of silence, one filled with nervous energy and quiet anticipation. Herb drank coffee, Marie pecked at the keyboard of her computer, Brian stared out the window intent on the mist rising from the East River and spilling over onto Park Avenue obscuring the pedestrian flow below.

Alan drew a breath and said, "Here's what I'd suggest. I'd like to send OWL #5 to Kandahar to work with me. He's got the Afghan language down, and he knows the culture. We'll make a first rate team."

"You sure you want to do this, Alan?" Brian asked because he was hoping against hope that his boss had come to his senses and realized this was the work of men who were trained for no other purpose, men who looked the part, who spoke the language, and who were, frankly, expendable.

"I'm absolutely certain," Alan assured him.

"Then we go," Brian said. "ETA in Afghanistan, two weeks and two days."

"What about OWLs #1 and #2?" Marie asked. "If any of our boys are ready, the Khalid brothers are."

"I've got OWLs #1 and #2 earmarked for Saudi Arabia," Brian said. "We'll put them on Dawud al-Sanie and his Wahhabi group and see if we can bring that glass house crashing down."

"Concur," Herb said. "The Khalid brothers are perfect. They speak Arabic with a Saudi accent, and they have relatives living there. Their father and his whole clan hate the Wahhabis with a passion. They'll have no problem staying out of the limelight, and they'll have even less trouble gathering intel."

"Saudi Arabia it is," Alan agreed. "Let's get them out the door as soon as possible, Brian."

"What about OWLs #3 and #4?" queried Marie. "They might be the most versatile of the whole lot according to Warren and Flue."

"We'll send them where the fit is best," Herb advised. "Number 3 and number 4 are from North Africa. I think our best bet is to send them to Algiers to deal with Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar and his band of Al Qaeda thugs. We'll do the world a big favor and wipe that killer off the face of the planet."

"Which leaves OWL #6 to lay the groundwork for the job in Cairo— Time to deal with the infamous Haji Mustafek once and for all," Brian said.

"You've got my vote," Marie chimed in. "Alan, are you good with that?"

Alan nodded. "We're going to start making some noise, my friends, and people

are going to stand up and take notice. Six OWLs is a good start—six is a very good start.”

“We can plan on bringing in six new trainees as soon as we get these three operations underway and look a month or so down the road before inserting a second group in the field,” Brian suggested. “Yea or nay?”

“That’s a good idea,” Herb replied. “I’m off tonight to London, Paris, and Rome for another round of intel meetings with some of the big boys. I’ll be keeping an eye out for our next round of targets.”

“I’ll be back in four days. Shall we rendezvous again then?”

“Let’s plan our next round for the ranch in Texas if we all can make it,” Alan said. “I’ll be hip deep in training by then. You probably won’t even recognize me.”

## **KASBAH, ALGIERS, ALGERIA**

THE TINY ROOF garden sat at the heart of the Kasbah quarter in Algiers, the densely populated and dangerously polluted capital city of Algeria. The garden was an odd anomaly hidden among crumbling apartment buildings and overcrowded tenements. Jasmine and flowering hibiscus scented the air, creating an oasis for Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar, a terrorist lacking any sense of morality.

He was sharing a midmorning glass of tea with four men who had never worked a day in their lives because rogue governments in places like Iran and Syria paid them good money for blatant acts of cowardice. They called themselves followers of Allah, but Allah would have struck them dead for ever insinuating a connection between true Islam and their wanton killings.

The Sheik was discussing the car bombing two days ago that had resulted in the deaths of sixteen schoolchildren.

“It was unfortunate that children were involved, but they were nonetheless the children of infidels, so our long-term mission was well served in any case,” bin Shizar said rather smugly, “and that mission has been clearly written for us in the Qur’an. Allah says nothing in the Holy Book about sparing the lives of infidel children.”

“I was watching Al Jazeera earlier this morning,” one of those present added, “and imams and mullahs from Lebanon to Iran are praising our work.”

“Indeed,” bin Shizar said. “You four have done the work of Allah and done it well. Rest assured you will all be rewarded in the end.”

“And what does Allah wish of us now, Sheikh bin Shizar?” another asked.

“Allah now commands us to visit the island resort the infidels have built on the Ile de Fer. The European devils are flocking to our beaches and polluting our waters. They eat the meat of swine, drink the forbid-den, and occupy the gambling tables when they should be on their knees praying for forgiveness.”

This brief diatribe stoked the ire of the four men, and bin Shizar could see the venom burning in their eyes. Good, he thought.

He came to his feet and reached out his hand to them, saying, “Your task is this. You are to travel to the island at once. You are to learn all there is to know about this place of gluttony and debauchery. And when you return, we will make plans so that the world will see the unstoppable power of Islam and know they cannot escape what Allah has ordained. They must be made to submit to His will.”

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

ALY WAS NOT a woman who thought the sun rose and fell based upon the parties she attended or the social functions she hosted, but there were times when she allowed herself the fun of entertaining.

The guests that night were an eclectic mix of dear friends, professional acquaintances, and a sprinkling of new faces. Chef Henry’s advice to hire a couple of extra wait people for the event and a professional bartender to man the bar had not gone unheeded.

Aly was inwardly quite pleased when she saw Marie Chavez arrive on Brian Hall’s arm and was glad Alan didn’t have a problem with his employees dating. Or if he did, he wasn’t making an issue of it with these two. Herb Bentz had arrived alone—a bit of a surprise—as had Imam Mohammed Aziz—not unexpected. Tim Pollack and his wife had gone out of their way to pick up Dan Millar’s widow, Betty, and she and Aly shared the kind of warm hug that only dear friends seem to do.

“So glad you came,” she whispered in Betty’s ear. “I couldn’t imagine this get-together without you.”

“Thank you. I needed to get out, and this is perfect for me, Aly,” Betty had said.

Aly reintroduced Betty to her father, James, as handsome as Aly was beautiful, who immediately swept Betty up in conversation. Aly blew him a kiss and mouthed, “Thank you!”

Drinks and canapés were served; the music of Diana Krall drifted down from the speakers; and the noise rose to that pleasant, unforced level that told the

hostess a successful party was afoot.

Aly, with a vodka martini in hand, fell in next to Herb Bentz and Imam Mohammed Aziz, a most unlikely twosome who were nonetheless deep in conversation about religion and politics, and the arrival of a woman on the scene didn't slow them down a bit. Aly listened, nodded, and eventually realized the imam was peeking at the martini glass in her hand.

"I hope you don't mind, Mohammed," offered Aly, raising her glass slightly, "but I do enjoy a drink occasionally, and I'm sure Allah will for-give me."

"Allah is all forgiving and all merciful as you well know Aly," replied Mohammed.

"Well, here's to forgiveness," Herb said, draining his glass rather enthusiastically. "I think I'll get another. Can I bring anything back for either of you?"

"I really shouldn't," Aly said, "but since you've been kind enough to ask, I might have another of these—very dry."

"One very-dry vodka martini—can do," Herb said, leaving Aly alone with the Muslim cleric.

Aly used the one-on-one moment to ask Mohammed Aziz about Haji Mustafek. "The European intelligence community calls him Egypt's most notorious terrorist."

The imam shook his head. "Not to my knowledge. An activist, yes, but I've heard nothing about his terrorist activities."

"Well, I have heard differently," said Aly revealing ever so slightly the effect of a couple of martinis. "By some indications, he may even be in with Al Qaeda."

"It's completely confidential, but I know," said Aly looking over both shoulders to confirm there were no eavesdroppers, "that Haji Mustafek will be under surveillance very soon. I told Herb that any government agent could stay with professor Fadil Sammut in Cairo; just mention my name. You remember Fadil, one of my graduate students; I introduced him to you a couple of years ago."

"Ah, yes, from your masters program. A professor I believe?" the imam probed.

"Yes, at the university in Cairo. They..."

At that moment, Herb returned with their drinks, and Aly said, "I was just telling Imam Aziz..."

"She was just telling me that you once worked for American CIA," Mohammed

interrupted. He gave Aly a quick wink. “You must be a man of many stories, Herb. Please. Regale me...”

## **ADALA TRAINING CAMP, TEXAS**

IT WAS MIDNIGHT at the Adala training camp, and Jamie Whyte and Dr. Paul Flue were poring over the evaluation reports they had compiled on their sixteen trainees.

“Surprisingly good considering the time constraints we’ve been working under,” the doctor said.

“Let’s pare it down,” Jamie said. He made a short order of two fingers’ worth of single malt Scotch and quickly poured another.

“Well, we can begin with #12,” Flue said. His drink of choice come the end of the day was hot herbal tea that Jamie teased him about no end. “His written test was a disaster, especially the firearms categories. What do you think?”

“Would I want him backing me up on an assignment? Not in a million years,” Jamie admitted.

“And if #9 is forty years old the way he claims, then I’m ready for a wheelchair. The guy’s pushing fifty or I’m a monkey’s uncle.”

“Your uncle could probably navigate our obstacle course faster than #9, poor guy.”

“Poor or not, he’s a washout. At least for overseas assignment,” Flue said, creating a new pile for OWLs #9 and #12, “we’ll just assign their OWL numbers to the next two trainee OWLs.”

“The good news is that OWLs #1 thru #6 are ready to go. Time to get them in the field and see what kind of men you and I have created.”

“If you’re asking me, and #8 and #10 aren’t far behind them.” He raised his teacup in a toast, and Jamie joined him. “I say we contact Brian and give him the go-ahead.”

“I’ll drink to that,” Jamie agreed.

## **ABOARD *EDEN II*, BROOKLYN, N.Y.**

ALAN ARRANGED FOR the company yacht to be brought from Boca Raton to Brooklyn. He and Aly had made a tradition of taking the yacht out for the Fourth

of July weekend, and Alan decided to use the time to host the Adala team's next meeting.

The *Eden II*, as the boat had been christened nearly six years ago, was a 301-foot beauty, complete with a 40foot Hinckley launch, a Schweizer 333 helicopter, fifteen private cabins, swimming pool, movie theater, conference room, with all the appointments and facilities one would expect on a vessel designed to sail anywhere in the world.

Aly didn't like the idea of mixing business with pleasure, and Alan promised to keep the meeting short and to the point.

"We'll have some dinner, watch the fireworks, and head home. Besides, I feel like everyone and their brother is looking over our shoulders," Said Alan. "The whole idea behind Adala was complete privacy."

Aly listened to this explanation and suddenly found herself revisiting her conversation with Imam Mohammed Aziz the night of the party.

"That was stupid of me," she told Alan. "I thought he would be a good resource, and all he ended up doing was trying to defend a known terrorist."

"Mohammed's a friend," Alan responded in her defense, but he was equally as guarded.

"He's also a Muslim cleric," she answered without going into the idiosyncrasies of that role in the Islamic world. "I'll be more careful next time."

Aly had sprawled on a chaise lounge on the navigation deck with a book and a bottle of water by the time the *Eden II* cruised past the last harbor buoy and turned south along the Jersey coast.

A deck below, the yacht's conference room was a raised room with waist-high windows that that looked out on New York Harbor on three sides. Coffee, fruit, and two-egg omelets were served to Herb, Brian, and Marie, but only Herb seemed interested in eating.

"Sorry about the subterfuge," Alan said, explaining why he had chosen the *Eden II* for their meeting and his newfound worries about the security of their operation.

"Yeah, this yacht is a real letdown after what we're used to back at headquarters, all right," Marie said laughingly.

"I'm thinking of the thanks we owe to all the maritime pioneers who laid out one of the finest harbors in the world," Herb chimed in.

“I could close the curtains I suppose,” Alan suggested.

“No, we’ll just suffer along,” Marie assured him.

The laughter was healthy, but it was also short-lived because Brian was quick to agree that there were too many people demonstrating their curiosity back in the Manhattan offices. And, as Brian put it, “Who knew where the speculation might lead?”

“It may have led right back to our party Friday night,” Alan said, fill-ing them in on the conversation Aly had inadvertently had with Imam Mohammed Aziz. “Probably no big deal, but let’s all just take a little extra care.”

“Yes, indeed, especially with six OWLs about to hit the streets,” Brian said. He told them about the evaluations he had just gotten from Jamie Whyte, including the washout of OWLs #9 and #12.

“Let’s not worry about attrition,” Alan said. “Let’s run with the guys we’ve got. What’s next?”

“Issuing passports, visa, and work permits,” Brian said simply. “Herb, that’s your department.”

“I’ve got my sources in London putting the final touches on the paper-work right now, and Brian can tell you that nobody hires a better crop of forgers than the boys at MI-6. You’ll be amazed—two days max,” Herb said. “And I’ve got some other pertinent news from a couple of fronts. The intel guys from Paris have all we need to go after the Algeria cell. They’re thoroughly annoyed because the politicians pulling their chains won’t let them do the deed themselves, so they’re opening the information floodgates up to us.”

“Outstanding, Herb,” Brian said. “A bona fide ally.”

“Indeed. The guys in Rome updated me on what they’ve learned, too. It seems Milan and Turin may become problematic, and North African traffic into Sicily and the south doesn’t look good. The good news is that London has some absolutely priceless info for us on Pakistan. They also have a few coverts working Islamabad, Karachi, and Peshawar, and they’ll give us what they can.”

“Every little bit helps,” Brian, the former MI-6 man, agreed. “That’s great work, Herb.”

“Outstanding!” Alan agreed. “And now it’s time to do some business with Al Qaeda. As soon as the paperwork comes in for OWLs #1 and #2, let’s get them on a plane for Riyadh. They’ve already got housing set up thanks to a couple of relatives in the area, and they’ve been prepped on their target, Dawud al-Sanie.”



“We’ve made reservations for them on Monday,” Marie said. “They should be active by Wednesday of next week.”

“Are we still on board with OWLs #3 and #4 going to Algiers?” Alan asked.

“We’ll have the French intel tomorrow, I’ll brief our OWLs on Monday, and they’ll be in transit midweek,” Brian said.

“What about #5?”

“I’ve already set up a rendezvous for #5 with the MI-6 op in Afghanistan. That’s next week too. He’s your OWL, Alan, so your ETA is two weeks from today,” Brian said.

“That leaves #6,” Alan said.

“And he’s headed for Cairo in ten days and a date with Haji Mustafek,” Marie advised. “I’ve already worked up his transportation and his housing, thanks to Aly’s contact there.”

“That being said, I think we ought to decide on an overall strategy and prioritize our assignments over the long haul,” Herb said as the yacht sliced through the Atlantic’s gray waters. He sat back with his coffee. “I think it’s fine to go out there and try to eliminate these high visibility targets, but I think we need to keep in mind that the Saudis and the Pakistanis are running terrorist factories. As soon as one head honcho goes down, they’ve got a dozen others lined up just waiting to fill their shoes and hoping to take a bullet for Allah. One of the strategies that we used pretty successfully with the CIA was to always target the sources of man-power in addition to targeting the big shots. I think Adala ought to be doing the same thing.”

“What do you propose, Herb?” asked Alan.

“Maximize our assets. We try to disrupt the chain of command. We take out a big shot here and a low level lieutenant there. We hit the imam at the Wahhabi school with the same amount of vigor as we do the guy going into the village recruiting the farmer’s fourteen-year-old son. We take out pieces of the puzzle at all levels.”

“Okay. That’s a long-term strategy that makes sense once we’re rolling out fully trained OWLs and HAWKS on a regular basis, which also means we may need another pair of topnotch instructors. Marie, why don’t you get together with Herb and start laying out a two- or three-year plan. I’d like to present the idea in confidence to some people here in this country. Who knows, maybe we’ll get the CIA on board in some capacity.”

“I’m on it,” Marie said.

“Another thing: extraction. As soon as we get back to the harbor, I’m making arrangements to sell this yacht to an offshore corporation in the Cayman Islands, one I just happen to control. She’ll be getting a new name: *Justice*. When the deal is done, she’ll sail to the Persian Gulf for one purpose, covert extraction.”

Brian nodded. “Right, we want every OWL and HAWK to have at least two extraction options, and Herb and I are already working on that.

“The plan is to communicate by SAT phone with every OWL twice a week. Once the HAWKS are in place for the kill, we coordinate extraction plans on a daily basis.”

Alan looked around the room. “Good work, team. Game on.”

As soon as *Eden II* docked back in Brooklyn, Brian and Herb were chauffeured to John F. Kennedy airport, where a Davis Industries’ jet was waiting for them. They flew nonstop to the new Adala landing strip.

## **ADALA TRAINING CAMP, TEXAS**

WITH THE HELP of Jamie Whyte and Dr. Paul Flue, they went to work pulling together logistics for OWLs #1 thru #6. Documents were flown in from London and distributed. Safe houses were confirmed in Algiers, Riyadh, Cairo, and Kandahar. Communications were coordinated. Funds were distributed. Contacts were confirmed in each city, and the in situ exchange of such things as weapons, phones, and computers was arranged and extraction plans were discussed.

OWLs #1 thru #6 were thoroughly briefed on each step of their assignments and then were tested and retested. Contingencies were considered for every possible divergence from those plans. Three days later, a go was given on all assignments.

## **RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

OWLS #1 AND #2, the brothers Khalid, departed from Houston on an Air France Flight bound for Riyadh with a short stopover in Paris. They wore traditional Muslim dress, including Saudi headdress.

They arrived in Riyadh nineteen hours later. Each carried a single suit-case that looked as if it had made many such trips.

The two OWLs passed through Saudi immigration and customs with-out

incident. They took separate buses into downtown Riyadh. OWL #1 disembarked at the corner of Al-Mayyah and Sufal and began the short trek to an economy hotel on the south side of the city. His brother rode his bus into the central bus station, transferred to a city bus, and made his way to the same hotel.

Each had his own room on different floors. After a short nap and a shower, they found separate seats on a bus headed for the Back Quarter, as it was known. The Khalid brothers had grown up in this middle-class neighborhood, and the reception they received from their family brought tears to their eyes.

They broke bread that night with a brother, two sisters, a half dozen cousins, and their father Adel, patriarch of the Khalid family, and a man whose vitality was nearing its end.

They talked for hours afterward, drinking tea, and telling exaggerated stories about America and their love of the country. Finally the gathering broke up; the kids and the women went to bed; and the men turned to talk of politics. Finally, Fahd guided the discussion toward the hated Wahhabi and their notorious leader, Dawud al-Sanie.

“Father, do you know of this al-Sanie?” Fahd asked.

“Of course,” was the answer. “He is the most evil of them all. He makes killers and martyrs of children promising them a paradise that does not exist except in their imagination. He preaches the virtues of courage and goodness, grace and chastity, and where can he be found every Wednesday night? In the most notorious brothel in Riyadh.”

“Is that a fact? Which brothel, Father?” was Fahd’s next question.

“In the District. On Hajan Avenue. Why, my sons? Why do you ask this?”

“Was he truly responsible for the death of our sister and mother?” the older brother wanted to know, his voice low and agitated.

His father looked from one son to the next, a sadness so deep and powerful clouding his vision. He wiped away a single tear and said, “He was. And I would kill him with my bare hands if I could be certain his kind would not take revenge on my other children.”

THE TWO OWLS spent the following week tracking the movements of Dawud al-Sanie and the personal bodyguard and henchman who never left his side, a nervous man they eventually identified as Ahmed Rachid. The brothers realized the opportunity this Rachid’s presence presented.

Patiently, they mapped al-Sanie’s visits to the local mosque, the Wahhabi

schools in the desert west of the city, and his Wednesday visit to the brothel called Hope and Magic.

That next Thursday, the brothers consulted with their father over cups of steaming black tea.

“You are right, father,” Hamud Khalid said. “The vile pig visits the brothel every Wednesday after evening prayer. Just like clockwork.”

“But his companion and bodyguard, a man named Ahmed Rachid, does not,” his older brother said. “Do you have any idea why?”

“I can only speculate, my sons. Maybe he believes, as they both should, that the brothel is evil and what goes on in the brothel is even worse,” Adel said with hooded eyes.

“We have a plan, father, but we need your help.”

“A plan?”

“The man is going to die. We will need two daggers before next Wednesday. Do not purchase them new. Take them from your shop or your kitchen; we need old daggers.”

“My sons, please...”

“Do not pain yourself with worry, my father,” Hamud told him, wrapping his arms around the old man. “We will rid this world of the pig, and no one will suspect any of our family. You have our word.”

On the following Wednesday evening, the two OWLs attended evening prayers at a mosque and placed themselves not twenty feet from al-Sanie and Ahmed Rachid.

It was pitch-dark when they departed the mosque. Stars filled a moon-less sky, and the air seemed to vibrate with unfound energy. They followed the crowd into the street. The streets and alleys took them all in different directions, but only al-Sanie and Rachid chose the avenue destined for the District. The OWLs employed every trick Warren and the doctor had taught them in following their targets undetected.

The night smelled of curry and cumin, but the corridors leading to the District were conspicuously empty. At an alley a block from the brothel, the OWLs made their move.

Like venomous snakes, they attacked in complete silence. OWL #1 drove the point of his dagger deep into al-Sanie’s neck, severing an artery, and spraying

blood in all directions. The terrorist was dead even before his body crumpled to the ground.

OWL #2 put his dagger to the neck of Rachid, the bodyguard, and cupped his hand over the stunned man's mouth. "Be silent or you die here," he sneered.

Owl #1 kicked aside the body of the slain Wahhabi leader and then turned his remarkably calm face toward the terrified Rachid. He held out a large piece of paper and marking pen.

"Do you want to live, Ahmed Rachid?" "Very much," the bodyguard said, blood trickling down his neck. "Good. Then take this pen and sign your name to this paper. Do it

now," Hamud demanded.

Rachid could not reach for the pen fast enough, and he scrawled his signature along the bottom of the paper.

"There." He dropped the pen. "Now I beg you. Free me. I have done as you asked."

"Yes, you have, haven't you, Ahmed? But there is one more condition to your freedom."

"Anything! In the name of Allah, anything!" He trembled.

Owl #1 withdrew the dagger from the neck of al-Sanie and held it out to the quivering man.

"Take this dagger in your hand and stick it into the chest of your dead friend." Hamud laid the signed document on al-Sanie's chest. "Through this paper and into his chest. With all your strength, Ahmed."

The bodyguard seized the dagger and drove it into the chest of the corpse. A car pulled up in front of the alley seconds later, and the Khalid brothers threw the bodyguard into the backseat next to their father and brother.

The OWLs jumped into the front seat. The car stopped in front of their hotel, and they climbed out.

"What about me?" Rachid called.

"You're going for a little ride," Hamud informed him. "I hope you know how to swim."

The OWLs had checked out of their hotel by the time the car reached the harbor

at Al Jubayl. They were on a plane back to Paris by the time the boat carrying Ahmed Rachid out onto the Persian Gulf was fifty miles from land.

“Sink or swim, it’s up to you,” Adel Khalid said throwing the man into the water and turning the boat back toward shore. “It’s a chance my wife and daughter never had.”

The next morning, the Saudi police found the body of Dawud al-Sanie.

The paper pinned to his chest read: “Death to the fornicator and debaucher.” It was signed, Ahmed Rachid.

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## **13 - AN ISRAELI DEATH, THE KASBAH**

### **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

ALY DAVIS WAS frightened and apprehensive as she stared down at the envelope with the Israeli postmark on it. It was as if this innocuous piece of paper with her name handwritten in the address box contained a malevolent virus. But it wasn’t her name or the Israeli stamp that burned a hole in her stomach. It was the senders’ name in the upper left-hand corner: Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Rosenthal.

The Rosenthals were the parents of one of Aly’s dearest friends, Donna Rosenthal. She and Donna had been corresponding on a regular basis for years, exchanging everything from exotic recipes to life philosophies, but for some unexplained reason Donna had not responded to Aly’s last three e-mails. This was completely unlike Donna, a woman who treasured the written word of a friend.

Aly had been on the verge of calling Donna’s home number in Tel Aviv when this unexpected letter arrived. There was something so foreboding about it that Aly’s hand shook as she tore open the seal; it could not be good news. She had read no more than the first two lines when the tears, burning on her cheeks, stung all the way to her soul.

Donna, a widow, had fallen in love with and recently became engaged to a history teacher at the university in Tel Aviv. She had taken time off from work one day to shop for a wedding dress. She never made it to the bridal shop. A suicide bomber had taken this beautiful, innocent young woman, so full of joyous expectation, away forever.

“Dear God, how could you let this happen?” The letter crumbled in Aly’s hand. She cried and swore and prayed that Donna had found some peace beyond the insanity of this world. “How could you let this happen?”

That evening before dinner, she shared the tear-stained letter with Alan. He read the words and shook his head, wanting more than anything to spare Aly the pain of this terrible loss. For the longest time, all he could do was hold her to his chest.

“I’m so terribly sorry, darling.” He said eventually wishing there were more meaningful words. “Why Donna, of all people? Just when she had so much to live for. She had been through so much already; it’s not right.”

“I’m sorry too, Alan, but I’m feeling overwhelmed with grief and helplessness.” Aly brushed her tears away, suddenly as angry as she was dismayed. “When in the world will this madness ever stop?”

“I wish I had an answer for that,” Alan admitted.

“So many students coming to my classes wonder about the true Qur’anic message about Jews. Recently, one of my students brought me this quote,” said Aly sliding a paper from her briefcase and reading aloud, “This is by Ibn IshAq, an eighth-century Muslim historian.”

It has been written: Kill any Jew that falls into your power. Thereupon Muhayyisa, a Muslim convert, leaped upon and killed Ibn Sunayna, a Jewish merchant. The killer’s brother, Huwayyisa, chided him, “You enemy of God, did you kill him when much of the fat on your belly comes from his wealth?”

Muhayyisa answered, “Had the one who ordered me to kill him ordered me to kill you, I would have cut your head off.” This was the beginning of Huwayyisa’s acceptance of Islam. He exclaimed, “By God, a religion which can bring you to this is marvelous,” and he became a Muslim.

“That’s mind-boggling! If you hadn’t said it was written in the eighth century, I would have sworn it was printed in Al Jazeera yesterday.”

“I lecture on the bounty of Mohammed’s tolerance of all monotheists and of my personal experiences with Jews. Soon the questions turn from the religious differences between Islam and Judaism to the cultural differences. They really want to get to know and understand the Donna Rosenthals of the world. Didn’t Shylock say something like ‘when you stab me, do I not bleed?’”

“I have to tell you, Aly, I shudder every time I think of what the world would be like if there were no Israel combating so much of the hatred and violence of the fanatical Muslim extremists. I hope and pray Adala can become the spark that

lights a fire of understanding beneath Islam teaching truth, goodness, and tolerance.”

“I hope so, Alan. I really do. And then maybe Donna’s death won’t seem so totally senseless.”

## **CAIRO, EGYPT**

OWL #6 ARRIVED in Cairo on Wednesday afternoon. His papers identified him as a visiting graduate student enrolled for a semester at the University of Cairo in advanced social dynamics. His name was Anwar Minya. If anyone asked, he could claim a master’s degree from New York University and a membership in the nonpartisan Islamic Association of North America. He spoke Arabic and fluent English.

The briefcase he found in the third stall of the men’s room on the main concourse of the airport belonged to a British MI-6 agent named Harry Stoneham.

Harry was in the next stall over. He flushed the toilet and whispered, “Take the briefcase and walk to the escalator leading to ground transportation.” That was all.

This was the plan Minya had memorized back in El Paso, so he wasn’t surprised. He did as he was instructed, exiting the men’s room and following the signs to ground transportation.

Briefcase in hand, he stepped onto the escalator and headed up. Harry was a step behind. He held a cell phone to his ear, but his words were directed at OWL #6.

“Inside the case is the file on Haji Mustafek. I had to scissor out a part or two for security reasons, but there’s plenty in there for you to go on,” he said, “and I must warn you, Mustafek has got henchmen everywhere, and I mean everywhere. Don’t turn your back on him for a second. If you get cornered, call the number using the cell phone inside the case; speed dial #3, and we’ll try to get you out. You get any new intel on Mustafek, you call me and not the Egyptians, hear me? Ninety percent of the local police can’t be trusted with their own mother’s secrets, much less yours, and the ten percent you can trust, we own. You with me?”

“I’m with you,” the OWL said. “Thank you.”

“In case I need to reach you, can you give me a contact number?” the MI-6 man asked.



OWL #6 whispered a direct-dial number to the agent and then wondered if he had done the right thing. “You can reach me there, but only in an emergency.”

“Good luck,” Harry said as they reached the top of the escalator. He turned to his left, and the Adala agent walked through the door to the taxi stand in front of the airport.

The address Minya gave the driver was on the east side, less than a mile from the university and a thirty-minute drive. He carried his duffel bag and briefcase to the front door and knocked three times.

Professor Fadil Sammut opened the door for a would-be student he knew only as Anwar Minya—OWL #6 as he was known only by his Adala colleagues—and greeted him as warmly as a man would a visiting relative.

“You must be Anwar. Come in, come in,” he said in crisp, slightly accented English. The two men shook hands. The professor relieved his guest of his one handbag but didn’t take offense when the OWL kept a grip on his briefcase. “So you are a friend of Aly Millar Davis, wonderful lady.”

“Yes, sir. A student who considers her more than a teacher,” the young man said according to the script Aly had prepared for him. “And we can certainly speak Arabic if you prefer, Professor Sammut.”

“No, no. We speak only English in our home. It allows us to practice the language, but it also helps us lose our accents.” A playful gleam appeared in Fadil Sammut’s eyes. “But I must warn you, I only swear in Arabic.”

“I’ll remember that,” the OWL replied with a grin.

“Come inside and meet my family.”

They entered the spacious parlor beyond the entrance, and six pairs of curious eyes fell upon Minya Anwar as if he had just stepped off a different planet. Except for his western suit, he didn’t look much different from their own people, but he was from the United States, and that made him a foreigner.

Fadil introduced his wife, Fatima, her mother, and four little girls all under the age of ten and all as cute as they were well-mannered.

The girls’ curiosity over this American Muslim carried over to the dinner table that night, and they must have had a dozen questions about America and the good life. Who was his favorite movie star? What was his favorite food? Did he know many Egyptians? Are all the girls in America beautiful?

OWL #6 patiently responded to each question, his answers full of humor, making them giggle and laugh. The inquisition carried on until the children’s bedtime,

when each from the youngest to the oldest raised their little arms and kissed their visitor goodnight.

“Wonderful children,” he said to their mother.

“And extremely exhausting,” she said with a warm smile.

“Which reminds me that I have an early lecture tomorrow at the university and must also retire,” Professor Sammut said. “Please accept my apologies.”

“And please accept my gratitude for your warm hospitality,” Anwar said to both Fadil and Fatima. “And if I might ride into town with you in the morning, professor, I would like to spend some time in the university library.”

“Wonderful,” said Fadil, “we leave at seven thirty.”

OWL #6 said his good-nights and went to his tiny room. Before turning out the light, he spent forty minutes glancing at the precious intel material in his briefcase. Tomorrow the hunt for Haji Mustafek would begin in earnest.

## **ADALA TRAINING FACILITY, TEXAS**

HAMUD AND FAHD Khalid, designated OWLs #1 and #2, returned from Saudi Arabia as the first successful HAWKs in the Adala project. It was a distinction earned with the death of one of the world’s most nefarious criminals, a man who used religion to rationalize the deaths of untold numbers of men, women, and children.

The Khalid brothers flew from New York to El Paso while OWL #6 was reading the last of the documentation given to him by his MI-6 contact in Cairo. The brothers did not expect to be greeted with a rousing celebration or a party. The death of Dawud al-Sanie may have tasted like revenge to Hamud and Fahd. It must have given their father a sense of peace, but it was, when all was said and done, strictly business.

When they sat down with Jamie Whyte and Dr. Donald Flue, the men who had taught them to kill without leaving a trace, they were debriefed as if the success of their mission was a given.

“Great job, men!” the doctor said without sounding like a brass band. “We knew you two were the best OWLs for the job, and you proved us right.”

“Well done,” Jamie added. They were huddled in a small conference room at the rear of the ranch house. The coffee was two-hours old, brewed in a small drip machine, but the roast beef sandwiches had just been made. “We know you’re exhausted and probably ready for a good meal and a night in the sack, but we’d

like to talk through the details of your trip before they get too far behind you.”

“These two don’t need any sleep, Jamie. They’re like nails, these two,” said the doctor.

When the West Point man saw the smiles spread across the faces of their two protégés, he said, “Get a cup of coffee and a sandwich and start at the beginning. Don’t leave out a thing.”

The brothers talked, and the instructors took notes and asked the necessary questions. Hamud described their entrance into the country. Fahd talked about the fine points of their undercover work. And they both chimed in when the subject of the kill came up.

“How confident are you that the Saudi police won’t start nosing around and asking your father and brother questions about al-Sanie’s death?” Jamie wanted to know.

Fahd shook his head. “It won’t happen. They have Ahmed’s signature on the death note. He had motive. The police will know that he would never enter the brothel, and they will assume the killing was religiously motivated. The dagger will reveal Ahmed’s fingerprints. When the police can’t find him, they’ll assume he went into hiding.”

## **CAIRO, EGYPT**

BACK IN CAIRO, OWL #6 spent a restless night. In the morning, he dragged himself from his bed and joined Professor Fadil Sammut in a dimly lit kitchen where his host was preparing a strong pot of Turkish coffee.

“The perfect thing to get a man’s brain working,” he insisted.

“That’s just exactly what I need this morning, professor. Thank you,” said the man Sammut had come to know as Anwar Minya. “Something to get this brain of mine working.”

Fadil laughed and said, “How do you think I am able to deal with 200 plus students every day, half of them hung over from a night on the town and the other half expecting me to fill their heads with an endless supply of invaluable information as if knowledge were a cold drink they simply gulp down.” They drank their coffee quickly and packed their briefcases. “If you are ready, my friend, we can leave now. My car is parked down the street. Just a short walk.”

Professor Fadil Sammut kissed each of his sleeping children on the cheek. He whispered, “I love you,” to his wife. Then he locked the front door behind him.

He and OWL #6 trudged down the steps and along the walk just as the morning sun was peeking over the houses. They crossed the narrow street and were a dozen paces from the professor's car when a black van swept around the corner.

It screeched to a halt, the side door swung open, and three masked figures jumped out bearing automatic weapons. Before OWL #6 and his host could begin to comprehend what was happening, the trio opened fire on the defenseless pair.

The whole scene lasted five seconds, left two good men dead, a wife without a husband, and four young daughters fatherless.

The van sped off leaving the street red with blood and more unanswered questions than the police in Cairo would ever be able to unravel.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

MARIE CHAVEZ OPENED the Adala meeting Thursday morning with a report about a thoroughly botched assassination attempt in Italy. "The intended victim was the country's minister of defense," she was saying. "He's a socialist candidate for the office of the prime minister and a devout Catholic. Very popular."

Alan was excited. "The media is trumpeting a big-time Al Qaeda mistake," he said. "They not only got nailed by the police, but their safe house isn't their safe house any more. I call that good news."

Herb Bentz didn't believe it. The former CIA man said, "Do you really think it was Al Qaeda, Alan? After all we've talked about and all the research we've done? Al Qaeda is a good deal more professional than that, don't you agree?"

"Who then?" Marie asked.

"I don't know for sure, but it sounds to me like some wannabe terror-ists hoping to hear the praises of Allah and all his misguided mullahs," offered Herb.

The phone rang at that exact moment. Brian answered, put his hand over the receiver, and mouthed, "It's Jamie Whyte."

Brian was smiling when he hung up. "Attention all," he said rather dramatically.

"Good news?" Marie asked.

"Some very good news," Brian acknowledged. "We hit pay dirt. OWLs #1 and #2

are back safe and sound, and the Wahhabi need a new leader.”

“Dawud al-Sanie?”

“As dead as a door nail.” Brian said. He made short order of the details.

“They blamed the whole affair on his pal Ahmed before dumping him in the Persian Gulf.”

“We scored one,” Herb cheered, “Bravo!”

“How about that?” Marie said. She could hardly contain her smile. “The good guys strike back.”

“Marie, if you could get ahold of Harry Neumann please. I’d like you to have him ramp up our recruiting efforts. And I think it’s time to put one of our OWLs on the recruiting trail full time,” Alan told her. Then he glanced around the room at his team. “We’re just beginning folks. This thing’s for real.”

The news was like a switch. Marie started working the phones. Brian made a fresh pot of coffee. Herb laid a spreadsheet on the table. And Alan guided the meeting toward a nuts-and-bolts discussion about the costs associated with expanding their project, laying out a long-term plan, and setting two or three realistic goals.

Marie ended one call and picked up another incoming one, rare because very few people knew the number in the conference room, even more unusual when she handed the cordless to Herb.

“Lord Chesney,” she said.

“Really?” Herb put the phone to his ear and said, “Hello, Edmund. Good to hear from you. What’s up, my friend?” And then he proceeded to listen without interruption for a full three minutes.

The only other thing he said was, “Thanks for calling, Edmund. I’ll speak with you later.”

Cradling the phone, Herb turned to the group. “Bad news,” he began. “OWL #6 is dead.”

“Oh, no,” Brian said. “How?”

“He was shot to death in a Cairo neighborhood along with his host, the University of Cairo Professor named Fadil Sammut. It happened right in front of the guy’s house.”

“Oh, no. Who did it?” Marie asked.

“A hit like that...had to be terrorists...and Lord Chesney’s money is on Haji Mustafek and his band of roaming thugs.”

“The thing really stinks!” said Brian.

“Stinks to high heaven, I’m afraid.”

“Either Mustafek was gunning for the professor, which I strongly doubt,” Brian said, “or he was after #6.”

“That’s my bet,” Herb agreed.

Brian stood up, paced, and sat down again. “Okay then, if they were after #6, they had to be tipped off. Who knew #6 was staying with Sammut aside from the four of us and Aly?”

Alan thought a moment. Finally, he raised his shoulders and said, “No one.”

## **PARIS, FRANCE**

OWLS #3 AND #4 flew Air France from New York to Paris that same Thursday morning. They were met by agents of Alliance Base—DGSE, French foreign intelligence, and were driven to the agency’s rather shabby, completely discreet headquarters off the Champs Elysee. They were met there by Maurice Clement, the deputy director of North African Affairs. Mr. Clement thoroughly briefed them on Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar, the Algerian terrorist most recently credited with the destruction of a police station and the death of twenty-five new police recruits in the capital city of Algiers.

“We know he frequents a rooftop garden in the Kasbah at #34 Rue de Martin in the old quarter of the city built within labyrinths of narrow alleys. It’s easy to get lost in the Kasbah,” Clement warned the two men and then gestured at the khaki pants and dress shirts they had arrived in. “You must never even consider going into the Kasbah dressed the way you are now. Traditional Arabic dress only. There are plenty of shops right here in Paris if you didn’t come prepared.”

“Thank you,” OWL # 3 said to the man, “but we have brought our own clothing.”

“Good. Very good. And where are you staying once you get to Algiers?” was his next question.

“At the Sofitel Alger,” #4 answered.

“Good. It’s always crowded, and most of the crowds are Arabs visiting or on

business. You'll fit right in." Maurice Clement stood up. He offered his hand, a rare gesture for this man. "I will alert our office in Algiers to provide whatever assistance they can. Don't be afraid to ask. I wish you good luck. This bin Shizar is the animal responsible for the massacre of those youngsters during mass in the chapel near Toulon. Time he gets his just due, gentleman."

## **LONDON, ENGLAND**

OWL #5 FLEW into Heathrow Airport in London mid-afternoon just as the Adala group was processing the news of the assassination of OWL #6 on the streets of Cairo. He was traveling as Samar Abdullah, a small, powerful man with butterscotch skin and the dark eyes of someone U.S. Customs would be glad to see leave the country. He hailed the cab he was told to, driven by a representative of MI-6. They drove in and around the airport long enough for him to learn the dos and don'ts of one of the most dangerous countries in the world. He was given a coded letter of introduction to one Derek Stafford, a longstanding MI-6 agent stationed in Kabul.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

UPON HIS ARRIVAL in Kabul, #5 checked into the Mustafa Hotel. He used the lobby phone to call Derek Stafford at a "one-use" number on a throwaway cell phone.

"Hello Mr. Stafford, I am Samar Abdullah." It was a simple introduction, and Samar prayed to God the man knew his name.

"Hello. Glad you arrived safely," was Stafford's response. "Where are you staying?"

"The Mustafa Hotel."

"I can meet you there tomorrow morning at ten. Talk to no one else until then. Use room service for your food. Understood?"

"Understood."

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

WHEN ALAN ARRIVED home, he was both angry and confused. The excitement everyone had felt about the success of the Khalid brothers in Saudi Arabia was dampened by the news of the ambush of OWL #6 and the unsuspecting professor in Cairo.

Alan wasn't in a position to share the news about the killing of Dawud al-Sanie, the Wahhabi leader, with Aly no matter how thrilled she might be. As badly as Alan felt about that deception, Aly was still under the impression that Adala was simply an intelligence gathering apparatus. She would soon learn about al-Sanie's death from the media or through one of her many Muslim organizations. But there was no way of avoid-ing the disastrous news in Cairo. She needed to know.

When they settled down with their evening cocktails, Alan broached the subject head on. "We lost our first Owl this morning. The young man we sent to Cairo," he said.

"What! You're kidding. Was it one of the boys that I met when visit-ing the ranch?"

"Yes, we called him OWL #6."

"I remember him. He was very smart. You could tell," Aly said. "What happened?"

"He was shot to death the morning after he arrived."

"Alan, that's terrible."

"It's even worse than that, Aly. I hate to break this to you, but the man who had put him up for the night was also killed, ambushed in the street outside of his house."

"Alan. No..." One word overflowing with trepidation and inevitabil-ity. "Don't tell me."

"I'm sorry. It was Professor Fadil Sammut."

"Not Fadil. No!" Now a wave of anger spilled out in her words. "How in the world could this happen? Fadil thought he was boarding a student, not an undercover agent. How could this happen?"

"Aly. I'm sorry. We don't know yet. Brian thinks there was leak some-where in our operation, but I think he's wrong. The only people who knew that OWL #6 was staying with Fadil besides you and me were Marie, Brian, and Herb,"

The drink Aly was holding suddenly froze halfway to her lips. "Oh, no. No, that's not true." Now she set the glass down hard and stared across the table. "I mentioned it to Mohammed Aziz at our dinner party. Don't you remember? I mentioned it to you."



Alan nodded. "I'd forgotten."

"You don't think Mohammed would have anything to do with such a thing, do you, Alan?" Aly was desperate to believe that.

Alan shook his head. "I don't know. I don't think so, but I've got to tell Brian about this. It's the one lead we have, and it might fit in some-place. Who knows, Mohammed may have inadvertently mentioned it to someone else. It's always a possibility. In any case, I'd better make a phone call."

## **ALGIERS, ALGERIA**

OWLS #3 AND #4 checked into separate rooms in the Sofitel Alger in Algiers, the grossly overcrowded capital city of Algeria. They had used the plane ride from Paris to North Africa to study the file containing detailed information about their Algerian target, Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar.

OWL #3 changed into Arabic dress and arranged an afternoon tour of the Kasbah district in the old section of the city with an Arabic speaking tour guide.

He allowed the guide to expound upon the many mosques populating the quarter. They paid a visit to several Ottoman palaces. The guide took his visitor to the Citadel and wasted many words the OWL wasn't listening to.

Finally, OWL #3 said to the guide, "I would like to see Rue de Martin if you don't mind going out of your way."

"There's nothing to see there, I'm afraid, my young friend. Rue de Martin is little more than an alley, and not much of an alley at that. Trust my judgment."

OWL #3 was a personable young man with a ready, even sympathetic

smile. "And trust you I do, Sir," he said, "but my father was born on

Rue de Martin, and I want to stand where he stood."

How could the guide refuse such a request? "Very well."

When they arrived at Rue de Martin, OWL #3 dismissed his guide with a generous tip, saying he preferred to spend some time alone in the neighborhood and accepting the guide's advice to leave before dark.

The Adala agent tapped all of the instruction he had received from Warren Dye and Dr. Donald Flue back in El Paso and carefully studied every building, every walkway, and every rooftop. He took measurements in his head and calculated distances from one roof to the other. He surveyed the terrain three blocks in

every direction. When he arrived at #34 Rue de Martin, he strolled along, seemingly interested in the architecture and the ambiance, but in fact taking mental notes of the buildings on either side of the target's home.

Most interesting was the height of the surrounding rooftops and how they provided an aspect of seclusion to the rooftop garden at #34. The garden was, according to their sources, a place favored by Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar for meetings with his associates. The addresses of the adjoining buildings were #30 on the east and #38 on the west, which OWL #3 scribbled down in his mental notebook as well.

The next morning, OWL #4 took a bus into the neighborhood. He made his way to #30 Rue de Martin and rang the bell next to the door on the lowest floor. He waited nearly a minute before a tired older Muslim woman answered.

“Good morning,” the OWL said in the most proper, respectful way, bowing slightly as he did. “If I may ask, I would like very much to speak with the owner of this building.”

“I am the owner,” was the woman's answer.

OWL #4 was delighted. He introduced himself as Hassan al-Assad and said, “I am an artist, a painter, and I would very much like to rent the roof above your house...just for a few days. I can only imagine how beautiful the view is, and I would love to paint it. I will pay you well,” he assured her. “Three thousand dinars in advance. What do you say?”

The woman was not dumb, and of course she accepted this wildly generous offer.

Two days later, OWLs #3 and #4 appeared at #30 Rue de Martin with their equipment. Hassan al-Assad, as the painter called himself, introduced OWL #3 as his apprentice, and the old woman showed them the rooftop entry. The young men set up an easel and canvas and cleared a space for their paints. The roof abutted the neighboring buildings, and they could hear a smattering of conversation coming from the garden atop #34 Rue de Martin just thirty feet or so below them. The OWLs understood that this was the place where Sheik Mohammed would meet with his thugs and craft his plans of destruction.

When the OWLs returned to Sofitel Alger, they used an encrypted SAT phone to place a call to Brian's cell phone.

“Hello, Brian, this is Hassan,” #4 said when the connection was made. “We have found a wonderful place to work in the old neighborhood.”

“That's outstanding,” Brian replied, following their script.

”We have all the paints we need, but we’d like ten pounds of that sculpting material you recommended, Tools, too. Can you send those over as soon as possible?”

“Consider it done,” Brian said. “Give me a couple of days.”

Three days later to be exact, the explosives and detonating devices the OWLs had requested were delivered to the Sofitel Alger in the name of Hassan al-Assad.

## **ADALA TRAINING CAMP, TEXAS**

OWL # 2 PLACED a telephone call to his father in Saudi Arabia, ostensibly to assure him that he and his brother had arrived safely in America. While this was true, Fahd Khalid was also taking the pulse of Riyadh after the killing of Dawud al-Sanie.

“My son, it was a terrible thing to lose such a holy person as Dawud al-Sanie. It is a great loss to the people,” his father said according to the script they had prepared. “The good news is that the kingdom is going to replace him with another Wahhabi to be selected at a conclave being held here in Riyadh thirty days from now. Perhaps you might want to visit then. Your uncle would like to present a sculptured plaque recalling the deeds of al-Sanie to be displayed in the great hall where 400 Wahhabi imams will gather to select his successor.”

Father and son spoke for another two minutes before hanging up. When they did, Fahd Khalid looked across the room at Brian Hall.

“The Wahhabi are moving quickly,” said Fahd, “and we must move quickly as well. The Wahhabi are planning a conclave to appoint a successor to al-Sanie thirty days from now. My uncle is a fine sculptor. He would like to present the conclave with a sculpted memorial of al-Sanie to the conclave using special materials.”

“So your uncle is a sculptor?”

“A very accomplished sculptor,” Fahd replied. “He could easily make a plaque in tribute out of almost any material. Clay, plaster, bronze, even C-4 explosive.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” Brian said. “How much?”

“Two hundred pounds should be enough.”

Brian nodded. “I’d like you and your brother to return to Riyadh right away. And please inform your uncle that we would like to donate any materials he might

need for his sculpture.”

“Yes, sir.”

Brian used his cell phone to place a call to Alan in New York. He explained the situation in brief and then said, “We need two hundred pounds of C-4 delivered to the Davis refinery in Riyadh immediately. OWLs #1 and #2 will pick it up there in three days.”

## **WASHINGTON, D. C.**

THE RESULTS OF the surge in Iraq were unclear.

Most realists were on the side of waiting at least until September before rendering a judgment. The liberals continued to scream for an end to hostility and the return of all military personnel at once, an impossibility if only for logistical reasons.

Except for the terrorists killed or captured in Iraq and those arrested in connection with domestic terrorism, there was very little planning meant to rid the world of the fanatical Muslim terrorists who continued to kill with seeming impunity—except for the OWLs and the HAWKS of Adala.

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# **14 - A BRAVE OWL**

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

SUNDAY MORNINGS HAD always been reserved for Alan and Aly to spend together. It was one of the few times during the week when they could sit across the table from one another, sip coffee, and read the newspaper. Sometimes they talked world events. Sometimes they spoke of the arts. Other times they talked very little and simply took pleasure in one another’s company.

The Adala project had cut into that time in a most dramatic fashion. Alan’s weekends had been filled with planning and training. He was days away from leaving for Afghanistan, and he hadn’t found a way to discuss the trip with Aly, much less broach the subject of her accompanying him. Looking over at his wife now, her eyes intent on some article or another from the front section, Alan realized how much he missed these mornings. He realized just how lucky he really was, and he was on the verge of telling Aly that when she shook her head and said, “My heavens. Have you seen this article about Dawud al-Sanie? The

Saudi religious leader? He was murdered three nights ago. Stabbed to death by one of his own people evidently.”

“Good riddance,” Alan said emphatically. “The guy wasn’t just a Saudi religious leader; he was the leader of the Wahhabi fanatics. And you know as well as I do that the Wahhabi run schools dedicated to poisoning dirt-poor fourteen-year-old kids into thinking they can be on the fast track to paradise just so long as they’re willing to become suicide bombers and blow up as many innocent people as they can along the way.”

“I know who the Wahhabi are, Alan.” She stared across the table at him, a bit taken aback by his reaction. Then she thrust the paper into his hands. “Please read the article and when you’re finished, I’ve got a question for you.”

Alan did as he was told. When he was done, he laid the paper aside and raised his palms. “Okay. Fire away,” he said.

“This disdain you have for Saudis. Tell me. Is it personal, or is it just the fact that they were born in the wrong place at the wrong time?” Aly wanted to know. “Please explain it to me, ‘cause I just don’t get it.”

Alan took his time with the question. He wasn’t going to get into a row with his wife, but he also wasn’t going to placate her either. Finally he said, “The answer is both, I suppose. Religious leaders like this guy al-Sanie, people who preach lies and teach children to kill—yeah, I have nothing but disdain for them. In fact, I hate the bastards, hate them personally. I’ll also admit that I don’t trust any Saudi who I don’t know well. I just don’t. I’m not going to apologize about the fact.”

“Aren’t you just a little bit bigoted with that kind of attitude, Alan?” Aly said openly.

“Sure I am, no doubt about it, and here’s why, Aly,” he said. “Fifteen of the nineteen terrorists who crashed into the World Trade Center and massacred over 3,000 innocent people were Saudis. Fifty percent of the terrorists killed or captured in Iraq are Saudis—more than fifty percent.”

“The Wahhabi schools in Saudi Arabia are academies of terror, nothing more nor less. Some of the madrassas in Pakistan have the exact same evil agenda as the Wahhabi, and were founded by the Saudis. Take a guess who continues to provide every nickel of their financing? A bunch of oil-rich Saudis who have never done an honest day’s work in their lives.”

“Huh? I see.” Aly was not ready to back down. “All that begs the question, why does Davis International Industries do business with these despicable people?”

You own the business. Why do business with people you can't stand?"

"That's a good question, Aly, a very good question," Alan said raising his coffee cup to his lips. Finding it cold and uninviting, he set the cup down and formed a steeple with his hands as he continued, "and there just happens to be more than one answer. We, meaning you and me and every other American out there, need oil to run our lives. We depend on oil to run our factories. Our factories create jobs, and jobs are necessary in our society. Without oil, DII doesn't exist as a going concern. We need oil. We buy it, we refine it, and we distribute it. That's what we do."

"Sure, you and I could survive financially just fine if I closed DII's doors tomorrow, what about the thousands of jobs we provide? What about those people?"

Alan drew a deep breath into his lungs. He exhaled the way a man does when he's drawing a line in the sand. "Here's one more thing; the most important and most persuasive reason for me to keep DII running and competing. My great-grandfather started our business as an energy company. Not an oil company; an energy company. In the beginning, he bought coal, processed it, and sold it to anyone in need of fuel. Then the era of the motor car came along, and guess what? They didn't run on coal. They ran on gasoline. Factories started to turn away from coal too because oil burned cleaner.

"Back then, Saudi Arabia didn't exist as an oil supplier, and nobody gave them a second thought. Now they sit on top of the world's largest oil reserve, and they have the world coming to them, but not for long.

"Tomorrow or many tomorrows from now, oil's time as an energy source will have come and gone, and when that moment arrives, I still want DII to be around as an energy supplier—whatever the source. No one in our industry spends more on energy research and development than we do, and that's why."

Aly was nodding her head. "I respect that," she said, as she reached across the table and laid a hand on his arm. "I really do, and I also understand a little better now." Then she smiled. "See what happens, Mr. Davis. We talk, we learn. We listen, we learn."

## **ALGIERS, ALGERIA**

THE SUN SET in waves of pink and purple across the Algerian capital and the old neighborhood of the Kasbah. The ancient quarter of the city seemed to retreat with the coming of night as if danger lurked around every corner.

OWLS #3 and #4 worked quietly and intently on the rooftop of #30 Rue de Martin, the tiny studio they had rented from the old Muslim woman three days

before.

Their package had arrived at the hotel, and they had transferred the unopened boxes here along with their painting supplies. The boxes did not contain the tools of an artist; they contained the tools of sabotage— a bundle of C-4 explosive, a detonator, a transmitter, a hook pulley, a cell phone, and fifty feet of rope.

Once the explosive was prepped and the detonator had been pro-grammed and inserted into the bundle, they attached the hook pulley to the bundle and ran the rope through a wheel. If used correctly, the rope and pulley would allow them to set the bomb on the rooftop garden of the neighboring house at #34 Rue de Martin, the terrorist headquarters of Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar.

“Let’s wait until it’s dark and we’re certain no one is using the garden,” said #4 after practicing the maneuver a dozen times.

The two men smoked and drank lukewarm tea as a moonless sky took a firm hold on the coming night. The windows of the neighboring buildings were shuttered. Except for those types who made their living in alleyways and on dark corners, the streets were deserted.

The OWLs studied bin Shizar’s dwelling until they were sure the garden was empty and the curtains of the surrounding windows had been drawn. When they were satisfied, OWL #4 used the keypad of his cell phone to activate the detonator. He matched the code with a preset telephone number.

OWL #3 anchored the rope to the railing surrounding their rooftop studio, and OWL #4 slowly lowered their package. There was a hedge of sweet-smelling jasmine that created a border around the garden, and the plan was to conceal the bomb behind the hedge.

“Slowly,” OWL #3 whispered, maneuvering the rope an inch one way or the other. “Another three feet...slowly...one foot...six inches...perfect.”

The bomb landed gently on the far side of the hedge. They released the rope from the pulley and pulled it back up.

“Now we wait,” OWL #4 said. “Now we just wait.”

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

AT MILLAR TRADING Company office in New York, Herb Bentz spent twenty minutes detailing the progress of the OWLs in Algiers. He passed the baton to Brian Hall, who talked about recruitment, coordination, and extraction. He concluded by saying, “For now, we have an advantage. No one knows we exist, so none of the bad guys know what they’re up against. That advantage

disappears into thin air as soon as we begin contacting the media and claiming credit for any successful assassinations.”

“The question is, when do we do that and how. We’re the good guys, and we have to come across as the good guys. We have to come across as the guys who are taking the bull by the horns when it comes to fighting terrorism. The guys in the trenches. Muslims willing to take a stand against the fanatics giving Islam a bad name.”

“Okay, then. We need a plan of action that creates positive momentum. I’ll work on that. We may need to call in one or two of our media contacts and get their take on how best to do that,” Alan said. “In the meantime, I want to talk about the killing of #6 in Cairo. What do you think, Brian?”

“What I think is that I don’t believe in coincidence, not for one second,” Brian replied, “especially not since you told me about Aly’s conversation with Imam Mohammed Aziz. She basically told him we had an OWL going to Cairo to look into Haji Mustafek, not to mention the fact that she was using one of her former students to find him housing.”

“There’s no question in my mind that we have to look into Aziz, Alan,” Herb argued. “I don’t care how good a friend Aly considers the guy to be.”

“Okay...and the best way to do that?” Alan wanted to know.

“I’d like to send someone in to get at his computer hard drive,” Brian answered. “If he’s dirty, we’ll find it there.”

“And if he’s not?”

“If he’s not, then the leak has to be in Cairo with MI-6.”

“Possible, but not probable,” Herb intoned.

“Okay. When do we do it?”

“The sooner the better. Tonight,” Brian said, “we can do it tonight if you can get the imam out of the house.”

“Hold on. What happens if he finds out his hard drive is missing?” Marie Chavez wanted to know. “We have to assume he uses his computer every day.”

“He won’t find out.” Brian assured her. “We won’t take his hard drive. Not literally. We’ll just copy it.”

Marie smiled, just a touch flirtatiously. “Well aren’t you a smart one.”



“I’ll call the imam and see if he can make it for dinner tonight,” said Alan, “We sure as hell don’t want to lose any more OWLs.”

While the rest of the Adala team packed their briefcases and shut down their computers, Alan used his cell phone to call the residence of Imam Mohammed Aziz. He waited nearly a minute while the house-keeper tracked the religious leader down.

“Alan. How are you? Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“Not at all. Sorry to interrupt your day, but Aly and I wanted to have you over for dinner before my trip to the Persian Gulf next week. I know it’s short notice, but dinner tonight seems to be our only opportunity. What do you say?”

“Oh, how very nice of you, Alan,” the imam replied, “but two of my fellow clergymen arrived from California yesterday. They’re staying with me for several weeks, and that means I have to put on my host hat; perhaps next time.”

Alan looked at Brian and raised an eyebrow. Into the phone he said, “Bring them along. You know we have plenty of room. I’ll just have Henry set a table for five. Aly will never forgive me if she finds out you had two of your colleagues in town and I couldn’t convince you to join us. You know she’d love a chance to use her Arabic, Mohammed.” Alan plowed ahead, using a voice that was one part pleading, one part persuasive. “I won’t take no for an answer. 7:00. Very casual.”

The imam chuckled. “Well, when you put it that way...I’ll have to ask my guests, of course, but I’m certain they’ll jump at the invitation. Plan on us being there unless I call you back.”

Alan gave Brian a quick thumb’s up, and the head of his Adala team hurried out.

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

ALAN DIDN’T THINK it was necessary to tell Aly the underlying reason for extending his dinner invitation to Imam Aziz. She would never in a million years approve of Brian Hall breaking into the Muslim cleric’s house and invading the privacy of his computer even if she understood the reasoning behind it. He told her it was a casual invitation between friends, and Aly seemed willing to accept this despite the fact that Mohammed Aziz was the one person beyond the Adala inner circle who knew about the OWL they had sent to Cairo. Now that OWL was dead, and so was the innocent man who had agreed to house him. Aly wasn’t dumb; she could read between the lines, and Alan was hoping she would do just that.

“WELCOME TO OUR home,” said Aly with exceeding charm as Alan ushered

Imam Mohammed Aziz and his two fellow clerics into the room.

“Aly! What a pleasure!” Mohammed said, taking her hand. Then he turned to his companions. “May I present Imam Haram Bahrami and Imam Ohana Afsar. My friends, please say hello to our hosts, Aly and Alan Davis.”

Aly bowed slightly and said in perfect Arabic, “Our home is open to you both.”

Imam Bahrami, a stubby, ebullient man, bellowed, “You speak Arabic. How wonderful for us.”

“I was born in Lebanon,” said Aly returning to English, “you have no idea how much I miss speaking Arabic. My husband doesn’t speak it, unfortunately.”

“Her husband has enough trouble with English, I’m afraid,” Alan said with an ironic smile. He led them into the parlor. “Please sit, gentlemen. Please. Can we offer you tea or coffee?”

“Tea would be wonderful,” Imam Afsar replied. His lanky, stooped form was an interesting counterpoint to his traveling companion, and there was a watchful quality about him that Alan couldn’t help but observe with a note of suspicion.

“You’re from California, Imam Aziz tells me,” he said to his guests.

“We run several community centers for Muslim immigrants,” Asfar replied. “Mostly Iranians who have been forced out of their homes by the current regime.”

“We’re exploring the idea of opening centers here and in Washington, D.C.,” Imam Bahrami added.

Alan wanted to ask them whether their goal was to create a community of Muslim Americans or one of American Muslims; the former he approved of, the latter he found a bit questionable. But he didn’t ask. He stayed in the background and allowed Aly the pleasure of speaking the ancient language she had learned as a child.

Eventually, they gravitated toward the formal dining room. Aly introduced the religious men to Chef Henry, an Egyptian Muslim also from Lebanon who took special pleasure in describing the meal he had prepared for the evening. “Enjoy,” he said as the plates began to arrive.

“Thank you, Henry,” Imam Mohammed Aziz said to their chef, “may the blessings of Allah be with you.”

The food was served: roast duck, curried chicken, sweet akee, a spicy fried potato, and syllabub for dessert. The table was conspicuously alcohol free,

though no one seemed to notice except Alan, who had never been very fond of iced tea.

Aly sat between the two visiting imams, and the three spoke Arabic as if the language were a form of music. Aly was clearly delighted, and Alan could see her guiding the conversation with questions about Iran and the Islamic practices and traditions that dominated that country. They discussed the Qur'an and the Hadith and how Sharia law had grown out of the various interpretations of these works.

Alan and Imam Aziz huddled at the other end of the table and talked politics, mostly the politics of the Middle East. They discussed the murder of the Wahhabi leader Dawud al-Sanie in Saudi Arabia and what the ramifications of such an event would have on everything from education to violence in the street. They talked about Alan's upcoming trip to the Persian Gulf and how terrorism affected even the simplest of daily operations in the Davis refinery there.

Alan had advised Henry to serve his five-course dinner at a leisurely pace, and the conversations lingered on for nearly three hours. It was almost midnight when the party broke up and the three clerics gratefully took their leave.

When the front door closed behind them, Aly took Alan firmly by the arm and said, "Those two are not imams! What they are I don't know," she added vehemently, "but they are not clerics."

## ***EDEN II, AT SEA***

THE COMPANY YACHT formally known as *Eden II*, that only days before had been renamed *Justice*, sailed the length of the Mediterranean Sea until she reached the Israeli harbor of Haifa. The 301-foot yacht was given entrance into the Israeli naval base located in the harbor and docked at a pier guarded by a gunship and six Israeli sailors.

A forklift approached carrying a large crate labeled "Georgia Clay." A crane was used to lift the crate aboard, and the crew stowed it in what once had been the captain's stateroom.

The crew did not tarry in Haifa. They refueled the yacht, took on a load of provisions, and set sail again.

Their course took them south and west beyond the Sinai, through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea, and 750 miles to the southwest end of the Arabian Peninsula. East and north, *Justice* motored at full speed through the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea to the mouth of the Persian Gulf. She turned north through the Straits of Hormuz to coordinates within spitting distance of the Iranian coast. Davis International Industries gulf refinery was located near the

port of Ad Damman, where the yacht was met by Paul Clancy, who for the last eight years had been the general manager of the refinery.

Clancy supervised the unloading of the crate himself.

Again, the *Justice* only docked long enough to replenish her stores and fill the fuel tanks before she returned to her assigned station in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, a position she would maintain until the powers-that-be from Adala dispatched her to ports as yet unknown.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

BRIAN HALL PLACED a direct dial call to Jamie Whyte's cell phone on the Adala ranch outside of El Paso.

Jamie was on the firing range working with a dozen recruits on the art of firing a high-powered rifle from a distance of three hundred yards in a prevailing wind.

Jamie recognized the number and answered by saying, "Where are you? Here at the ranch?"

"Kind of wish I was," Brian replied. "I love New York, but sometimes the walls start to close in, you know?"

"Understand. So you're not here to buy me a drink. What is it then? Good news or bad?"

The former MI-6 agent said, "I want you to prep a couple of OWLs for a trip to Cairo."

"We're going after Haji Mustafek again? Outstanding, wish I could make the trip myself," Jamie said vigorously. "Let's get him."

Brian responded, "It's very important that we send them in on different days and with completely separate agendas. There can be no cross-referencing on this baby. I'll ask MI-6 to arrange separate safe houses for them."

"Good thinking," Jamie replied with the sound of gunfire in his ear.

"I want you to give me a couple of your very best men, Jamie. Your best marksmen."

"Right now, OWLs #7 and #8 are the best of the bunch, and they're eager to get on the job," replied Jamie. "I'll get them packed."

"As soon as they're briefed, let me know. I'll have Marie arrange their

transportation,” Brian told him.

“Oh, and one other thing, Jamie: the Nor Cal sniper rifle you worked on with Alan when he was at the ranch needs to be sent to New York. If we can’t pick up a Russian sniper rifle, we’ll need to use the Nor Cal. For better or worse, Alan’s just about ready to put it to use in Kandahar.”

## **ALGIERS, ALGERIA**

OWLS #3 and #4 had been maintaining a twenty-four-hour vigil on the rooftop of #30 Rue de Martin. They worked twelve-hour shifts. When they weren’t working, they kept their distance.

Two days had passed, and there had been no sign of Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar or any of his henchmen anywhere in the vicinity of #34 Rue de Martin. No one had entered the house, and the garden had been deadly silent. The OWLs were not alarmed. They were patient men. They would wait until someone from Adala told them otherwise. They had an assignment, and nothing mattered other than the success of that assignment.

Dawn of the third day the silence was broken. The door leading from the house at 34 Rue de Martin opened onto the garden suddenly, and four men sauntered out. It took OWL #3 less than two seconds to recognize Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar.

According to their plan, the OWL on duty when the time came would find a safe haven a couple of hundred feet from the house before using his cell phone to detonate the explosives hidden behind the jasmine hedge. OWL #3 was excited. This was what they had trained for.

He crossed the rooftop of #30 Rue de Martin and took the stairs two at a time to the street. The moment he exited the building, he was accosted by two men who didn’t look anything like residents of the old neighborhood.

One of them took him by the arm and said, “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

“I am an artist. My name is Hassan al-Assad,” he answered. “I have permission to paint the city from the roof of this building. Just ask the woman who owns it. I rented the space from her.”

“It was the woman who owns the building who warned us about your suspicious behavior,” the man replied. “And your behavior strikes us as suspicious as well. I think you’d better come with us.”

“But I haven’t done anything,” #3 protested as they took him forcibly by the arms

and half dragged him through the entrance into building #34. They half carried him up four flights of stairs to the rooftop garden of Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar.

The terrorist was seated at a small round table beneath an umbrella. He held a teacup in two hands. The three men with him held submachine guns and were strategically positioned around the garden.

“Here he is. The artist from next door. He calls himself al-Assad,” one of the men from the street announced. “We searched him. He carries no weapons.”

Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar stared at the OWL. “Do you know who I am, you idiot?”

OWL #3 shrugged as casually as possible. “No sir. I’m sorry, but I don’t. I am from Casablanca. I only came here to Algiers to paint this beautiful Islamic City.”

Bin Shizar set his tea cup down. “That may be, but you must prove that to me, Mr. al-Assad.”

“And I can, of course,” OWL #3 insisted. “Please. Just ask the director of the city museum. His name is Dr. Ali Hassad. Please just ask him.”

“And how would you suggest we do that?” the terrorist said. “Carrier pigeon?”

“Just call Dr. Hassad. His number is 43256-01. He will confirm it,” the OWL said, reaching into his garment producing a cell phone and handing it to bin Shizar.

Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar took the cell phone from the OWL and dialed the number; it was the last telephone number he would ever dial. When he pressed the send button on the phone, the detonator in the C-4 explosive not ten feet away sent a charge through the deadly material, and bin Shizar, his henchmen, and one very brave OWL were no more.

The explosion sent shock waves through the streets, and the echo could be heard for miles. OWL #4 was standing on the small balcony outside his hotel room when the sound waves reached him. He had no doubt the explosion had come from Rue de Martin, and the thought brought a smile to his face. “We did it. We did it.”

He hurried back inside. Now it was time to put their extraction plans into effect. Of course, he had no way of knowing that OWL #3 had become now and forever a guest of Allah.

As Brian Hall had instructed him, OWL #4 picked up the hotel phone and dialed the direct-dial number of the newsroom of Al Jazeera, the Arabic television network.

When a reporter in the newsroom answered, OWL #4 said, “We have just assassinated Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar in Algiers. The police will be there by now.

“We? Who is we?” the reporter demanded to know.

“We are Adala.”

“How? If you are responsible, then you can explain how it was done.”

“C-4 explosive with a phone activated detonator. We are Adala,” he said again and hung up.

He made the same call with the same message to the French Intelligence Agency in Paris advising them he would remain in Algiers and placed himself at their service.

The next day, the name Adala appeared on the wires of every news-paper in the world, and the headlines proclaimed the previously unknown organization responsible for the killing of Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar, the infamous Algerian terrorist and ally of Al Qaeda.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

BRIAN HALL LOOKED as if he hadn't slept in a week. His shirt was rum-pled and his hair was disheveled. His eyes, however, sparkled. “Well, Alan, we got into Imam Mohammed Aziz's house last night and got everything we needed. I've got a team from the CIA helping us out with the down-load, and we should have some information tomorrow at the latest.”

“Good. I appreciate the effort. I can tell you with or without the information from his hard drive, we have a problem. I can feel it. And it's not just Aziz, not after what Aly found out about his two California guests.”

“Impostors, huh?”

“Aly spent two hours talking to them last night and discovered one error after another in their clerical understanding of the Hadith and the Qur'an, or maybe I should say lack of understanding. This wasn't deep stuff; this was stuff every religious scholar with an Islamic background would know,” Alan assured them.

“Okay, so suppose it proves to be true about Aziz,” remarked Herb Bentz, who in contrast with Brian, looked in fine fettle. “We need to decide what our best course of action is, and we may only have one shot at the guy.”

“I suppose that depends on what we find on the hard drive and what we can find

out about the religious impostors he's harboring," said Brian.

"Now I want to caution everyone," Herb said seriously. He came to his feet and started pacing. "We have to walk on eggshells around this thing and consider every action we take down to the last detail. Say we discover one or more of them has committed a crime, a serious crime. We would have to consider turning the matter over to the bureau. The problem is, they might not be able to prosecute because the evidence was originally obtained by us in an illegal fashion. They call that kind of evidence "fruit of the poisoned tree," and it's not admissible in court. Believe me, they'll have the ACLU and every liberal lawyer in the country begging to handle the case pro bono."

"I agree," said Brian, "but let's not forget that we may have a few bar-gaining chips of our own. Suppose these three are Al Qaeda moles. If the hard drive turns up evidence of criminal activity or the involvement of Al Qaeda or names of their moles here in America, Aziz and the imams will do anything to either be in a safe jail or federal protective custody. When Al Qaeda learns how careless they were, it wouldn't take Osama bin Laden a nanosecond to issue a Fatwa on them."

Alan shook his head. "I'm glad of that because if Aziz were free, even in hiding, we'd be forced to put our international operation on the back burner, at least temporarily, and that's the last thing we want." He said. "I hope you're right and Aziz elects to cooperate."

"Wish me luck guys; I'm going to tell Aly about Aziz, and while I'm at it, it's high time I told her the truth about Adala."

## **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.**

THAT EVENING, ALAN took Aly out to the terrace. He didn't realize how tightly he was holding her hand until they were sitting across from one another and she said, "What is it, Alan? There's something wrong. I can tell."

"Yes, there is...terribly wrong actually. I haven't been honest with you Aly, and nothing could be more wrong than that," He said remorsefully.

"Alan? What is it darling?" Aly leaned forward.

"There's something I have to explain to you, something I should have explained a long time ago."

"Adala was formed because of Dan's murder. You know that. I told you we were going to train espionage agents called OWLs to try to get information about the whereabouts and plans of international terrorists, that the idea was to turn this information over to authorities. The espionage part is true. What I didn't tell you



is that our OWLs are also trained to kill.”

“To kill? What do you mean to kill? No...no, you mean they’re trained to kill in order to protect themselves. That’s okay, I can buy into that.”

“No Aly, I mean trained to kill deliberately—trained to assassinate terrorist leaders.”

“I can’t believe you’ve been planning murders,” Aly said in disbelief; her eyes forming tears of disappointment.

“I am so terribly sorry,” he said as Aly broke away from him and up the bedroom stairs.

“Aly, my darling Aly.” He called out, “Please, let me try to explain,” as he ran up the stairs trying to catch her.

He found her standing at the bedroom picture window, tears streaming down her reddened cheeks. His arms found her shoulders as he gently drew her close.

“I have to tell you that Adala ordered the killing of Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar in Algiers. He and his thugs were responsible for the slaughter of those girls in Toulon. French intelligence had all the evidence, but the politicians wouldn’t allow them to go after bin Shizar. They said it’s for the Algerian authorities to deal with, and they’ll do exactly nothing. Shizar received justice at the hands of a very brave OWL who gave up his own life in the process.”

She turned to face him saying, “He may well have deserved his fate, but is it Adala’s responsibility to mete out justice?”

“If no one, no government, no ordained organization or no police force is willing to fight these terrorists, then it is imperative that we do so. And the fight, on their terms, has always been to the death. The ineffective governments we live under have placed million-dollar rewards on the heads of these killers, dead or alive, and yet they operate freely, even giving infomercials on television. We dispense justice and seek no reward. We are only humans doing the dirty parts of what we all know must be done in order to save our civilization.”

“But why didn’t you feel free to discuss it with me instead of telling me a half truth?”

“I have never told you anything untrue ever before, and I promise I will never do it in the future. I can offer no reason other than my own cowardice fearing you might not agree with my aim of eliminating terrorist leaders.”

“You’re no coward, Alan. You’re the bravest man I know. It’s just an enormous shock to learn that what I knew about Adala was not the whole truth. I am your

wife because I want to be that more than anything else in the world. I will stand behind you and support you always, and I will trust in you as you have always trusted in me. Let's never exploit the truth with each other again."

"I'm going to tell you some other things you don't know. We're looking into the affairs of Mohammed Aziz. We have reason to believe he's the source of the leak that caused the deaths of OWL #6 and the professor in Cairo. If he turns out to be a terrorist or a terrorist sympathizer, we won't harm him; we'll turn him over to the FBI because there is a justice system here in America."

"Alan, you've explained a few things I hadn't understood before. Of course, I'll try understanding your feelings, especially those that were born out of Dan's death just so long as we can both trust each other. And now I have to confess something to you. I wasn't going on a lecture tour. I had planned to surprise you and join you in Saudi Arabia when you visit the refinery for an Arabian honeymoon."

"You've just taken the wind out of my sails, Aly," said Alan. "Another thing you didn't know is that I was not going to the refinery. Instead, I'm going to Afghanistan on Adala business and hadn't told you so as not to worry you. Well, I guess all the cats are out of their bags. But now, there's no way I could go without you."

"There's no way I'd let you go without me," She answered.

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## 15 - A TERRORIST MOLE

### EDEN, GLEN COVE, N. Y.

ALAN HAD JUST gotten off a conference call with Jamie Whyte at the Adala training facility and Marie Chavez at the Millar Import and Export Company offices in Manhattan. Every detail of his incursion into Afghanistan as an Adala OWL had been discussed, amended, and finalized. He used the word *incursion* because any reference to assassina-tion made his stomach turn over.

Suddenly this was very real. Tomorrow was the day he and Aly would fly to Kabul under the auspices of the Davis International Relief Foundation. Their mission there was to provide funding to three fledgling elementary schools dedicated to young girls who had previously been denied access to any type of classroom experience, and there were thousands of them. Representatives of President Hamid Karzai's ever-tenuous government would meet them at the airport. So would an MI-6 agent named Derek Stafford, though he would do so

under the guise of a Davis employee.

While Aly was touring the schools and coordinating the management of the fund transfer, Alan had put a hunting trip on his itinerary. He had purchased a license for the wild mountain goat, known in Eurasia as the ibex. He had even hired a native guide. His hunting rifle would be sent overseas later today via Federal Express. Legitimate passports were in order; so was the forged document Alan would use once he reached Kandahar.

“You’re ready,” Jamie told him. “You’re an OWL. Remember everything we taught you, Mr. Davis. Leave nothing to chance, and take no chances.

We win this war by killing the other guy, not by dying for the cause.”

“No argument there,” Alan assured him.

“Good luck, boss,” Marie said.

“Ditto,” Jamie added.

Alan had no sooner hung up than his cell phone rang. He recognized Brian Hall’s number and picked it up after a single ring.

“Good morning, Alan. I’ve got Herb Bentz on the line as well,” Brian informed him.

“Okay. Good. What did we find out about our good friend Imam Mohammed Aziz?” Alan asked with an unblemished trace of sarcasm.

“We found out he’s dirty as hell, Alan.” Brian said.

He sounded like a man climbing a rugged mountain peak, and Alan could picture his wrinkled shirt, stained necktie, and disheveled hair. He could also picture the fire in Brian’s eyes, and that was what made Brian so good at his job. “He’s getting his orders from someone very high up in the Muslim world in Paris. We’re breaking it all down from his hard drive right now. The two phony imams from California have direct ties to Iran, and their refugee centers on the coast look like processing stations for some very unsavory types. I’ve already given the CIA and the FBI a heads up, but we’ll know more as soon as we dissect Aziz’s computer. We should have a complete analysis in three or four days,” announced Brian.

“Thank you Brian. So it could very well have been Aziz who gave up our OWL in Cairo,” Alan said.

“I wouldn’t bet a farthing against it,” Brian said with certainty.

Alan gritted his teeth. "Let's serve his head up to the FBI on a platter if we can, gentlemen."

"Oh, that's very definitely the plan, boss." Herb assured him. "So, is everything set for tomorrow?"

"We'll be in Afghanistan late tomorrow. All the papers for both Aly and me are in order, and all my gear is in transit," Alan said.

"What have you told Aly?" Herb said with genuine concern.

"I told her we think Dan Millar's killer is still alive in Kandahar, and I'm going there to make sure we get it right," Alan said. "I told her I don't want any surprises like we had in Cairo."

"Good. I've got MI-6 on high alert. Like I said earlier, one of their agents will contact you on arrival in Kabul."

"Derek Stafford, right?"

"Right. The password is *guns and roses*," said Herb.

"What about my OWL? Everything set there?" Alan wanted to know.

"OWL #5 is already in Kandahar and settled in to a safe house. He's been contacted by the MI-6 mole working inside the Taliban, and Mohammed Omar al-Fayez is definitely living in a house on the outskirts of Kandahar under an assumed name. OWL #5 has mapped out two realistic trigger points, both rooftop shots from about 200 yards."

"Piece of cake," Alan said in a voice as hard as steel.

"You'll make the final call on the trigger point depending on the wind and the sun," Herb told him. "Your OWL is also hard at it finalizing an extraction plan to get you safely back to Kabul."

"It will be up to you to explain to anyone who asks how a marksman with your superior skills failed to bag a trophy ibex," Brian remarked facetiously.

"And what a story it will be," Alan said though he was in no mood for jocular. "Have we heard anything from Saudi Arabia?"

"The package from your trusty yacht, *Justice*, was unloaded at the Gulf refinery under Paul Clancy's supervision," Herb explained. "OWLs #1 and #2 entered the country again under different aliases and picked up the package this morning. Two hundred pounds of C-4 explosive. We don't know what the Khalid family is planning for the Wahhabi conclave exactly, other than the fact that their uncle

would like to honor them with a very volatile sculpture. In any case, the OWLs will keep us posted.”

“Thanks, gents. None of this would have been possible without your hard work and expertise,” said Alan. “Take care of things while I’m gone. I hope to see you in a week or so.”

## **RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

HAMUD AND FAHD Khalid, known in the world of Adala as OWLs #1 and #2, huddled in the back room of their Uncle Omar’s workshop garage drinking black tea with their father, Adel, and their very talented uncle. The garage was filled with the tools of a sculptor renowned for his work in bronze and copper.

“What have you learned about the Wahhabi conclave, Father?” the younger brother asked politely.

“The conclave will be held at the Ibriham Azkha Mosque exactly twenty days from now,” said the paternal head of the Khalid clan.

“I know the mosque well,” offered Omar, “and I can understand why it was chosen for the event. It seats at least five hundred people. It has a stage and a sound system.”

“And it sits in the middle of a government office area so it has security,” Adel added.

“Unfortunately, our idea about using a sculpture won’t work. Sculptures or art work of any kind are forbidden in a mosque,” Omar lamented. “It doesn’t matter who the subject is. Dawud al-Sanie, the Prophet, even Allah himself—it doesn’t matter.”

“Then what do we do with our explosives?” OWL #1 asked. “We have enough plastique to blow a hole the size of a pyramid in that Mosque. The C-4 is easy to handle. It’s as pliable as clay and can be transformed into any shape. There must be a way.”

OWL #2 set down his teacup. He looked from his father’s face to his uncle, and finally to his brother. “I have an idea.”

## **CAIRO, EGYPT**

OWLS #7 AND #8 arrived in Cairo a day apart. They carried legitimate work visas issued by the Egyptian embassy in Washington D.C.

OWL #7 shared a taxi from the airport to the city with a man who turned out to be an MI-6 agent named Harry Stoneham. Harry gave the OWL the keys to a small apartment on the outskirts of the city, a safe house the British intelligence agency had owned for nearly a decade. He shared a file on the terrorist Haji Mustafek that was frightening simply because the man was responsible for the murder of so many people. He gave the OWL a cell phone to be used for contacting only two people, Stoneham himself and his fellow OWL. "Absolutely no one else. If you need to call home, use a pay phone."

Harry followed the same procedure with OWL #8 except that he used the men's locker room at the airport. He shared keys, a phone, and another copy of the file. He also shared one last word. "Your superiors back home have provided you with all the tools you'll need. Check the closet at the safe house. You need anything else, you call me. Remember, this must be a low-key venture. Invisibility is your byword."

The OWLs settled in at their individual safe houses, read their files cover to cover, and then touched base by phone. "There's one part of Mustafek's routine that seems to stand out. He seems to enjoy having his dinner two or three nights a week at some place called the Indus Delta Restaurant."

"Let's check it out tonight."

"I'll take the inside. You keep an eye on the outside," OWL #7 said.

OWL #8 watched the restaurant from the window seat of the tearoom across from the Indus Delta. When Haji Mustafek arrived, his entourage was twelve-men-strong. Half stayed on guard outside, their jackets bulging, undoubtedly concealing Uzi machine pistols. The others entered and sat at a round table in a far corner of the restaurant.

"A fortress," OWL #8 reported to his colleague.

"If we're going to get at him, it has to be inside the restaurant," his fellow OWL agreed. "The question is how. We need an 'in.'"

"I have an idea," OWL #8 said eventually. "I want you to approach the owner of the restaurant and tell him you and your brother are seriously interested in buying the place. Tell him we've come upon an unexpected and large inheritance. Like many men, his natural greed might just rise to the surface."

"Naturally," OWL #7 agreed. "And if he's interested?"

"Tell him your brother is a European-trained chef who will have to observe the restaurant's operations for a week or two before you can finalize the deal."

OWL #7's eyes widened; then he smiled. "I'd forgotten. You were a cook before

you became an OWL. I just didn't know you were trained in Europe."

"Not exactly, but I figure the Muslim neighborhood in downtown Brooklyn is nearly as prestigious," OWL #8 quipped. "What do you think?"

"It might just work. I like the idea. Give me forty-eight hours. I'll make my pitch to the guy and see what he says. If it's a go, I'll call you. If not, we go to plan B."

## **J. D. WALSH PUB, NEW YORK, N. Y.**

BRIAN HALL ORDERED two shots of single-malt Scotch. The bar was smoky and dark, so they both felt right at home. Who knew how many hundreds of hours the two had spent in bars just like this during their rather distinguished careers in a world where staying in the shadows was the preferred mode of doing business.

They toasted. Nothing in particular. "Health," Herb said. "Cheers," Brian replied. They drank and savored the taste as if all the world's ills could be washed away by scotch this good. They reminisced for a few minutes about their days with the CIA, in Herb's case, and Brian's time with British intelligence, but that didn't last long. "Let's get down to busi-ness now. What did we finally get from the hard drive?"

"We got everything there was to get," said Brian confidently.

"And?"

"And not a minute too soon," Brian replied. "It seems our phony imams, the ones Aly spotted the other night at dinner, are actually scientists of some sort, backgrounds in chemistry and biology by all accounts."

"That doesn't sound good," Herb said, not allowing the concern to get in the way of his scotch.

"Good old Aziz has orders to help the two 'imams' create a laboratory somewhere on the East Coast, and we can probably assume it's the kind of laboratory where things like anthrax get priority treatment," Brian noted.

Herb grimaced, then he raised his glass. "Dollars to donuts they're not here to develop a cure for the common cold."

"Best news of all," Brian added with just a trace of excitement. "Aziz appears to be the head of North American operations for an organization I have to believe is Al Qaeda. He's left a somewhat obscure trail to follow, but I think that's where it's leading."

“Well, Brian,” said Herb looking across at his friend and colleague. “A decision has to be made. We either have to fish or cut bait on this thing. It’s a tough call, but I think you and I should try to come to some kind of understanding with the FBI that would keep us in the loop and at the same time permit them to conduct their investigation. They have the manpower and resources, and we don’t. Egos aside, we have to bring these killers down, and Adala isn’t ready to take it on.”

“You’re probably right,” Brian admitted. “Ours is more of an international project anyway. Unfortunately, I have to question how the FBI will react when they learn how we acquired the information from Aziz’s hard drive.”

“We have to tell them about the coincidence surrounding a DII employee being shot in Cairo and the motivation behind our break-in into Aziz’s residence, but we don’t have to say one word about Adala or any of our operations.” Herb looked over the rim of his glass. “What do you think?”

“Absolutely. It’s up to Alan if and when he wants to bring in either the feds or the CIA.”

“Just one other matter, Brian: we have ten OWLs at the training camp without any planned assignments. Six of them are ready to go today, and the four others will be ready in a week or two.”

“We have that job for two of them in Pakistan; why don’t we set them up in the field right now?”

“I like it. We can use two in Pakistan right now. Why not send 2 OWLs each to England, France, Germany, and the Gaza Strip? We’ll surely have need of them at or near those locations soon; besides, they can begin under-cover operations right now. You never know what they might pick up,” added Herb.

## **RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

THE KHALID CLAN had a plan. Since the rules of the Wahhabi conclave forbade the display of such things as sculptures or other works of art within the Ibraham Azkha Mosque, where the selection of their new leader was to take place in fifteen days, something else was needed. OWL #2 thought that if they could massage the C-4 explosive into a flat, thin roll, then it could be laid beneath the carpet that ran down the center aisle of the mosque’s meeting hall.

“Right beneath the feet of the very men we are targeting.” OWL #2, the older of the two brothers, asserted with a smile.

“We have to test it and then test it again,” his brother Hamud said adamantly.

“And what better place than the privacy of the desert,” Uncle Omar said. “We’ll



take my truck. Let's pack our things."

They rolled a piece of carpet and loaded it into the back of the truck along with three detonators and three thin layers of an extraordinarily lethal chemical compound known as C-4.

They drove north and east. The sun was beginning to set over dunes running into the distance like waves on the ocean, golden-brown sand tinged with a red glitter, when they found a secluded valley, parked, and unloaded.

They tried to reconstruct the center aisle of the mosque by finding a level, hard packed stretch of sand. Once they were satisfied, they laid one layer of the explosive down, inserted the detonator, and set the activation switch to a prearranged number in Hamud's cell phone. They laid the carpet over it, smoothed out the wrinkles, and then sought shelter behind Omar's truck. The hopeful onlookers were duly rewarded when Hamud punched the number into his cell phone and the explosive blew the carpet to shreds digging a crater four feet deep in the desert sand. Two other experiments were equally successful, but there was little celebration. Not yet.

The elder Khalid looked from his sons to his brother and back again.

His voice filled with resolve, he said, "We now have a means of dealing with the filthy Wahhabi. Let us prepare as if our very lives depended upon it."

The Khalid family spent the next ten days flattening C-4 explosive into twelve-inch squares exactly one-quarter of an inch thick. It was tedious, exacting work, but they were energized by the process. Then they carefully stacked the sheets four high, layering each sheet with copious amounts of talcum to prevent them from adhering to each other. When the work was complete, they purchased a sufficiently long runner of very expensive carpeting to be held in reserve until September 10, one day before the conclave.

## **AFGHANISTAN**

IT WAS A somber twelve-hour flight from New York to south Asia and the troubled, turbulent world of Afghanistan. From the air, the arid, intimidating mountains dominating the country from south to west were as uninviting as the parched, uninhabited desert along the Iranian border. All Alan could think about was the far side of the moon and why anyone in his right mind would choose this as his homeland. Probably because it chose them, he decided.

Kabul was located on a plateau below the mountains. This capital city supported its million inhabitants at a level somewhat below the poverty level. The few taller buildings were framed by rings of shabby mercantile structures and interspersed with even shabbier housing. The outer ring of the city boasted of the finer

housing and most of the visible greenery.

“It’s a lot bigger than I would have guessed,” Aly said, “but maybe even more third-world looking than I imagined.”

As soon as they deplaned, they were met by two people. The government representative was dressed in robes and a head scarf. The other, Derek Stafford, was a tall, strapping British intelligence agent with sunken cheeks and a rather wicked smile. After the government man was satisfied that his duties had been done, he allowed Stafford to take over and arrange their accommodations.

“Brian Hall asked me to look out for you,” he said with typical English understatement. “I hope you enjoyed the scenery on your way in.” He was grinning when he said this.

“It doesn’t exactly strike one as a tourist hot spot,” Aly said, “but I’m determined to keep an open mind.”

“No need to keep an open mind, Mrs. Davis. It is what it is. A black hole. You will be impressed, however, with the people you’ll be working with at the schools. They are a remarkable, resilient bunch, and they need your help.” Derek Stafford didn’t say that he thought, in the end, her good work would be wasted. He was tired, but when it came to customs, he whisked them through with the ease of a man who knew exactly the right buttons to push. “Your bags are already in the car. Three for the young lady and one for you, Mr. Davis. Sound about right?”

“Very efficient, Derek. Thank you,” Alan answered.

“I’ll drive you to your hotel,” he said. “I hope you’re not expecting the Hyatt. I did get you the best available.”

“Clean sheets are my only priority,” Aly assured him.

“You both look about as worn out as two people could be after twelve hours in an airplane. Why don’t you get unpacked and just crash for a few hours. I’ll have a bottle of something restorative sent up.” The British agent dropped them at the hotel and recommended a restaurant with-in walking distance. Then he said, “Suppose I call you at ten tomorrow morning for an update?”

## **CAIRO, EGYPT**

THE OWNER OF the Indus Delta Restaurant in Cairo was a rotund, ill-tempered man named Abdullah Emeeza. He had taken OWL #7’s inquiry about the sale of his restaurant very seriously, and now he was interested in opening negotiations.

Very interested.

He and OWL #7 bargained over the price for over two hours, only because the OWL felt it was necessary to maintain his deception. Arabs haggle. That's what they did. He who refused to haggle was not sincere, and OWL #7 was nothing if not sincere.

When both men were satisfied, OWL #7 left by the front door. He used his cell phone to contact OWL #8 as he walked down the dusty street in search of a taxi cab.

"We have a deal," he told his compatriot. "It's contingent upon your approval. You start your recon tomorrow. Don't forget. You're a chef—act like it."

OWL #8 arrived at the Indus Delta back entrance at 10:30 the following morning. The man who opened the door was dark, swarthy, and hostile by nature.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Emeeza," OWL #8 said with an ingratiating smile. "I am..."

"I know who you are. You're Omar Al Mayyah," the restaurant owner said. "You don't look like a chef, but your brother tells me you're a genius in the kitchen. Come in. Come in."

"I'll do my best to stay out of the way," the OWL promised. "Oh, and if I could have a look at the books later, I would be most grateful."

Seven days passed, and OWL #8 played the part of the potential buyer quite well. He asked questions only when the restaurant wasn't busy, and he helped out whenever it seemed appropriate. He talked about the menu, the customers, the equipment, even the staff; and yes, he even went so far as to peek at the books.

Over the next seven days, Haji Mustafek had dinner in the Indus Delta three times. He was always well guarded, very subdued, and very well attended to. The underlying thread of anxiety among the staff was well hidden, but OWL #8 detected it nonetheless.

OWL #8 did as he did with many other customers and pointed the terrorist out to Mr. Emeeza and said, "Another regular. He comes in often."

"Yes, he does. Very generous with the staff. Very generous," Mr. Emeeza said, though OWL #8 knew this was not the case. In fact, Haji Mustafek was demanding and stingy, though no one ever dared challenge him. Who challenges a man who arrives for dinner with armed guards and a bitter smile?

“Do your regulars ever order specialties in advance?” OWL #8 wanted to know.

“Yes. Quite often; in fact, the gentlemen there almost always order Sheikl el Mahsi for their dinner on Wednesdays,” the owner confessed.

“Really. Sheiki el Mahsi?” OWL #8 seemed particularly excited by this revelation. “Sheiki el Mahsi is my specialty, Mr. Emeeza. You must allow me to prepare it for your special guests on Wednesday.”

Mr. Emeeza did not even hesitate. “All right. If it helps to facilitate the sale of my restaurant, I have no objections.”

“Excellent. Thank you,” OWL #8 said. “Next Wednesday then.”

## **F.B.I. OFFICES, NEW YORK CITY**

THE FBI STATION Chief looked across at Brian Hall and Herb Bentz as if he had just listened to two seasoned storytellers weave a plot that was either a grand piece of fiction or a very scary slice of reality.

“That’s an amazing story, gentlemen,” Chief Ed Quinn said to them. “Frankly, I don’t know exactly what to say.”

“We will cooperate in any way we can,” Brian said. “All we ask is to be kept informed of any developments in the investigation.”

“Informed,” said Quinn in a most guarded fashion.

“Listen, chief, anything we learn from these terrorists could very well save the life of one of our employees overseas,” Brian said. “That’s how dangerous things have gotten for us in the Middle East. You know that, of course.”

“That I can understand,” Quinn answered, “but you realize that the government is going to have an extremely difficult time using anything on that hard drive since it was obtained illegally. We’re going to need to improvise.”

“We thought you might say that, so we would like to propose a solution,” offered Herb helpfully.

“Let’s hear it, Herb,” Quinn said.

“If we confronted Imam Aziz with the hard-drive issue and told him what we know, he might well jump over to our side. Think about it, Quinn. The guy will be scared half to death that Al Qaeda, or whoever the hell he reports to, will get wind of the fact that he’s let this computer of his fall into our hands. How

careless could he be?”

“How stupid,” Quinn added.

“Exactly, and Aziz has been around long enough to know how terrible their retribution would be.”

Quinn smiled rather bleakly and shook his head. “You’re a devious son-of-a-gun, aren’t you,” he said. “But we don’t have much choice. Let’s try to flip him.”

## **PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN**

OWLS #9 AND #10 arrived separately and, with the help of MI-6, secured safe lodging. They were being kept safely under the wings of thoroughly experienced British agents who had received most of the tools that a HAWK might need to accomplish his assignment.

“This is an extremely important mission,” Brian had told them before they left Texas, “because it could frighten a lot of those wealthy Saudis. If we could somehow dry up the funds being poured into Pakistan in support of the extremist Madrassas, we could close them down. Every month, a member of the royal family, together with two or three wealthy Saudis, meets in Peshawar to dole out staggering amounts for both the Madrassas and the terrorist activists.”

“How do they actually do it?” asked OWL #10.

“They bring hard cash and meet in the top-floor Crescent Room of the Pearl Continental Hotel. The meetings are always held on the first day of each month and with tight security both inside the Crescent Room and around the hotel. It is for you two OWLS to figure out a way to eliminate the Saudis and get yourselves out of Peshawar safely.”

BOTH OWLS IMMEDIATELY began their undercover surveillance activities by posing as tea merchants wishing to determine if the Pearl Continental Hotel could properly house and provide meeting space for their next merchant association membership conference. Every public facility was visited and photographed including the Crescent Room. They even inspected the basement levels of the hotel for, what they told the manage, were “security” concerns.

After 4 days of exhaustive study, #9 said to his partner, “I don’t see how we can get to them inside the hotel. We stand a better chance somewhere else; the airport, en route to the hotel, or upon their departure.”

“There must be a way,” replied #10. “I want to go over the hotel layout and the photographs one more time.”

## CAIRO, EGYPT

EVENINGS IN CAIRO were a bit cooler with the coming of autumn. A brisk breeze from the east brought the unmistakable scent of the Mediterranean Sea.

As darkness set in and the dinner hour approached, two vans pulled in front of the Indus Delta restaurant. Six men tumbled out of each vehicle, most with bulges clearly visible beneath their jackets, scanning every rooftop and running their eyes over every inch of pavement. The last man out was Haji Mustafek. He entered the restaurant after his five companions had inspected it. The group took the seats that were always reserved for them on a Wednesday night, while the restaurant staff converged on them as if royalty had just entered.

In the kitchen, OWL #8 was advised that the Mustafek party had arrived and that beverages were being served. The OWL set to work.

Dinner salads came next, efficiently served by two male waiters who moved silently around the table. Back in the kitchen, OWL #8 was slowly bringing his specialty to exactly the right temperature. When the salad plates had been collected, #8 ladled six generous portions of Sheikl el Mahsi onto prewarmed dinner plates. The waiters delivered them to the terrorists' table as the marvelous aroma wafted throughout the restaurant.

“Wonderful, wonderful,” said Mustafek. “I have been looking forward to this dish all day.” He gestured to one of his men. “Abdul, give me your opinion.” His “opinion” was that if Abdul didn’t die, then the dish was safe to eat.

The man named Abdul filled his mouth, chewed, and swallowed. He couldn’t help smiling. “Delicious, I’ve never tasted Sheikl el Mahsi this well prepared anywhere.”

As the table began their feast, OWL #8 casually exited the back door of the restaurant. A rental car was already awaiting him. He climbed in and exchanged a knowing nod with OWL #7.

“Very good,” he said with a small smile. And then to the driver, he said, “Cairo International Airport if you would. We’re running a bit late if you wouldn’t mind hurrying.”

The first complaint was not registered from the table in the restaurant for nearly fifteen minutes. The first to do so was Abdul. A sudden headache had rendered him nearly speechless. A second man was having difficulty breathing. Another vomited.

The terrorist Haji Mustafek tried to stand, but his legs wouldn’t hold him. He didn’t know that OWL #8 had sprinkled two lethal doses of potassium cyanide

into each bowl of his special Sheikl el Mahsi recipe. He would never know.

In thirty-seven minutes, everyone at the Mustafek table had left this life forever, and Adala had claimed another victory.

OWL #8, now a HAWK, caught his flight out of Cairo to Rome and would await his next assignment. OWL #7 remained undercover in Cairo.

## **PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN**

“DO YOU REMEMBER our visit to the basement of the hotel?” asked Owl #10.

“Yes.”

“The airflow metal duct work; was it large enough for a man to crawl?” asked OWL #9 excitedly.

“Yes, easily I would think.”

“Then take a good look at this Crescent Room photo where our quarry holds their meetings. Do you see the air-passage grate high up on the wall? Would that not be an excellent place from which to shoot? It dominates the room. Anyone in the room would be in plain sight of a person concealed within the air duct.”

“You’re right. That would be an answer, but can a man get into the air system and make his way to the Crescent Room?”

“There must be a condenser and motors feeding the cooling system somewhere on the roof along with an exhaust system. The ductwork must be accessible from the roof.”

“Tonight, in the darkness, we must get to the roof and examine the outside grating to see if it can be removed and if a man can enter the duct to crawl,” said OWL #9 eagerly.

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# **16 - A WAHHABI CARPET – MEDIA FRENZY**

**RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

HAMUD KHALID, OWL #1, was not the same man he was the night he and his brother brought an end to the lives of Dawud al-Sanie and Ahmed Rachid, not by a long shot. They had both been evil men, and many Saudis who knew anything about the Wahhabi applauded their demise. Hamud had not once since that night troubled himself with thoughts of guilt. Al-Sanie in particular was the scum of the earth, a terror-ist who took pleasure in the loss of innocent life, and a man who found reward in twisting the minds of innocent, malleable boys and girls. He deserved what he got.

There was also a personal side to al-Sanie's timely death. Hamud considered the terrorist's death the first step in avenging the murder of his mother and sister. True, there may not have been concrete evidence that their killers had been students of al-Sanie himself, but they were certainly disciples of his terrorist philosophy and believers in the warped misrepresentation that had long tainted the Qur'an's true teachings.

Unlike al-Sanie's assassination, the impending events of the next two days filled Hamud's mind with terrible doubts, and the act of destroying a holy Islamic shrine tore at the very fabric of his conscience. It didn't matter that he had been trained for an undertaking exactly like this. It didn't matter that he had gladly volunteered to take action against the Wahhabi. This was more than espionage, and it was more than retribution against radical fundamentalism.

This act, he thought to himself, will do more than disrupt the Wahhabi and decimate their chain of command; it will destroy a place built in Allah's honor by men who believed as he did, men who saw the integrity and honor of Islam, men who would have seen through the perverse charade of men like Dawud al-Sanie. How, OWL #1 wondered, can Allah look favorably on me if I do this thing? Hundreds will be killed or maimed. How do I know if every man attending the conclave deserves to be blown to pieces? How do I know whether they truly epitomize the same evil that a man like Dawud al-Sanie did? Can I assume that every man who attends the conclave supports the teachings of suicide and martyrdom and the corruption of young minds the way al-Sanie did? Are any of them good or caring or worthy of life?

These were the questions that haunted OWL #1 on this cool autumn evening of September 29 as his family gathered for their evening dinner in the old quarter of Riyadh. They were served steamed vegetables and thinly sliced beef, the smell of which Hamud could hardly bear in his state of mind. Hamud could see the tension on his brother Fahd's face as clearly as he could hear it in his Uncle Omar's normally placid voice. His father, Adel spoke with conviction about the enemy they were waging war with in two days, but the enemy now had many faces, and even a man who had lost his wife and daughter to the slaughter of terrorism seemed weighed down by the event.

They had been working nonstop for days now, and the effort that had gone into



preparing the specialized carpeting for the center aisle of the mosque and doing it within the window of time allotted to them had taken a heavy toll on the four men.

The most dangerous step of all—that of installing the explosives and camouflaging them with the newly stitched carpet—still awaited them. Would it ever arrive, Hamud wondered. His brother Fahd and Uncle Omar had developed a plan for entering the mosque undetected, or at least as undetected as legitimate workmen can be. They had made a dry run two mornings ago; still the risks were enormous and undeniable. Should they be caught, their punishment would make the common use of caning and stoning, so popular with the Sharia, look like child's play.

No one discussed such things—after all, they were at war. The risks were acceptable, they all agreed, and besides, it was not the punishment doled out by mere mortals that worried Hamud; it was the uncertainty of punishment in the hereafter.

No one seemed to have an appetite this night. Hot tea, yes, but food didn't have its normal appeal, even for Fahd and his seemingly unflagging hunger. No one seemed to have the energy for talk either, or at least the kind of energetic discourse that had previously fueled their mission.

“Let us beseech Allah to look favorably on our efforts tomorrow,” said Omar after the dishes were removed from the table with only the tea remaining. “May He allow us the will and means to eliminate the blasphemers of Islam and the murderers of true Muslims. Let us pray that our preparations prove sufficient and that our courage never falters. If Allah favors us, we will be guaranteed success, and we will rid our holy land of these devils.”

Hamud found comfort in these words. He went to bed that night feeling somewhat less guilty if not completely at peace. He closed his eyes and focused on his training, and when he slept, it was with a renewed sense of conviction in the knowledge that the enemy cared not one iota for the Muslim masses, the Muslim masses for whom Hamud was fighting.

He arose well before sunrise, as did his father, uncle, and brother Fahd, four courageous men with destiny at their fingertips. They set out less than one half hour later in a newly lettered truck bearing an Arabic sign pro-claiming it the property of the Riyadh Carpet Company. Packed in the back of the truck were the thin layers of C-4 explosive, detonators, receivers, and transmitters, and an elegant runner of carpet designed to camouflage it all.

The two older men rode in the cab, somber and silent, yet seemingly calm and resigned to the fate these next days would bring them. OWLs #1 and #2, the brothers Khalid, sat in the back of the enclosed truck wedged among their

deadly cargo. They avoided conversation, each a captive of his own thoughts, his own fears, and his own unwavering commitments to all that Adala stood for.

The sun had not yet risen when they arrived at the courtyard of Ibriham Azkha Mosque, a magnificent stone structure with two pencil-thin minarets adorned with balconies used by the muezzin to call the people to prayer. The main entrance to the mosque lay just beyond a shaded and cobbled courtyard. The entrance's exquisite mosaics reflected the first light of morning, and the golden dome that crowned the structure flashed like the coals of distant fire.

Uncle Omar backed the truck as close to the entrance as possible. All four men jumped from the vehicle. The elder Khalid carried a sign across the courtyard and placed it in front of the entrance, a cautionary warning to those devout worshippers arriving for the predawn prayer called Fajr. The sign very politely informed them of work in progress and directed them to use the side aisles. Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you very much.

Omar, Hamud, and Fahd opened the back of the truck and began carrying the carpeting and "padding" made from C-4 explosive into the empty Mosque. Then, as if they had been doing so their entire working lives, they began laying the padding edge to edge until it was all in place, exactly as padding would have been had it been made of synthetic rubber instead of thin layers of an explosive material powerful enough to bring the roof down and wreak terrible havoc on the entire house of prayer.

Next came the exacting task of laying the carpet runner over the padding.

It was a full day's job, or at least the Khalids made it into a full day's job. Their truck remained outside beyond the courtyard and their sign continued to direct visitors and worshippers to either side of the prayer room. They ignored the occasional rumblings of annoyed patrons exactly the way laborers had been doing in every walk of life for centuries. The carpet fell into place and looked quite stunning. All that remained was the insertion of the detonator into the C-4 and the activation of the transmitter, but this would have to wait until the following day simply for safety's sake.

The four men stayed until after Isha, the final prayer of the day.

They left their work sign in place overnight and then drove back home. They ate, tried to sleep, and were on the road again well before dawn. Omar and Adel Khalid were inserting the detonators into the explosive material well before the muezzin called the faithful for morning prayer. At the same time, OWLs #1 and #2 moved the company truck two streets away and parked it in a prearranged spot in front of an apothecary and a small grocery.

It was just before 9:00 when a large truck arrived in front of the mosque and a

team of eight workers began to off-load pallet after pallet of folding chairs in preparation for the Wahhabi conclave. They set up the chairs theater style on both sides of the center aisle facing the podium pulpit exactly as Adel Khalid, his brother, and his sons knew they would.

From inside the mosque, Omar and Adel watched as the clerical contingent began to arrive for the event. A thousand questions arose. Would the padding remain undetected? Would the explosive do the job as planned? Would they get away with it? Would the name Adala be on the lips of every person in Saudi Arabia by day's end? Or would the OWLs and their father and uncle be dead or behind bars awaiting something far worse than death?

Ironically, the waiting would prove to be the most stressful element of a plan that had been more than a month in the works.

## **PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN**

THE MOON, WHAT there was of it, hung like an ivory tusk in the eastern sky.

OWLs #9 and #10 studied the grounds surrounding the hotel. By now, they had studied the movements of the hotel security force enough to know that the position they had taken up on the roof was secure for at least the next twenty minutes and probably some minutes after that as well.

“Always respect the timetable,” Jamie Whyte had preached to them over the past months. “Never trust to guesswork.”

The OWLs examined the exterior grating on the roof and then used a power screwdriver to loosen the screws. They set aside the outer grating and used a pencil flash to examine the metal ductwork running above the top floor. It was large enough to accommodate a moderate-sized man crawling on his belly, but not much more.

OWL #9 unfolded the architectural blueprint they had discovered at the assessor's office the day before and whispered, “The only question is whether or not the Crescent Room is still located where this thing suggests it is.”

“And if it is,” OWL #10 said, “whether we can access it from this duct work. I'll check it out.”

OWL #10 crawled into the metal duct, pencil flashlight firmly between his teeth, and headed due east following the blueprint. He estimated a distance of 12 meters before the ductwork forked, at which point he took the right fork. Then crawling another six meters he made a sharp right for less than five meters. The open grating, high on the wall of the Crescent Room was exactly where they hoped it would be, directly over a plush suite with a rich wooden conference

table and six chairs.

“Found it,” he whispered into the tiny wireless mike.

He heard OWL #9’s voice in his ear. “Is it doable?”

“Point-blank range,” his fellow OWL whispered.

“Excellent. Get back here.”

The two OWLs were back on solid ground less than a half hour later. They made their way to a small café next to the Mehar Promenade, where they ordered Turkish coffee from a pretty young waitress.

When the coffee was in front of them, OWL #10 said, “We’ll need to make at least one more dry run, and then we’ll need to stow our weapons.”

“And not a moment too soon,” his comrade said. “If we’re going to stay on schedule, we have to move within the next seven days.”

“Whichever of us does the job won’t be coming back. Escape will be impossible once the shooting begins,” OWL #10 said. “I think we should be prepared for that.”

“Then we go together and must make certain none in that room escape either,” #9 said with remarkable calm. “Or, we find something equally as lethal as a gun but more covert.”

“Ah, of course.” OWL #10 smiled grimly. “If you’re thinking what I’m thinking, it might just work.”

“It’s quiet, it’s lethal, and it gives us the best chance of getting out of there alive,” #9 said.

“The question is, will the material we need arrive in time,” his fellow OWL said.

“I think so, but it’ll be close.” OWL #10 finished his coffee and stood up. “If we order it tonight, Jamie Whyte can have it on a transport by morning. Let’s put in a call.”

## **THE HINDU KUSH, PAKISTAN**

IN HIS MOUNTAIN hideout north of Peshawar, Pakistan, Ayman al-Zawahiri met with a camera crew from the Al Jazeera television network. It was time for another incendiary announcement to hit the airways. Al Jazeera would never refuse al-Zawahiri, no matter where he was hiding out, because his

commentaries were carried by affiliate stations in every corner of the globe. It was a mutually beneficial relationship—they respected his privacy at any cost, and he in turn rewarded them with an exclusive.

The sullen, bearded terrorist took his place in front of the camera, waited for the red light to come on, and made his threat to the western world.

“The unexpected deaths of our Islamic brothers in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Algeria are the work of Jews and the infidels of the West. You mock the cause of Islam. You blacken the eye of our religion. Let it be said that the American president will pay a terrible price when Allah demands reparation for his sins. For each life lost by a soldier of Islam, one hundred infidel lives will be taken. Mark my word.”

The terrorist looked straight into the camera, his voice rising just slightly with emotion. “The oceans protecting America are meaningless to us. The weapons of death are there now in the hands of our brothers. Plans for their use have been made, and it is only for us to set those plans in motion. So I tell you America: BEWARE! You will be punished.”

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

ALAN AND ALY met with MI-6 agent Derek Stafford in the privacy of their hotel room. They ordered a hearty American breakfast of bacon, eggs, juice, and muffins from room service.

“I thought it was best if we weren’t seen together in the hotel dining room,” Stafford said. “The better part of valor and all that.”

“You’ll get no argument from me,” Alan assured him. He poured more coffee for everyone and carried his cup to a window overlooking the city. The streets teemed with people and animals, and the braying of a donkey filtered up to them. “So how does our plan look, Mr. Stafford? Are we still on schedule?”

“The way I understand it, Mrs. Davis will be picked up by a government escort this morning and spend the next two days visiting schools and talking to representatives from the Karzai government,” Stafford said.

“That’s right,” Aly said.

“Very admirable of your foundation. You have no idea how bereft of education this culture is and how starved they are for it.” Stafford lifted his cup and drank.

“As for your trip south, Mr. Davis, I have arranged for your safe transit to Kandahar in the care of a man I trust implicitly. You will have no trouble at the government checkpoints. He is a registered hunting guide, and you are a

licensed hunter. Please do not forget your paperwork. My man will meet you at noon today. Please have whatever you need ready to go by then. You'll have a 250-mile-long drive ahead of you, so be pre-pared. Your OWL will meet you at a small private residence on the edge of town this evening. You know him as Ahmed, but the name on his passport identifies him as Mosa Kharat. The house belongs to us, and it is very private."

"How dangerous is this, Mr. Stafford?" Aly asked point blank.

Stafford looked from Aly to Alan as if the answer might be found somewhere in between. Alan said, "My wife knows I'm here on the business that Herb Bentz told you about, Derek. We don't want to lose another OWL the way we did in Cairo."

"Well, to be frank, Afghanistan is hardly the safest place in the world, Mrs. Davis. Hard for an American not to draw attention to himself or her-self, so that's why were keeping as low a profile as possible," the MI-6 man admitted.

Aly wasn't satisfied, but she said no more on the subject. "How long will you be gone?" she asked Alan.

"I have a limited hunting license that expires after three days. I'll be back in Kabul by then," Alan promised her.

Breakfast was forgotten. Derek Stafford came to his feet. "All right then. Please use the south door of the hotel when you leave, Alan, and look for a Land Rover with more rust than paint." He held out his hand to Aly. "Mum."

"Mr. Stafford, I suppose thanks are in order, though I am not absolutely sure for what," Aly admitted. "I do appreciate you looking out for us while we're here."

The trip from Kabul to Kandahar was like traveling through a tunnel made of harsh mountains and arid desert. The road followed a narrow band of water that tumbled south and west. They passed through three government checkpoints, or at least Alan assumed they were manned by government troops. Whoever they were, they were not particularly friendly, and Alan let his driver handle all the talking. In the end, their delays were minimal.

It was an hour past sunset when the Land Rover delivered Alan to an address in Kandahar that looked more like a stable than a personal residence. As the truck pulled to a halt, OWL #5 stepped out of the shadows and held up a hand.

"Welcome, sir," he said with obvious relief in his voice.

"Thank you," Alan said. "It's Ahmed, isn't it? Good to see you. How are we doing?"

“Everything is prepared,” the OWL assured him. “You must be starved from your trip. Come, your meal is waiting.”

OWL #5 exchanged words with Alan’s driver, and then he ushered Alan toward the house. Beyond a heavy wooden door, the structure opened onto a single room with a vaulted ceiling. It was crudely built by western standards, with timbered supports, and an uneven concrete floor. A shoulder-high divider segregated a toilet and sink from a table and chairs, two narrow bunk beds, and a primitive kitchen area with a hand pump and a hot plate.

“Not too fancy,” the OWL said almost apologetically.

“It’s fine, Ahmed. It’s fine,” Alan assured him.

OWL #5 must have read Alan’s mind because his first impulse was to direct his attention to an old leather duffel bag resting next to the bunk beds. He set the bag on the table, unzipped it, and withdrew the rifle Alan would employ tomorrow when he would become a bonafide Adala HAWK.

“Take a look,” the OWL said. Alan hoisted the rifle, tucked it against his shoulder, and peered through the sight.

“It’s a Russian sniper rifle, a Dragunov SVD with a refitted hunting scope and equipped with a sound suppressor,” Ahmed said excitedly. “It’s not the gun you practiced on back in the States, but the action is almost exactly the same. Try it. The idea is that if the weapon is discovered after the hit and after you discard the parts, the Afghani authorities will assume it was abandoned by Russians during their hasty retreat from the country back in the eighties.”

“Good planning,” Alan agreed. He was busy maneuvering the rifle, exploring the balance, and experimenting with the action. Then he sight-ed down the scope again. “What about the scope?”

“It’s been zeroed in for a one-inch pattern at two hundred yards,” Ahmed said as if reciting a hastily memorized poem.

“Sounds good. I’ll break it down a couple of times later on just to get the feel.”

Alan set the rifle on the table and said, “Let’s eat, shall we? Got a place I can wash up?”

With a trace of embarrassment, OWL #5 invited Alan to step behind the divider. “Not very private. And the water is ice cold.”

Alan didn’t complain. When he was done, he joined OWL #5 at the table. They ate a rather bland stew sadly lacking in meat and mopped their plates with pita bread. Bland it may have been, but there was more than enough for two, and

Alan ate until he was full. Then he sat back in his chair and asked, "So what's the layout?"

The OWL produced an extremely detailed map showing every building, every house, every road, and every alleyway within a three-block area of Mohammed Omar al-Fayez's house. The height of the building Alan would use for his shot was calculated to the foot and juxtaposed to the exact height of the garden area that al-Fayez used for his daily prayers. The distance and drop were calculated as close to the inch as possible; Alan was impressed, and he said as much to his OWL.

"And the neighborhood?" he asked. "As crowded as it looks from the pictures?"

"Very," Ahmed admitted. "You'll need to use that to your advantage when the job is complete."

"And the shot?"

"Mohammed Omar al-Fayez uses the open garden for his daily prayers, so you will likely shoot at a kneeling target. Distance 185 yards. Drop 42 feet," Ahmed said, pointing to the blueprint.

"Time of day?" Alan asked.

"It must be done while the target is saying his noon prayer," the OWL replied.

"Dhuhr," Alan said.

"Yes, we call it Dhuhr," the OWL said. "Tomorrow morning, I will take you to the rooftop you'll be using for the shot. In the meantime, get some sleep. Tomorrow the hunt begins."

## **ROME, ITALY**

UPON HIS ARRIVAL in Rome that same evening, OWL #8 was met by a member of the Italian Intelligence Agency, better known as SISDE. He was escorted directly to the agency's headquarters. This was all part of the arrangement Herb Bentz had made with SISDE nearly a month ago. In exchange for helping the Italians with undercover surveillance in areas best served by Arabic-speaking Muslims, the Italians would provide Adala OWLs cover and protection in places like Tunis and Tripoli. The OWL was briefed on the modus operandi of Muslim agitators in the country, given an alias identity and dispatched to Turin.



## **RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

SUNRISE OF THE following day, September 11, found the Khalid brothers, OWLs #1 and #2, in the cab of their truck awaiting their father and uncle. It was a nerve-wracking few minutes.

The conclave in which a new Wahhabi leader would be chosen to take the place of the slain Dawud al-Sanie, was less than three hours away. Except for a few early morning worshippers, the Ibriham Azkha Mosque was quiet. The conclave attendees would not begin arriving until 9:00.

Uncle Omar slipped into the mosque through a side entrance and took a seat near the back. He surveyed the prayer room until he was convinced no one could possibly observe his actions and then very calmly placed the receiver under the chair and activated the switch.

The plan called for Omar to remain in his seat until the prayer room was fully occupied and to ensure no one compromised the integrity of the detonator switch.

When he was certain it was the right time, Omar would exit the Mosque and walk deliberately cross the courtyard toward the waiting truck. Adel Khalid, the patriarch of the family, would be standing at the far end of the courtyard. When Omar was a safe distance away, Adel was to dial the deadly number on his cell phone that would initiate detonation.

Once they were in the truck, they would drive directly to Riyadh International Airport, where they would drop the two OWLs off in preparation for their noon flight out of the country. Adel and Omar would then dispose of the truck, return to the old quarter, and then occupy themselves in their usual pursuits.

Just after sunrise, Omar removed the “Work in Progress. Keep Off ” signs from the mosque entrance, effectively inviting visitors and worshippers once again to utilize the prayer room’s center aisle.

Shortly thereafter, the first Wahhabi began arriving. Predictably, they all moved down the center aisle toward the podium pulpit. The mosque began to fill. The attendees strode down the aisle completely unaware of the very unique carpeting upon which they were treading. By 8:42, the majority of the attendees had arrived, and the conclave was less than twenty minutes from beginning.

Uncle Omar checked the positioning of the receiver one last time, then arose and made his way toward the exit. A series of steps led him to the courtyard, and he made certain not to draw attention to himself by seem-ing to hurry. He caught sight of Adel in the shadows of a tall tree at the edge of the courtyard and saw

the cell phone he was clutching in his hands.

Adel waited until Omar was on the far side of the courtyard before dialing a number on his cell phone. He entered the number with the tip of his finger, his eyes fixed on the mosque. The signal traveled from the transmitter to the receiver and into the detonators inside the C-4 explosive. The enormous eruption that followed could be heard for miles, and the exterior walls of the mosque exploded. Stone rocketed in every direction, and a towering fountain of flame and smoke billowed skyward. Flying debris rained down on the courtyard, littering it with a carpet of shiny mosaic tiles, broken stone, and concrete slabs.

As Adel began walking toward the waiting truck, he looked back to see two men hunched over, covered with dust, and crawling blindly out of the Mosque. Adel didn't stop. He kept on walking, his pace calm and measured.

## **NEWSROOMS EVERYWHERE**

THE EVENT CREATED a media frenzy in every nation on earth. The early assessment of human loss counted 227 dead and 171 wounded, many critically. The Saudi Arabian government promised prompt action. The terrorists responsible, they announced, would be captured and brought to justice, their trials would be swift, and their punishment would fit the crime in no uncertain terms.

Thirty minutes after the blast, an English-speaking voice phoned several sources of the media, Reuters, the Associated Press, and CNN among them, claiming credit and identifying himself as a member of the anti terrorist group, Adala—the same anti terrorist group that had claimed credit for the assassinations of Dawud al-Sanie in Saudi Arabia, Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar in Algeria, and Haji Mustafek in Egypt. The caller's knowledge of the exact time of the blast and the source location of the explosives left no doubt of his complicity. No phony caller could possibly have had such detailed knowledge this early in the investigation.

The word spread. Columnists, reporters, analysts, and editors gave as much ink and commentary to this one event as they had the 2004 Madrid railroad bombings, the British underground bombing, and the attack on the USS Cole combined.

Many of the questions posed by the media went unanswered. Who is Adala? If they were terrorists, why had they claimed credit for killing such terrorist leaders as Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar in Algeria and Haji Mustafek in Egypt? Why were they attacking Wahhabi clerics and Wahhabi instructors all across Saudi Arabia? If, as it seems, they were English-speakers, then where were they from? Were they American? Could they be Canadians or South Africans, Australians or British? Who was behind this group known as Adala? Do they condemn Al

Qaeda as Al Qaeda has condemned them? If so, who was their spokesman and when would they hear from him?

The speculation was rampant. On the one extreme, someone tried to further the notion that Adala was a branch of Al Qaeda. On the other extreme, someone was trying to further the argument that they were pup-pets of the CIA or MI-6 or MOSSAD.

Someone else suggested that Adala was a collection of mercenaries paid by some undiscovered and yet wealthy entity. One paper wrote that extremist Christians were attempting to convert Muslims and turn them against radical fundamentalists. Another wrote that Rupert Murdoch had to have something to do with it.

More pragmatically, there were several thoughtful columns promoting the belief that Adala was an antiterrorist group, well funded and well trained and perhaps made up exclusively of Arabic-speaking members, likely Muslims. After all, didn't the woman who owned the building in the Algiers Kasbah next to the roof garden where Sheik Mohammed bin Shizar and his friends were killed, tell authorities that two Muslim men had rented her rooftop patio? Didn't the owner of the restaurant where Haji Mustafek and his friends had their last meal state that a Muslim chef, long since vanished, had prepared the meal and poisoned the food?

In its reporting of the question, PBS television invited Muslim scholars and historians to join with former CIA department heads in a roundtable discussion on the events and the organization claiming credit, all without any meaningful consensus. Even the death of Dawud al-Sanie in Saudi Arabia came under scrutiny in hopes of connecting it with the sudden rash of other killings. It was all speculation, but the speculation was often as potent as actual fact.

A CNN linguist tried to dissect the word Adala and its English translation: justice. He suggested motivating factors like retribution or payback. He talked about some attempt to fight back against the misrepresentations that fundamentalists made concerning the Qur'an and the less volatile view that most Muslims took. But the question still remained: if this were so, then how did the apparently unjustified murder of hundreds of religious leaders conform to that notion?

## **KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN**

THE NEW DAY found Alan wide awake and deep in thought. He could feel tendrils of excitement growing deep inside his stomach, but he also recognized threads of fear. Well, that's healthy, he thought. Soon the hunt would begin, but this was not a hunt for some wild game; rather, it was a hunt for a human being. This was neither sport nor recreation. This was murder, something he had never

contemplated before, something he had always labeled as evil and animalistic. No longer. Now the images of Dan Millar standing next to him at his wedding, his best man and lifelong friend, and even more vividly of Dan Millar being blown to bits by order of Mohammed Omar al-Fayez more than justified the hunt he was about to embark upon and the assassination he was prepared to carry out.

Alan looked across from his bunk to the kitchen area where OWL #5 was hunched over the hotplate.

“Good morning, Ahmed,” Alan said with surprising gravity. “The sun is up, and I need some coffee. Is that what I smell?”

“Good morning, sir,” Ahmed replied. “Yes, Mr. Davis, we have a rather strong blend of Turkish coffee. Will that be all right?”

“You bet it will.” Alan sprang to his feet. The burqa he would wear as part of his escape disguise, was lying on the room’s one overstuffed chair. He gathered it up and stepped into the burqa, covered his head and face, and stared out through the narrow slot reserved for a woman’s eyes. He practiced his walk, hunching to disguise his masculinity, and tripping over the hem several times. “What bad luck, it’s a bit too large.”

“You’re getting it, Sir. Small steps. Don’t hurry,” the OWL instructed. They drank coffee, and Alan practiced for twenty more minutes. Then he stepped out of the burqa, dressed himself in a gray jogging suit, and set about breaking down the Russian Dragunov. He stowed the rifle inside a worn duffel bag along with his burqa.

OWL #5 was waiting for him out front. He was sitting behind the wheel of an old, well-rusted Ford sedan nervously smoking a cigarette.

“It is time for us to leave, Mr. Davis,” he said. “Ready, sir?”

“I’m all set,” Alan said. “Let’s go.”

They drove for ten minutes, weaving their way into the heart of the city. Ahmed parked the car at the curb in a crowded neighborhood amidst a bustling outdoor market. Then they walked east using side streets and alleyways until they came upon a series of boarded-up structures that looked like abandoned tenement houses at the edge of the city.

Ahmed pointed to the building on the far corner and said, “That’s the one.”

Alan nodded. “Time for you and me to part company, my friend. You’ve done your job well.”

Now it was the OWL’s turn to nod. He said nervously, “There’s a ladder inside

the building and an entrance to the roof in the ceiling. Your target will be in a walled garden that you can see into when looking in the direction of that mountain top.” He pointed, but it wasn’t necessary.

“I’ll find it,” Alan said.

“Good luck, sir. I will be waiting for you with a van at the end of the square as planned. You have your map.”

“And a very good map it is, Ahmed.” Alan started away. “I’ll see you as soon as I bring down this killer.”

Alan found the ladder and carried it up the flight of stairs that led to the roof entrance. Once he was on the roof, he crawled on his hands and knees to the ledge on the west side of the building with a clear view of the mountain peak Ahmed had spoken of; then slowly and carefully he assembled the rifle. He screwed the suppressor to the barrel and attached the scope. Lastly, he inserted the clip, although he knew one cartridge would be enough.

He assumed a prone position, peeked over the ledge, and focused his eyes on the open garden of the terrorist Mohammed Omar al-Fayez. He settled the rifle against his shoulder and peered through the telescopic sight. The sight brought him within spitting distance of the garden. Alan knew he could never miss a target the size of a human head, especially not this head.

Now all he had to do was wait.

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## **17 - FAMILY TRAGEDY**

### **PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN**

CLOUDS THE COLOR of black ink hung low over the city of Peshawar obscuring the half moon while a cool breeze brought the trees surrounding the hotel to life.

The two men known in the world of Adala as OWLs #9 and #10 were pleased. They both believed in omens, and the weather, they decided, was a positive sign as they accessed the roof dressed in private security guard uniforms. The pre-dawn darkness together with the flickering moonlight camouflaged their stealthy movements as they slowly made their way to a place of concealment at the entry to the air-duct system.

The package from the Adala camp they had eagerly been awaiting had arrived by overnight courier. It contained a sophisticated blow gun equipped with a red-dot accuracy system and a carefully wrapped container of hollow-tipped ricin-laden mini darts the size of sewing needles, feathered with a trio of tiny clear polypropylene fins.

On this night they had traded bullets for deadly ricin-laden darts, just about the deadliest poison known to man. Ricin might take as long as three days to kill, but death was inevitable. There was no anti-dote, no treatment, and no escape from the pain short of a bullet in the head. In short, it was the perfect killing device for the men they would be targeting in the hotel's Crescent Room. It also gave the OWLs a far better chance of escape because the blow gun is quiet and the prick from the dart feels no worse than a mild bee sting. The symptoms of their mortal wounds would not be felt for hours; time enough for a successful escape and the opportunity to strike again on behalf of Adala.

Accessing the roof had involved no more than taking the hotel elevator to the top floor and climbing one flight of fire stairs. No one paid attention to two more security guards. Upon gaining the roof, the OWLs went to the air duct repair grating and removed the four retaining screws just as they had done on their practice run three nights before. With a pencil flashlight held between the teeth, the air duct passageway, with all its branches, was clearly visible to anyone able to crawl along inside the duct.

OWL #10 had drawn the short straw and thus the honor of becoming an Adala HAWK giving OWL #9 the responsibility of keeping their conventional weapons until escape time. OWL #10 slung his thin, light backpack over his shoulder as he silently maneuvered himself into the air duct, holding a tiny pencil flashlight between his teeth and using his elbows and forearms to inch forward, his belly polishing the bottom of the duct, and following the same route he had discovered during their practice run.

Seven minutes later, he came upon the grate overlooking the Crescent Room. He extinguished his flash but not before glancing at his watch—he had three hours to nap as best he could, while awaiting the arrival of his targets.

His wrist alarm announced final preparation time, and he slid himself a bit forward noting lights now illuminating the Crescent Room. The room below was empty, though someone had already arranged two coffee servers, two teapots, and eight or ten individual bottles of water on the credenza beyond the rectangular conference table. According to the OWL's timetable, the targets would be arriving in exactly thirteen minutes. This gave Owl #10 sufficient preparatory time to lay the contents of his pack out before him.

A fifteen-inch custom, hand held, tubular blowgun equipped with a red-dot system he could turn on and off instantly with a forefinger was OWL #10's

weapon of choice. It was almost completely silent. When the shooter blew into the mouthpiece, he filled an internal holding chamber on the blowgun, then released the propelling air with the push of the firing button.

The twelve ricin-laden darts, with shafts no larger than sewing needles, would be more than enough ammunition for the assignment. The risk in this plan was could the shooter fire the intended number of darts before being discovered. He'd need skill and luck—a lot of luck.

When he reached the grating overlooking the Crescent Room, he adjusted his weaponry while rehearsing the shooting angles for every seat in the room below. He focused on his training: trust your aim; don't hurry; don't hesitate—then get out of there.

Just then, the door below him opened. It was exactly 8:00 am on the first day of the month, a day of retribution. Nine men filed into the room. Two Saudis were dark-skinned men, older, and dressed in business suits that looked as if they had been made by the best tailors of Bond Street. The Royal Saudi entered last only after his three bodyguards were sure it was empty and secure. The three Pakistanis were like clones and could be distinguished by their dark headdress and bushy mustaches. The bodyguards carried automatic weapons that sent a chill down OWL #10's spine. Breathe, he told himself. Focus your breathing. They can't kill what they can't see or hear.

The Saudis and their Pakistani counterparts sat themselves in six chairs; the Saudis on one side, with the Royal in the middle and the three Pakistanis on the other. Two of the bodyguards took up positions at either end of the room. The third stepped back into the hall, closed the door, and created a human barricade in front of the door. Good, OWL #10 thought. One less thug to worry about.

He listened as the men poured coffee or tea for themselves, opened briefcases, and laid papers and maps on the table. As is the usual custom, parties to a transaction sit across from each other, and this event was no exception. Fortune shone on OWL #10 as the three Saudis sat closest to him, their backs facing the grate. He hoped he could get them, the three priority targets, before being discovered.

When the discussion had garnered the full attention of all parties, OWL #10 momentarily turned on the red-dot which appeared on the carpeting just to the left of the Saudi seated on the far left. The OWL made the necessary adjustment aiming a bit up and to his right. The momentary flash of the red-dot squarely in the middle of the back of his target signaled the OWL to fire. His dart struck barely two inches from where the red dot had appeared, causing the victim to flinch and, in so doing, dislodge the dart, which fell silently to the floor.

The hours of training using the red-dot system were more than justified as the

soon-to-be HAWK promptly dispatched a dart destined for the Saudi seated on the right of the royal. The target's reaction to the tiny dart sticking out from his back was even less noticeable than the first Saudi's. It was only fifteen seconds later that the red dot shone briefly upon the back of the royal Saudi signaling his doom. He jumped up from the "bee sting" looking over his shoulder attempting to spot the cause of his discomfort but to no avail.

There were nine darts left, at least three of which would be dispatched to the Pakistan i's side of the table. Time was of the essence because now the red dots would be shining on the chests of these targets and therefore might be seen by anyone in the room.

It took all of sixty seconds to propel the three missiles, which found their marks causing chaos in the Crescent Room. It was 'get out of there' time, and the newborn HAWK didn't waste a nanosecond.

He did the best he could, but getting out of the duct was far more difficult and time consuming than getting in. Because there wasn't enough room for him to turn around, he had to slide backwards, pushing himself with forearms and elbows.

Inside the Crescent Room there was chaos. Four darts were discovered and examined but it was a mystery where they came from and what their purpose might be. They speculated among themselves. Was it a prank? Was it a test of their security? Could it be poison? Were they under attack?

The guard stationed in the hallway heard the unexpected commotion and threw the door open, his weapon at the ready as he charged into the room. When he was able to ascertain that each of the conferees had felt a sting and was given leave to examine the darts, he looked carefully around the room. His eyes swept the rich tapestries and murals coming to rest at last on the grate covering the air duct. His instincts and training kicked in full force.

"We must act quickly, he roared, "we are under attack. I will go to the roof and you, Salif, go and secure the hotel entrance. No one must leave the hotel. Omar, stay here to protect our prince," he said as he turned around racing toward the fire stairs leading to the roof.

He took the steps to the roof two at a time until reaching the closed roof door. His gun at the ready, he thrust the door open leaping onto the roof only to be greeted by OWL #9 and his silencer equipped Glock automatic pistol aimed squarely at his head. Three rapid shots were fired, all striking the Saudi guard in the forehead, just above his nose.

OWL #9 raced to the air duct calling for his partner to hurry and announcing they



had been discovered.

## **A MOUNTAIN VILLAGE, AFGHANISTAN**

JUST EIGHTEEN DAYS had passed since a single shot from a Soviet Dragunov rifle marked the end of the career of Mohammed Omar al-Fayez and the beginning of Alan's imprisonment.

The worst of his captivity had been the sight of a young teenage boy holding the severed head of his own uncle aloft, a knife dripping with the man's blood, and the cheers of sick and evil Taliban fighters urging the boy on.

It was beyond horrifying for Alan. Every image of that day flooded his mind and burrowed into his memory. Alan could picture the frenzy of the village people as the boy drew the knife blade across his terrified uncle's neck. The victim's screams echoed in Alan's head, and the grinding of steel against bone became permanently imprinted on his brain, but more than anything, it was the terrible glee this inhuman act produced, that left him cold all the way into his soul.

He tried to sleep simply because he hoped for a few minutes of escape, but when he closed his eyes, images of the beheading and the villagers' joyous reaction ran over and over on the backs of his eyelids. He focused every ounce of his mental powers on Aly, trying without success to picture their most meaningful moments together. When that didn't work, he tried recreating their most memorable times together, but nothing worked.

He had been a captive for eighteen days and nights, but this night was the worst. The freezing floor ate into his bones, and the one blanket he had been issued had no effect. The stench of the room burrowed deep into his nose, and nothing he could do could stem the assault. He counted the seconds, agonized over the minutes, and tried not to think of the hours before morning and the return of light and familiar sounds.

The first glimpse of dawn only reminded him how much every fiber of his being hurt. So powerful was the first ray of sun that it nearly drove him to his knees. He would have cried had he not been so parched and so on edge that there was not even a tear left in him.

Twenty minutes later, he heard footsteps approaching from the village. He listened to the crack of boots as they struck the stone walk outside his hut. The door opened, and the tall man with the scar coursing down his face like a purple river sauntered into the hovel. The seven steel-faced fighters who had kept watch on Alan for the last twelve hours came to attention.

The scarred man ignored them, giving his full and complete attention to Alan.

“Good morning, Mr. Davis,” he said in a surprisingly congenial tone.

Alan said nothing. He stared at the man as if a lower form of life had just entered the room. “I have good news,” the man announced. “You are no longer suspected in the killing of our leader, Mohammed Omar al-Fayez.”

“It took you over a couple of weeks to find that out,” Alan said. “I guess better late than never.”

The man actually smiled at this. “But no matter. We have decided the terms of your release.”

“Thank God” was out of Alan’s mouth even before he realized he’d said it. As suspicious and wary as he was after more than a fortnight of deceit and manipulation, he also realized how starved he was for anything that sounded like good news.

“Yes, I imagine Allah had a hand in the matter,” the man said. He groomed his moustache with two fingers and feigned an inappropriate smile. “But I have forgotten my manners. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Abdullah Khan. I am the new the leader of our movement in this area. A great honor.”

“I’m sure it is a great honor, Mr. Khan, and I congratulate you,” Alan said sarcastically realizing how necessary it was to appease such men with small talk, no matter how insincere. He was learning the skills of a good actor, and he hated himself for it. “But if we could get to the part about my release, I would be extremely grateful.”

“Let me begin first by updating you on current events. I know you have been deprived of the news of the world during your little stay with us, but it seems you have become something of a worldwide celebrity over the last few weeks. Stories about you, your lovely wife, and the company that bears your name have been appearing in media outlets all over the world.”

“Well, I’ll be!” Alan said with profound cynicism. “So it took this to get my name in the papers.”

“Oh, yes,” the terrorist named Khan said. “You are even more famous than Daniel Pearl. And just like Mr. Pearl, there is rampant speculation about your ‘abduction’—that’s what the papers are calling it, abduction. There is even more speculation as to whether you are dead or alive.”

“Please tell the world that news of my death would be a bit of an exaggeration,” Alan said. He knew this Twain paraphrase was lost on Khan, but it made him feel good to say it. Refusing to cower or grovel or bestow this arrogant individual with even a modicum of gratitude was far less dangerous, Alan had discovered,

than a show of weakness. These were the kind of men who preyed on weakness and took pleasure in doing so. "Now can we get to my release?"

"Of course," replied Abdullah Khan as he drew up a chair and lowered himself into it. A cigarette materialized from his coat. He took great pains to light it and then blew smoke toward the ceiling. "We have just been in

contact with your wife."

"You've spoken with Aly?"

"She is aware of your, shall we say, condition."

"Where is she? In Kabul?" Alan forgot his tough-guy stance. He only wanted word of her safety.

"She is safe and sound in her hotel in Kabul. You must have powerful friends, because she is extremely well protected, not that she needs protecting." The Taliban leader drew on his cigarette. Then he stared through the smoke at Alan. "We have also learned that you are one of the wealthiest men in America, Mr. Davis. You failed to tell us that."

"How forgetful of me," Alan replied.

"Yes, and because of your lofty status we would not wish to demean you by asking for a pittance of a ransom." Now he came to his feet and drew himself to his full height. "Therefore, our demand for your release will be two hundred and fifty million dollars. The amount is nonnegotiable and must be paid promptly. You have the option of directing that amount into the bank account of our choice or having your head cut off with a dull blade and paraded in the streets of all the villages in this region. What is your decision?"

Alan could hardly believe what he was hearing. He was nearly as shocked by his response. "Are you people insane?"

"Is that your answer, Mr. Davis?" Khan said calmly.

"Listen, there isn't a man in the world that could pay that amount of ransom. Not in one lump sum. Money like that takes time to raise, Mr. Khan. It's not like throwing a switch or picking it off a tree in the backyard."

Khan acted as if the words had been spoken in some foreign tongue unfamiliar to him. He said, "I will repeat myself just this one time, Mr. Davis. The amount and terms of your release are nonnegotiable. What is your choice?"

"Of course I choose to live. But in order to raise anything close to your demand I must have some time to liquidate the necessary assets," Alan argued, and

hoped he didn't sound as desperate as he felt.

"Some time, as you put it, is understandable, Mr. Davis." Khan crushed his cigarette beneath the heel of his shoe. "What amount of time is necessary?"

"I can pay some of the ransom immediately. How much I'm not certain, but a good amount, I assure you. The total, however, could take years to raise. Years," Alan emphasized. "You have referred to my wealth. But it's not as if every penny I have is sitting in a bank waiting for me to write a check."

"Mr. Davis, we are reasonable men," the terrorist said. He started for the door. "You have two weeks to pay us the full amount. We will deliver our terms and conditions to your wife in Kabul tomorrow. We will also do you the courtesy of delivering any messages from her."

"Thank you," Alan said, though there was no gratitude in his voice. Arguing was not in his best interest now; he knew that. Using his time wisely was.

Khan stopped at the door. "When the outside world learns that you are still alive, pressure from the media and your government will force our enemies to dedicate any and all available troops to the task of finding you. They will not find you, of course, because you will never be in one place long enough to enjoy more than one meal, much less a full night's sleep."

Abdullah Khan kicked open the door and stomped out.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

ALY'S APPREHENSION HAD begun long before she and Alan landed in Afghanistan, and she was nearly sick with anxiety by the time he left for Kandahar. While she went about her foundation work as if nothing in the world was more important than the education of young Afghani girls, rarely did her mind stray far from Alan's mission.

Then when he failed to return after three days, she knew he was in trouble. She called Brian Hall in New York, and he flew into Kabul the next day. Despite speculation about her husband's well-being, and in a place as dark and dangerous as Kandahar, the guesswork was more about his death than his survival, although she never doubted for a moment that he was alive.

After Brian arrived, Aly traveled with him to Kandahar against everyone's wishes. She conversed in Arabic with the many sources Brian and his MI-6 connections were able to dig up. She discovered little. Then, when her investigation took her deeper and deeper into the Kandahar underbelly, Brian stepped in.

"Mrs. Davis, there is no way I can protect you in Kandahar. Our best bet is to

return to Kabul and wait it out,” Brian told her. “I must insist.”

“But I have to try, Brian. What am I supposed to do? Sit around the hotel in Kabul and twiddle my thumbs?”

“Try to understand, Aly. You and I have both spoken with Owl #5. So has Derek Stafford. His contacts have looked in every nook and cranny of Kandahar. Alan never arrived at the agreed-upon rendezvous point. OWL #5 waited. He came back every day for three days. He has no idea where Alan is, but he feels very strongly from what he has been able to find out that the Taliban is holding Alan; and if they are, we’ll never find him if they don’t want us to. This is their world, their land, their domain. If he’s still alive, which I’m sure he is, the Taliban will contact us with a ransom demand. That’s how they work.”

They returned to Kabul, and the waiting was as dreadful as Aly had expected it would be. Worse than the waiting was having no clue as to Alan’s fate.

Everyday she would say, “Can’t we do something?” And every day the tears of apprehension and frustration would well up in her expressive dark eyes.

There was some good news. Coalition forces were giving top priority to the search for the American citizen and billionaire, Alan Davis, as the news of his abduction spread like wild fire. On the local side, Afghanistan’s President Karzai was marshaling every available Afghan soldier and policeman to employ their help in the search.

“The pressure is on,” Brian assured her. “The Taliban will be in touch very soon. I’m sure of it.”

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

HERB BENTZ HAD a plan for dealing with Imam Mohammed Aziz, the Muslim religious man turned terrorist conspirator and one-time friend of Aly and Alan’s. He decided to invite the imam to lunch at the Davis International executive dining room ostensibly to commiserate about Alan’s disappearance. The room was perfect for such a visit. It was completely quiet. There would be no interruptions and therefore no unexpected voices or sounds masking the conversation being picked up by the microphone concealed beneath the oriental vase adorning the table. In the room next door, the FBI would be monitoring and recording every word of their conversation.

Marie Chavez, who was by this time running the day-to-day operations of Adala single-handedly, ushered Imam Aziz into the dining room.

“I hope you two enjoy your lunch,” she said, shaking the Muslim man’s hand with

all the graciousness she could muster.

“You’re not joining us?” Mohammad Aziz asked disappointedly.

“I’d love to, but I have a plane to catch,” she said truthfully.

“Please, sit,” Herb said. “I’m so glad you could come. Let me get you coffee, or would you prefer tea, imam?”

“Coffee, thank you; cream please,” was the religious man’s reply.

“You are looking well,” Herb said as he busied himself with the coffee, “though I’m sure you’re as upset as the rest of us are over Alan’s disappearance.”

“I have prayed for his safe return every day. Allah will hear our prayers, of this I am certain,” the imam said as if he were reading from the book of religious clichés every man of the cloth had on his night stand or hidden in the back of his mind.

I’m sure, Herb almost said out aloud, but this was no time for a war of words. Stick to the task at hand, he ordered himself; then he said, “I recommend the chicken salad plate. It comes with slaw and fried potato sticks.”

“Sounds delightful,” replied Mohammed Aziz, and then he added, “So how might I be of service, Mr. Bentz? Anything at all.”

“The truth of the matter is, I asked you to come for lunch, Imam Aziz because I have some serious questions needing answers.”

The imam looked momentarily nonplussed, but he managed to say, “Please, fire away. Anything I can do to help.”

“Those two men you brought with you to Aly and Alan’s house on the night of Aly’s dinner party, remember them, the two guys who called themselves imams?” Herb queried. “They’re not really clergy, are they, Mohammad?”

“I don’t understand.” The usually composed Muslim cleric looked up, slightly startled, and his face flushed with color. He said, “Who in the world told you that, Mr. Bentz?”

Herb didn’t reply. He said, “There is another even more troubling question, I’m afraid. There was a professor of religious studies and social science at the University of Cairo named Fadil Sammut. You knew him, of course.”

“No, I’m sure I don’t,” Aziz lied, though his eyes betrayed his lack of veracity. He reached for a glass of water and drank the way a man does when he needs to

hide his anxiety and gather his thoughts.

“Professor Sammut was shot and killed in front of his home in Cairo along with one of our espionage guys. There could be no reason for killing Sammut. He was a respected teacher without a blemish on his name. He was a dedicated husband and father of four young girls,” Herb explained, his eyes fast upon the imam. “So it had to be our OWL they were after and Professor Sammut was collateral damage—terrible thing.”

“What has all this to do with me?” Imam Aziz demanded as he had traded his water for coffee and gripped the cup with two hands.

“Pretty simple really. You were the only person outside of our Adala group who knew one of our OWLs was being sent to Cairo and that he might be staying with Professor Sammut. Aly told you—she thought you were a friend; she thought an imam of the Islamic faith could be trusted. Silly of her, wasn’t it?” Herb prodded.

Imam Aziz pushed aside his coffee and struggled to his feet. “Lunch is over,” he said aggressively. “I’m sorry, but I’m leaving this inquisition.”

“Sorry Mohammed, but that’s not going to happen.” The door to the executive dining room opened, and two men came in. “These two gentlemen are with the FBI, and I think they have some questions for you as well.”

“Good afternoon, Imam Aziz,” the older of the pair said. “I am Edwin Quinn. I’m in charge of the New York City office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The young man next to me is Special Agent Dumars.”

“I don’t care who you are,” Mohammad Aziz said nervously. “I’m going back to my mosque.”

“No, sir, you’re not,” Agent in Charge Quinn said. “We have some business to discuss. Now we can do it here, or we can do it in our offices. It makes no difference to us.”

“Why don’t you sit back down, Imam Aziz, and we’ll get through this as quickly as possible.” Special Agent Dumars said with a quiet smile.

An ashen mask swept aside the defiant flush from Imam Mohammed Aziz’s face. He stood motionless, his mind racing, and his eyes traveling from one man to the next. When intransigence seemed a futile approach to his predicament, he slowly returned to his seat and again wrapped his fingers around his coffee cup. He asked, “Am I under arrest?”

“Not yet,” Quinn said. He took a seat across the table from the religious man. Herb returned to his chair at the head of the table, and Special Agent Dumars

paced. "But...we do have a few questions that could go a long way in clearing up the matter raised by Mr. Bentz. I'm sure you don't mind."

"Go ahead."

"Would you like to tell us which Muslim terrorist group you're work-ing with, imam, or should we guess?" Quinn asked.

"Excuse me! I belong to no terrorist organization and never have," replied Imam Aziz, sipping his coffee and slowly regaining his composure.

"We have every reason to believe that you sent word to Haji Mustafek in Cairo warning him to keep an eye out for an American Muslim seeking information about his organization, a young man who would enter the country posing as a graduate student and who would be staying with Cairo University Professor Fadil Sammut. We believe you initiated this communique after a confidential conversation you had with Mrs. Aly Davis at her home."

This didn't sound much like a question, and the imam jumped to his feet.

"No! No! This is ridiculous. I'm leaving now. I know my rights. Either arrest me or let me go."

"Sit down!" Special Agent Dumars snapped, stepping up to the table. "We'll let you know when you can leave."

Mohammad Aziz could feel the brute force emanating from Agent Dumars and slowly melted back into his seat. "I know my rights, and you're holding me against my will," he blustered weakly.

"The matter we're discussing here is one of national security, Imam Aziz, and so far you've told us nothing but lies. Lies and national security don't go hand-in-hand, so if you'd like to discuss the matter in a court of law, we wish you good luck. But that won't be your choice; that will be our choice. Got it?" Dumar said.

Quinn stepped in, saying, "Wanna hear how serious it gets, Imam Aziz? We believe you're coordinating terrorist operations in our country."

"That's not true," Aziz protested.

"It is true," Quinn said simply. "You see, we have a copy of the hard drive on your computer and it pretty much tells the whole story."

"You what? How could you have that?" The imam now resorted to outrage. "I have not seen a search warrant allowing such a thing. I know the law too. You can't use evidence illegally obtained to prosecute me."



Herb Bentz intervened exactly as the three men had planned. “The FBI doesn’t want to prosecute you, Mohammad.”

The imam listened for the disclaimer to this statement, but Herb had fallen silent. “They don’t?”

“We would very much appreciate you cooperating with us, in fact,” Quinn told him honestly.

“What do you mean?”

“The information on your hard drive gives us the names of some of your cell leaders,” the FBI man said. “The information also tells us there are some rather nasty terrorist plans brewing right here in America, and some of them sound quite destructive. We believe you have considerably more information to share than what is on your computer, and that information can assist in our investigations.”

“If what you say is true, why would I want to help you?”

“I’ll tell you why, Imam Aziz; it’s real simple,” Quinn said leaning across the table, “because if your superiors, in whatever terrorist group you’re associated with, learn of your carelessness and stupidity in allowing the FBI to obtain a copy of your hard drive, they’ll surely deal with you in one of their very special ways. Know the very special ways I’m talking about? And believe me when I say the penalty they will exact will be a lot worse than anything we might do.”

Imam Aziz slumped in his chair. He mumbled, “Oh, God, no!”

“Oh, God, yes,” Agent Dumars said roughly.

“You cooperate with us, however, and we’ll protect you,” Quinn told him. “If you show us just how sincere you are, we can guarantee you minimal jail time.”

Mohammed Aziz slumped even further into his chair, a thoroughly beaten man. Slowly he looked up and somehow mustered the energy to say, “No jail time. They could get at me just as easily in a prison. That’s my proposition.”

Quinn acted as if he were thinking about this, fingers drumming the tabletop. Eventually he said, “Okay, it’s a deal, Imam Aziz, no jail, but if you even think about reneging, even dream about reneging, we’ll pin you to the wall. You’ll end up with ten life sentences.”

“And you won’t last six months,” Herb said to him. “Guaranteed.”

## KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

BRIAN INITIATED THE conference call with Herb and Marie at 10:00 Afghanistan time, and both were waist deep in Adala business.

“I guess he misses us, Herb,” Marie said as if Brian were sitting in the room across from them.

“I think he misses you, darlin’,” Herb replied. “Me? I think he’s seen enough of this mug to last him the rest of his life.”

“Right on both counts,” Brian assured them.

“So what’s the word on Alan?” Herb asked.

“Still waiting.” Brian could see how these two words affected Marie, even from 2000 miles away, and he was quick to add, “They will call, Marie. Believe me, they’ll call. Alan’s got too much to offer. I’d bet a year’s salary he’s alive.”

“Okay. Okay, if you say so,” she replied glumly.

“So what I’m thinking is that, with all the stuff you two have going on already, we should suspend recruiting until we clear up Alan’s whereabouts and get his input.”

“Right,” Marie said, “we could do with some breathing space, and so could our instructors back at the ranch; they’re training twelve OWLs at the moment.”

“I think we had better suspend any new operations until we can be certain that Alan is safe. I’d hate to see him punished for a new Adala assignment that he was totally unaware of,” said Herb, “but we ought to make some moves with the unassigned OWLs we have in camp that are ready and trained. I suggest we lend them to our allies as Arabic speaking Muslim undercover operatives, something they don’t have enough of.”

“Where would you send them?” queried Brian.

“We could send four to MI-6 in London,” said Herb, “two each to Israel, France, Spain, and Iran, where they’re sorely needed.

“True, and it’s a good way of thanking MI-6 for all the help they’ve been giving us,” Brian said.

“Exactly, and since MI-6 would have to make the OWLs available to MI-5’s domestic intelligence unit, a favor would be owed them by the boys at MI-5.”

“Aren’t you the devious one,” Marie said, sharing a grin with Herb.

“Quid pro quo, eh? I love it,” said Herb laughing.

## **RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA**

THE DEATH TOLL from the bombing of the mosque in Riyadh continued to climb—almost all of the dead were Wahhabi—and the hue and cry from the jihadists all over the Muslim world rose with it.

The perpetrators still had not been found, and the Saudi Royal family felt the pressure—they had gone so far as to shuffle the leadership of the government-led police unit called the GID. The royal family was not acting out of indignation or outrage, just political cunning. They would have been far better off without the Wahhabis in their lives and far more independent; still, the explosion could hardly be ignored.

“Where are we now?” asked Omar Tali, the local division chief of the GID, of the agents and officers assembled that morning in the duty room. They discussed the evidence that had been accumulated, and then he said, “Every man in the department is on duty every hour of every day until the perpetrators are in custody—no exceptions. His highness is very displeased with our progress thus far, and we all know the consequences of his displeasure. We meet again tomorrow, and I want to see some progress.”

The only real concrete evidence the GID had gathered to date was the charred and indistinguishable fragments of the carpeting left behind by the explosion. Because the GID’s forensic unit was lacking both skill and equipment, samples of the carpeting were sent to the FBI for their professional opinion. One thing the FBI was able to add to the mix was the fact that the carpet was almost certainly of Saudi manufacture.

This led two GID agents to visit every manufacturer and exporter in the area. The agents determined that the carpet was a remainder, narrowing their search considerably. Only two vendors had purchased any of the carpet over the last six months, and one of them turned out to be the Riyadh Carpet Company. The purchase order identified the sale as a discontinued piece, twelve feet wide and seventy-five feet long. The order stood out because the customer wanted the carpet converted into a runner one hundred-twenty feet long and four feet wide. This was a very specialized order and, as the agents determined, a perfect fit for the aisle in the destroyed mosque.

In another stroke of good fortune for the GID, the truck that had been used to deliver the carpet was spotted by a military helicopter returning to the capital city from maneuvers in the Persian Gulf. As it happened, the chopper’s pilot was

following the main highway back to Riyadh.

The Khalids had hidden the truck in the dunes well off the highway, but the pilot caught a glimpse of something metallic shining in the last light of sunset, and he went in for a closer look. He landed and discovered a truck whose markings identified it as one belonging to the Riyadh Carpet Company. The vehicle was hauled back to police headquarters where fingerprints were lifted, and a drawing of the truck reproduced.

The drawing was shown to two surviving Wahhabis who identified the truck as one they had seen parked out front of the mosque the day before the explosion. One of the survivors also felt strongly that one of the carpet installers looked remarkably familiar.

“I swear he looked exactly like the sculptor who did the fountain works for Prince Fassel only last year. Remember? The work was in the paper, and a big deal was made out of it,” the survivor said to the police.

Prince Fassel reluctantly identified the sculptor as one Omar Khalid. The uncle of Hamud and Fahd Khalid was arrested that same afternoon. He was positively identified by the Wahhabi survivors as the carpet layer they had seen in the mosque that day. Uncle Omar’s fingerprints matched those lifted in the truck.

Less than two hours later, his brother Adel was brought in for questioning, and the results were the same.

Facing the inevitability of execution in accordance with Saudi law, Omar and Adel Khalid confessed to the bombing and gave the GID useless falsified identities of the two OWLs who were now safely back in America.

The royal family would have been satisfied with having the pair shot, but politics and fear won the day, and with only the sentencing left to be determined, they gave in to the bloodthirsty Wahhabis.

In the end, the two condemned men were ordered to have both ears removed, their tongues split, and their eyes gouged out before facing decapitation. Their remains were fed to the crabs.

When news of their father and uncle’s fate reached Hamud and Fahd Khalid, they wept uncontrollably for days, it seemed. In time, however, their tears were replaced with a fierce, renewed determination to exact revenge, and they reported back to the Adala training facility to await new assignments.

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# 18 - RESCUE

## PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN

OWL #9 DRAGGED the lifeless body of the Saudi bodyguard behind the rooftop water tower as his mind raced trying to plan an escape. He was running to the duct grating calling for #10 to hurry when he spotted #10's right leg. A firm grasp coupled with a desperate tug on the leg produced the rest of #10 unceremoniously onto the surface of the roof.

"We must move at once," barked OWL #9. "We have been discovered. Get up and follow me."

There was but one way out of the hotel and one thing they had to do immediately—get to the basement. Owl #9 led the way three steps at a time down the fire stairway not stopping until they reached the fifth floor. A solitary guest, waiting for a down elevator, gazed curiously at the two out-of-breath security guards as they burst from the door to the fire stairway and joined him.

The light and accompanying bell announced the arrival of the elevator. When the doors slid open, the only passenger was one of the bodyguards descending from the Crescent Room. They entered behind the guest, their eyes fixed on the Saudi.

"There has been an attack against my royal prince in the Crescent Room. We must apprehend the guilty ones. You hotel security men can help us. I will go to the front hotel entrance, and you two will begin a floor by floor search," ordered the Saudi.

"Yes, sir, we will begin in the basement right away," responded OWL #9 as he pushed the button for the basement floor.

The Saudi bodyguard rushed out of the elevator at the lobby floor followed by the hotel guest. The doors closed, and the two OWLs descended to the basement. Having surveyed the basement only days earlier, they knew there was an employee entrance opening onto a stairway that led to a side street. Quickly, they shed their security guard insignias and walked as leisurely as they could toward the long line of taxis waiting for fares from the hotel. An OWL opened the door of the taxi waiting at the rear of the line and both Owls slid into the rear seat. The driver was directed to take them to the bus station where they promptly boarded a departing bus heading south, toward safety.

## THE HINDU KUSH, AFGHANISTAN

ACROSS THE BORDER, somewhere in the rugged, forbidding mountains of Afghanistan, Alan ran a hand through the beard that every day made him look more and more like his captors.

Forty-eight hours of blistering sun by day and bone-chilling wind by night had passed since his ransom demand was delivered to Aly in Kabul. Abdullah Khan and his ragged band of Taliban fighters had moved Alan five times since then: a mosque in a village to the east, a deserted barn on a wheat farm to the west, a safe house outside of Kandahar—always on the move.

They were huddled now in front of a fire deep in a cave so far from civilization that Alan realized he would only be found if and when Khan deemed it appropriate. That was more frightening than anything Alan had ever experienced. He might escape, and he would take any opportunity to do so, but the chances of surviving in the middle of the Hindu Kush were daunting.

He stared across the smoking flames at the man with the purple scar. Khan had just returned; from where he refused to say. Alan wasn't interested as much in where he'd been as he was in what he had learned, so he came right to the point. "So? What's the status of my release? I hope you have news."

Khan took a long pull on a bottle his guards had been sharing for the last two hours. He grimaced with pleasure when the liquor hit his stomach, smacked his lips, and held the bottle out to Alan as if the two men were best friends. "Vodka?"

"No vodka," Alan answered. He waited, even if his patience had grown thin, knowing his composure was, by now, unshakable.

Khan lit a cigarette. Eventually he said, "We have given your people in Kabul the necessary bank information: accounts, routing numbers, everything; however, there has been no transfer of funds as of this moment, well, as of two hours ago at any rate. But don't worry; you have twelve days until we parade your head through the streets of Tarin Kowt like a sacrificial lamb." Khan smiled and blew smoke into the flames of their fire. He drank again.

Alan felt as if he was losing any and all footing he may have gained over the last month. He needed to gain some concession, some sense of standing. He said, "How about some clean clothing? These Aladdin pants you find so fashionable stink like hell. If I took them off, they'd stand up by themselves."

Khan found this amusing. He said, "Patience, my friend; all things in good time. If I were you, I would concern myself with prayer rather than your trousers."

At that moment, the sound of raised voices, the neighing of horses, and what

sounded like a car horn broke the silence of the cave, and Khan jumped to his feet. He tossed his cigarette in the fire and hurried toward the exit, leaving Alan in the company of a dozen armed Taliban fighters, most of whom were far more interested in smoking, alcohol, and cards than they were in one Alan Davis.

One of them came to his feet and casually approached Alan with a crumpled pack of cigarettes held out before him. Alan shook his head at the offer. The Taliban didn't seem offended; he knelt next to the fire not two feet away from Alan and went through the motions of lighting a fresh smoke. Through a cloud of gray smoke, he whispered, "I am a friend. Say nothing. Be prepared to leave in three days."

He stood, slid past Alan, and leisurely strolled out of the cave.

Alan watched him, a little stunned and more than a little suspicious. He wanted to shout, who was that? And why would he help me? Be prepared to leave in three days? What was that about? Three days? Three hours? Three minutes? What did it matter? He would leave in three seconds if it looked like he would get more than ten feet before someone shot him in the back.

Alan curled up in a corner across from the fire and tried to close his eyes. He couldn't sleep. All he could think about was the strange man who had just called himself a friend and given him the vaguest hope for escape.

When all else failed, he stared at a rock formation on the roof of the cave and an image of his darling Aly appeared before him. Nothing in the world had ever been more evocative or more meaningful than the flames from the fire that threw reflections of orange and gold off the stone ceiling. The flames were only surpassed by the flickering accent of her inviting smile. He heard her voice: "Alan. Alan. Alan..."

## **FBI FIELD OFFICE, NEW YORK CITY**

THE FBI DIDN'T want to alarm Imam Mohammed Aziz's two house guests, aka Imam Haram Bahrami and Imam Ohana Asfar, now positively identified as Egyptian chemists with unspecified connections to several Muslim groups on Homeland Security's watch list.

Imam Aziz had, since his brush with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, become something of a chatterbox, and Special Agent in Charge Edwin Quinn and the team assigned to the case didn't mind one bit. Imam Aziz had already revealed the names and locations of six active Al Qaeda cells from New York to San Antonio and what he knew of their plans. He gave every evidence of a man who hoped with all his heart that he could talk his way into the good graces of the law and everyone would be so thrilled with his cooperation that they would

send him to his new home with a pat on the back and a “Well done, Mohammed.”

“Today,” he told Quinn eagerly, displaying a typed piece of paper, “my guests gave me this list of equipment and materials. I’m supposed to have the list purchased in full and delivered by the end of next month.”

Quinn studied the list. “Lab equipment, big time stuff too—ugly, very ugly.” He looked at Mohammad Aziz and said, “Okay. Good work. Do as they say; buy the equipment and let me know as soon as you have an address for the delivery. But for now, we need you to get back to your duties at the mosque. We don’t want your ‘guests’ getting suspicious.”

“Thank you. Yes, I should.”

“But do remember that we’ll be watching, Mohammed. We’ll be watching every move you make.”

Imam Mohammed Aziz was clearly not made for the cloak and dagger life. He was pale and tense, and Quinn wondered how long he would be useful to them. “Are we on the same page, imam?”

“Oh, please...yes, watch as closely as you like; in fact, I hope you’ll be there if anyone should discover what I’m doing. I am frightened. You don’t know these people,” the imam stammered. “You have no idea of what they’re capable.”

“Sure we do,” Quinn assured him.

“Well, aren’t you going to arrest someone?”

“We’ll arrest someone when we’re ready, Imam Aziz,” Quinn assured him. Indeed, the amount of information they were collecting and the evidence they were accumulating was enormous, but in this business, timing was everything.

## **A MOUNTAIN VILLAGE, AFGHANISTAN**

IT WAS A DARK, bitterly cold night in the windswept hills north of Sangin in the Afghan Dasht-e Margow. Alan had been moved from the cave at dawn that morning. His captors had stopped briefly in a small village for supplies and headed north by his reckoning. Now he was huddled behind the walls of a flimsy tin-roofed shack. He and seven Taliban fighters with their scarves wrapped tightly around their necks were gathered around an inadequate coal fire drinking black tea and munching pieces of bread so hard that Alan felt sure it had been baked in some other century.

Good, he thought, at least your sense of humor hasn’t completely deserted you.



And why should it? He had reason to hope; there was the ransom the Taliban had demanded, though there was no guarantee he would survive even if the transfer was arranged; there was the strange interchange with the man in the cave who suggested he be prepared for something in three days.

Alan took his tea and the potato sack he used as a blanket and curled up in one corner of the room. He tried closing his eyes. He tried remembering the view from their New York condo. He tried picturing the faces of friends and family. He tried reminding himself why he had started Adala in the first place and why he had found it necessary to travel to Afghanistan when he had men better trained to do exactly what he had done when he put a bullet in Mohammed Omar al-Fayez's head.

The sound of men stomping their feet and chewing hard bread was broken suddenly by a vehicle grinding to a halt on the rock-strewn road outside the shack. Men shouted in Pashto; the pounding of feet could be heard echoing in the night; and the door to the tin-roofed shack suddenly flew open.

Abdullah Khan burst into the room with an RPG held in two hands.

"You men come with me," he shouted to the Taliban fighters. "The enemy has been spotted to the east, and they're headed this way. We have to take a position on the ridge above the road, and we only have a few minutes. Gather your weapons. You!" he pointed to the largest of the fighters and said, "If he moves shoot him."

"Yes, sir," the man replied. He readied his AK-47, set his feet in front of the door, and turned every ounce of his attention on Alan.

Suddenly, they were alone. The sound of men running—ostensibly to set up their ambush along the craggy hills to the north—was quickly replaced by an eerie silence. The burly guard fingered the trigger guard on his Kalashnikov. He moved nervously from foot to foot.

Alan watched him. He calculated the distance between himself and the guard. He calculated the time it would take to roll to his feet and the number of steps he would need to cross the room. He thought about how he might use the coal fire as a diversion. He wondered if this was his last chance to make a break for freedom.

He was considering his next move when the sound of footsteps on the gravel outside the shack signaled the approach of a single individual. Whoever it was knocked three times, and the guard shouted, "Identify yourself."

"I'm unarmed," was the reply. "I have a message from Abdullah Khan."

The door opened a crack. The guard stood aside and used the barrel of his AK-47 to nudge it open further. “Enter. Slowly.”

The man who entered the shack was dressed as a Taliban fighter, and he did appear to be unarmed. Oh, my God, thought Alan, his heart pounding suddenly in his chest. It’s Owl #5.

“I have come with orders from Abdullah Khan. I am to bring the prisoner to the ridge,” said #5 to the guard.

“No way. Not a chance,” the guard said, his gun at the ready. “No one leaves. Those are my orders.”

OWL #5 was remarkably calm when he said, “Here is the written order from Khan himself. Look for yourself.”

With lightning speed, the OWL reached beneath his tunic, withdrew an Uzi machine pistol, and long before the guard knew what was happening, #5 fired three quick bursts into his abdomen, almost cutting him in half and driving him backward into the coal fire.

“Come, sir, we must move quickly,” OWL #5 shouted to Alan. Alan sprang to his feet and dashed toward the door. They were outside the shed and running when Alan heard himself say, “Where to now? We’re in the middle of nowhere.”

“Our friend—your friend from the cave—left his van down the road when he raised the alarm that the enemy was approaching.”

Alan looked at the OWL even as they ran down the hill to the road. “You mean there is no enemy?”

“No, sir,” the OWL replied, his head swiveling from side to side as he watched every shadow, the barrel of his Uzi sweeping the terrain. “Everyone from the police to the army has been working to secure your release.”

“I don’t believe it!”

“Hurry! There’s our ride. Climb in.”

Alan clambered into the passenger seat of the old van while the OWL dug into his pockets for the keys. He turned the key, and fortunately, the engine turned over.

“This thing’s a relic,” Alan said as they started down the hill in the direction of the main road. “You think this crate will hold itself together long enough to get us home?”

“Let’s pray to Allah it does,” OWL #5 said.

Alan looked across the front seat at the young man. He reached out and put a hand on his shoulder. “Am I glad to see you. Thank you! Thank you so much,” he said with as much sincerity as he had ever felt.

“Yes, sir. No problem.”

“Where are we going?”

“To Kabul, to join your wife,” smiled #5.

“Thank God.” Alan’s relief was so palpable that he felt slightly delirious, but the OWL’s next words jarred him back to reality.

“There are weapons behind our seats in case we run into trouble,” he said. “Take a look.”

The weapons #5 had mentioned were an Uzi much like the one he was carrying and a 9 mm Sig Sauer with a full clip. As Alan inspected them, he wanted to ask what kind of trouble, but he didn’t have to; trouble found them ninety minutes later when the road narrowed within the walls of a rocky canyon.

Standing in the middle of the road waving their arms as if they were in need of help were three burqa-clad women.

“Weapons, weapons,” cried #5. “Be ready.”

“Why, what’s up?” Alan said, but he already had the Uzi in his hands and the Sig Sauer on his lap.

“Don’t know. Maybe robbers. You never know. But in these parts, they don’t ask questions. They shoot first and take everything that’s not tied down. Stay alert,” the OWL said as he dropped the van down a gear and began slowing.

It was impossible to read the women’s expressions with their faces covered, but their body language looked to Alan more tense than relieved that someone might be coming to their aid. They were still waving their arms when four men with automatic weapons poised and ready leapt out from behind the rocks, fired a dozen warning shots in the air, and used the three women as human shields.

Alan shouted. “Go, go, go!”

The OWL jammed the accelerator to the floor, and the van leapt forward. The four men turned their guns on the van, and Alan leaned out the window with his Uzi on automatic and sprayed the road with a violent burst. The van picked up speed. The orange flashes of the Russian Kalashnikov were like sun flares

blinding them. The windshield exploded an instant before the vehicle collided head on with one of their attackers and the woman he was hiding behind. Their bodies somersaulted over the van, and the woman's screams echoed in Alan's ears.

Then he heard OWL #5 groan. Alan looked across the seat and saw a circle of red spreading across the young man's chest.

"Oh, my God!" Alan reached for the steering wheel as the van rumbled through the canyon and around a sharp turn. The OWL'S foot slipped off the accelerator and his head lolled to one side as the vehicle began to slow. Alan used his left foot to apply the brake, and the van came to a stop on the shoulder of the road.

"Number 5! Number 5!" Alan searched the OWL'S face, but his eyes had rolled back in his head, and he had lost consciousness. "Can you hear me? Hang on, man!"

No answer. Alan pushed aside the OWL'S tunic. The bullet had pierced his chest on the right side, and blood was pouring from a gaping wound. "Hang on," he said again. "I'll get you home."

Alan threw open the passenger side door and hurried around the front of the van to the driver's side. He lifted OWL #5 into the passenger seat, using his jacket as a pillow, and laid his head against the passenger door window. The OWL's breathing was slow and labored, and Alan said a prayer.

"Don't let go, #5. Don't let go!"

Alan started down the road driving as if an emergency room were just around the next bend. Every ten seconds he glanced at the man who had come to his rescue not three hours ago. The OWL'S face grew more wan by the minute, and his breathing became shallow. Alan kept talking to him as if his voice might have the power to heal, but not ten minutes later the OWL gasped, and a terrible silence filled the van. Alan feared the worst.

He hissed,slamming his palm across the steering wheel."Don't give up on me, kid."

He drove now with his Uzi on the console and didn't stop. The gas gauge was nearing empty as the city lights of Kabul grew stronger and more vivid along the horizon. Not a moment too soon, the army check-point appeared, and Alan could only hope the soldiers manning the post were friendly.

He pulled over, and the van died. The soldiers approached with caution, their rifles at the ready, and Alan rolled down the window. He was still gripping the steering wheel when the soldier nearest him said some-thing in Pashto.

Alan shook his head and said, "Please help me. I am an American. My friend's been shot. Please help me."

The next few minutes were more or less a blur. Someone apparently recognized him as the missing American, and phone calls were made to headquarters. An ambulance arrived for #5, and a government truck escorted Alan into the city.

He recognized his hotel, and the man at the front door greeted him in English. The lobby was overrun with people, most of them media types, but Alan ignored every question and every overture. The only face he wanted to see was Aly's, and he was pushing his way through the crowd when she and Brian Hall were suddenly rushing toward him.

"Alan! Oh, my darling!" Aly threw her arms around him and held him with all her strength. "Thank God you're here and safe. I never gave up hope, not for one minute."

Alan lifted Aly off the ground and carried her toward the elevator.

Sparing no niceties when extracting two reporters with hand held tape recorders held out before them like beggars in the night, he pressed the close-door button, and in a moment, they were alone. They reached the third floor, walking arm in arm down the hall toward their suite and the two posted security men. Aly threw open the door pulling Alan inside, and for the longest time, they just held each other.

"Aly, you are my life," Alan said. "I honestly didn't know if we'd ever see each other again. I lived with that one thought every minute I was held and swore I would do whatever it took to get back to you."

Aly took a step back. "Let me look at you," she said, her hand tracing the line of his face, running her finger through his beard. And then suddenly she caught sight of the stub on his hand and gasped. "Oh, no! Alan! What happened to your finger?"

"Sharia law in action," he said, "but that's not important right now. My hand is healing just fine. The important thing is that we're together again and safe. Don't even think about it."

Aly held the hand against her cheek, then kissed his palm. "Plenty of time later to tell me everything," she whispered. "Now its time for me to run you a tub and help get you out of those filthy clothes."

Alan shook his head. "First, I need to call the hospital. A very brave OWL is there. Number 5 risked his life to rescue me, and now he's in the hospital with a bullet in his chest. Do me a favor and get the number, will you please, darling?"

“You sit,” Aly said reaching for the hotel phone. “I’ll call the hospital. What’s his name?”

“I don’t know his full name. Try Ahmed.” Alan shook his head as if this oversight were something he would regret for the rest of his life. “Things were happening so fast that...”

“It’s okay. I’ll find him, darling.”

The hotel desk directed Aly’s call to the emergency room of Kabul’s largest hospital, and she introduced herself. She was connected with someone fluent in English and explained the circumstances surrounding OWL #5’s admittance. She asked about his condition. “It’s very important. Can you please check for me?”

She was only put on hold for a matter of moments before the attending nurse returned, and Aly could tell by the tone of her voice that the news was not good.

“We’ve seen only one emergency patient in the past two hours, Mrs. Davis, and unfortunately he was dead upon arrival. I’m very sorry.”

“Thank you, me too,” Aly said.

“I hate to ask, but will you or Mr. Davis claim his remains?”

“Yes,” said Aly haltingly, “we’ll take care of it.”

She laid the phone down and looked across the room at her husband. “Alan, he’s dead. I’m so very sorry.”

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

THE NEXT MORNING Brian Hall came to the hotel suite where Alan was recuperating from his ordeal.

Brian made no attempt to conceal his emotions, odd for an Englishman raised on the virtues of being stoic in even the roughest of times.

“I can hardly find the words to tell you how happy we are to get you back, Alan,” he said. “You really scared us.”

“Good to see you, my friend,” Alan said. “I just wish I could turn back the clock and do something to get OWL #5 out of there alive. The man gave his life for me.”

“I know what you’re going through,” Brian said. “I’ve been in your shoes, and

there is no way to ease the pain or the guilt.”

“I have no idea how he managed to get me out. All of a sudden he was there, and we were out of this tin shack and running like blazes.”

“It was a team effort, believe me,” Brian said taking a chair across from his boss. “MI-6 had their mole in the Taliban, and that got things started. The U.S. army and the Marines played their part in the diversion, and then, there was your OWL doing exactly what he was trained to do. I applaud him. That’s the nuts and bolts of it, but I’ll fill you in on all the details after you’ve had something to eat.”

“The plan almost didn’t work, thanks to some rogue robbers who tried to ambush us. OWL #5 got me out of that one too, Brian. Do me a favor and see to it that his family is well provided for. It’s the very least we can do.”

“You know I will, Alan,” Brian replied. Then after a moment, he got down to the unpleasant business of the media.

“We need to come up with a plan to deal with the buzzards,” he said. They’ve been hounding us every time we leave our rooms. They want to know everything about the kidnapping. They want the details of the ransom demand. They want to know exactly where you were held. And they really want to know what you might have had to do with al-Fayez’s assassination. Which means they will be grilling you about Adala too. I guess we knew it was coming.”

“Good. I’m looking forward to holding a press conference. I want every single one of them to attend, Brian. Make it an event. I mean the press, the periodicals, the radio, TV, every last one of them.”

“I like it,” Brian said. “Let’s use this to our advantage, get the world behind us. I’ll get to work on it.”

“Look at my hand,” Alan said bitterly, “some thing's missing, isn’t it? You know what happened? They cut off my finger. I’ll show my hand to the media and let them expound on why we should always negotiate with Al Qaeda rather than take unilateral action to wipe them off the face of the earth. Why we should see their point of view instead of demanding explanations for why they exploit the Qur’an to their advantage. Why we should see them as patriots fighting the effects of colonial-ism instead of terrorists and outlaws feeding on their own people. Why they should be allowed to establish their own version of the law no matter how onerous it is. Let’s get those questions out there, Brian.”

“Are you sure you can handle a press conference?” asked Aly.

“You bet I can. I’ve been waiting for this moment,” Alan assured her.

“Brian, see about getting a suitable room here in Kabul with space for as many

media types as we are able to jam into the place. I want to be on a slightly raised platform with a comfortable chair and a microphone because I have plenty to say. And I want you to record everything they ask and everything I say in return. Every word of it. The conference will begin with an opening statement; I'll write it out, and we'll hand out copies to everyone in the place. There will be a Q&A that you will coordinate from beginning to end. Remember, this is our show, Brian. Let's do it tomorrow while the iron is still hot."

"I'm on it, boss," Brian assured him. "Start time?"

"Let's make it 10:00 a.m. sharp."

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## 19 - MEET THE PRESS

### KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

"YOU SURE YOU'RE ready for this? It's a bloody madhouse out there," Brian said to Alan.

The former MI-6 man had planned a small news conference in the controlled environment of a secured dining room at the Kabul Inter-continental. He had contacted CNN to televise the event worldwide, and the instant word got out, chaos broke loose. MSNBC wanted in. So did Fox and CNBC. The networks back home refused to pick up the interview unless they had their own people on site. He couldn't have the Associated Press and deny access to Reuters. He couldn't invite the Israeli news agency Haaretz and not extend the same invitation to Al Jazeera, not without causing a full-fledged riot. The streets of Kabul were already filled with angry voices and handmade banners—they were also filled with people taking Alan's side and showing support for the U.S. presence in the country—dicey!

"Let's do it right," Alan had said. "Come one, come all."

Brian and his team revised their plan and opted for a convention hall in the same hotel. Media from as far away as Toronto and as near as Pakistan swarmed the hotel; the hall filled with television crews, video cameras, and satellite feeds. Sound and lighting equipment surrounded a raised stage and a bank of microphones. Reporters and photographers turned row after row of folding chairs into a standing-room-only gallery fit for a Hollywood star. A score of interpreters wore headphones and held digital recorders.

It was a circus by Brian's standards, and a dangerous one for the man he



worked for. Brian didn't trust the Afghan security service, not as far as he could throw them; so he brought in two-dozen men recommended by MI-6: undercover, armed, and highly professional. Their single task? Make certain Alan got out of there alive.

Brian peeked out from behind a makeshift curtain and shook his head at the growing throng. "Two minutes, Alan." He glanced back at the man.

Alan looked gaunt and determined. Aly held onto his arm, as strong as a woman could be after all they had gone through. She hadn't tried to talk Alan out of the news conference, and Brian had to give her credit for that.

He said, "My guy from CNN will introduce you. He'll keep it short and sweet. Then you're on."

"You up to this?" Aly said, giving him one last chance to bolt this madness and go back to New York and pick up the pieces of their life together.

"More than up to it," Alan replied. He caught her eye and smiled. "I'll be fine. As long as I know you've got my back, I'll be fine."

"Count on it," Aly said.

They heard the CNN producer doing his best to bring some order to the crowd, and Brian said, "We're on."

Alan walked out from behind the curtain with Aly on his right and Brian on his left. There were three armchairs at the back of the stage—they sat. A hush filled the room.

With the atmosphere crackling with anticipation, the CNN producer gave a brief introduction of Alan Davis, international businessman, industry leader, generous philanthropist, and a man lucky enough to survive capture at the hands of the Taliban.

There was a smattering of applause that faded quickly. Alan approached the podium and a bank of microphones so numerous that he tried to ignore them in favor of the mass of people pressing toward him. He focused his attention on one television camera, and the green light next to the monitor told him they were live and broadcasting to nearly two hundred countries worldwide.

He stared at the camera waiting for the noise to die down. He waited nearly a minute, unwilling to talk over the noise. This was too important.

Eventually, he said, "Good morning. I will make a brief opening statement before taking your questions." He held up the pages upon which the statement was

written. "If you'd like, you may pick up a copy of the statement as you leave.

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

THE FOUR MEN watching the broadcast from the hotel room in Teheran leaned forward. Mullah Orani Khamiz, the ayatollah's military advisor, and Saad bin Laden, who held a similar position with Al Qaeda, were more curious than disgusted. Their two Taliban brothers tried to feign indifference. It was impossible. This was a remarkable event. Who knew what the ramifications might be.

"Infidel!" one of the Taliban spat.

"Listen, my friend," the imam ordered, as Alan began to speak. "Listen carefully."

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

ANY ANXIETY ALAN may have felt evaporated the moment he began to share the statement he had planned so meticulously over the past twenty-four hours.

"When I read in the newspapers in the morning or hear on the television at night or on the radio while I'm driving my car that America is at war against terrorism, and when I hear it said that we are allied with a handful of stalwart nations in this war, I say to myself, 'They just don't get it.' This is not only a fight for America and a few staunch allies. Every nation of good will is at war at this very moment with the radical Muslim world. Whether you call them fundamentalists or extremists, or fanatics makes little difference. A declaration of war is not necessary for the kind of mortal and moral conflict we're facing here. If the worst happens, you're just as dead without the declaration as you are with it."

Alan looked up from his paper. He stared into the television camera, and then read on. "For me, this point was driven home when my dearest friend was blown to bits on an airplane attacked by these fanatics. You surely read about the Air France disaster in the newspaper, but you never heard my friend's name: Dan Millar. Dan was not the target of the assassins responsible for this horrendous act; he was only collateral damage. Hundreds of other innocent men, women, and children were murdered on that flight, too, and most of them were good and honorable Muslims. But in the minds of these killers, it is not one's nationality, race, sex, or religion that determines who is to live or die. The victim is anyone who disagrees with their interpretation of the law known as Sharia, rules of law allegedly derived from the Qur'an or the Hadith, and I emphasize the word *allegedly* because nothing could be further from the truth."

Alan stared unblinking at the camera. "This is insanity. Killing anyone who disagrees with you and killing them with impunity? Yes, insanity, but more than

that, it's evil—pure evil.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

WHEN ALAN SAID this, a cheer went up from the office on the eighth Floor of the Millar Trading Company in Manhattan. It was a small group—Marie, Herb, and two of Herb's former colleagues from the Agency.

“This is phenomenal,” one of the two said. “Do you know how long we've been waiting for someone to stand up and say exactly that?”

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“WHO THEN ARE these killers?” Alan asked his world audience. “We know Al Qaeda is one organization promoting this madness. There are many others. They may be less well known and less organized, but they are just as determined and just as deadly. They are allied with each other through the perversion and distortion of true Islamic teachings. They share the goals of world conquest and views of world domination by extremist factions. Where are they? You know where they are. They are hiding out in every country in the Middle East and waging war in every country in Europe—a coward's war. We have all heard of killings in Spain, England, France, Germany, Holland, and the United States, of beheadings and car bombs in Iraq, Lebanon, Bali, and Israel. The list of affected countries and the number of victims is endless, and always... always those taking credit for these acts of cowardice are radical Islamic groups wrongly attributing their spineless behavior to the will of Allah. They are everywhere.”

## **LONG ISLAND, N. Y.**

IN AN APARTMENT on Long Island, Betty Millar, Dan Millar's widow, stared at Alan's determined face and listened to his words. Tears streamed down her face. What great friends Dan and Alan had been! Her realization that what Alan was saying had begun the day Dan died, left Betty almost speechless. Nothing could ever take the place of her husband here at home, wrestling with their girls, and making love with her in their own bed, but maybe his death could move others to stand up and say, “Enough is enough.”

She wiped her tears with the back of her hand. Nothing could stop them; however, nothing in this world, certainly not tears of grief and sorrow, could stop her from watching this news conference either.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“THESE COWARDLY FANATICS,” Alan continued, “are running ideological factories that are producing suicide bombers by the hundreds. Where are these factories? They are masquerading as religious schools for children of all ages. Every single day, the minds of these innocent children are being subverted into thinking that the killing of an infidel—that’s what you and I are called, infidels, will make them beloved martyrs in the eyes of Allah. They are taught that killing will ensure their entrance into paradise and an eternity of sexual pleasure. Can you imagine fourteen-, fifteen-, and sixteen-year-old boys hearing this from their so-called religious leaders? Is there anything more evil and perverse? Can you imagine the path these boys are likely to take after hearing such lies?”

Alan glanced up from his notes. “These schools that preach extremist and fanatical distortions of the Qur’an are not to be mistaken for the many fine Islamic schools around the world that are teaching the true word of Allah and the real message Mohammad brought to all of us. That is one of the absolutely terrible consequences of radical Islam. The ones who suffer the consequences of these terrorist acts most frequently are other Muslims, true and honorable Muslims who find themselves stigmatized and persecuted; true and honorable Muslims who are also harmed by the abject failure of their leaders to speak out against terrorism. The silence of these so-called leaders is deafening and defeatist. This passive approach to terrorism must change. It must change because the only time good people like you and like me will defeat these fanatics is when true and honorable Muslims take a stand and publicly denounce these false interpreters of their religion, close the Wahhabi schools, and teach their children that killers of innocent people will not be treated as holy martyrs but as common criminals.

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

“HE IS TRYING to turn our own people against us,” one of the Taliban leaders shouted at the television. “It will never happen.”

“It will never happen,” Saad bin Laden said calmly, “because the true and honorable Muslims he is talking about are weak and afraid, and we must always use that weakness and fear to our advantage.”

Imam Orani Khamiz smiled when he heard this remarkable insight. A more accurate assessment could hardly have been voiced.

“As right as you are, Saad bin Laden,” he said, “perhaps we should keep that fact to ourselves. We don’t want the sheep thinking they have a voice.”

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

ALAN FOLDED HIS notes. Now he talked to the television audience as if he

were inviting them to join the fight. “By now, you have all heard of a group of men and women calling themselves Adala. In Arabic, the word means ‘justice.’ From what I know of this group of men and women, they are very dedicated. All are Muslims determined to save the true Islam of Allah. They are a small army of Muslims who will destroy terrorists wherever and whenever they can, and they need our support. I am personally indebted to Adala. It was one of their brave members who rescued me from the Taliban and gave up his own life in the process. I am more than grateful. I am now committed to their cause, and I hope you’ll join me.”

Alan slipped the folded pages into his pockets and opened the news conference to questions. He pointed to a woman in the front row.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

HERB STOOD UP. He held his breath, knowing the journalists and media people in Afghanistan would not shy away from the most pointed questions. “Don’t let them push you into a corner, boss,” he said to the television. “Don’t say too much.”

“Say exactly what you think, Alan,” Marie said with equal fervor. “You’ll never get another chance like this as long as you live.”

“That’s what I’m worried about,” Herb said, lighting a cigarette. “His life expectancy.”

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

THE REPORTER FROM NBC stood up, introduced herself, and said, “To begin, can you tell us what brought you to Afghanistan in the first place, Mr. Davis?”

“My wife, Aly is Muslim, and she has been active in Islamic charities for years all over the world. We came to Afghanistan to see the situation firsthand and to see how we might be able to help.”

A man from Reuters was already on his feet, and Alan pointed to him. “Was it also your wife’s charitable interests that led you to visit such a dangerous place as Kandahar? Or perhaps you weren’t aware of the dangers there? Is that possible?” he asked.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

“BE CAREFUL, ALAN,” Herb said, moving closer to the television. “Tread

very lightly.”

“We finally agree,” Marie said nervously.

They watched Alan’s face, but his expression didn’t change when he replied, “Unfortunately, it’s not unusual to find people with the greatest needs in the most dangerous places. I could have stayed in Kabul, but I chose not to.”

“Good answer,” Herb said.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“Can you tell us how and why you were kidnapped, please?” the thick accent of an Al Jazeera reporter wondered. “The circumstances seem suspicious.”

“Very suspicious,” Alan agreed. “I was shopping in a crowded market-place hoping to find some fresh fruit. I tripped and fell. Very clumsy. A number of very kind people tried to assist me. When they realized I didn’t speak Pashto, their native language, and because I could not make myself understood, the police took me into custody. They turned out to be members of the Taliban—or at least Taliban sympathizers—and they handed me over to the devils. They wanted money, ransom—black-mail, very simple.”

Alan tried to point to a member of the French media, but the man from Al Jazeera refused to yield. “You say you were kidnapped for ransom. That does not sound like the Taliban to me. Who were your captors, and what were their names?” he asked.

“It may not sound like the Taliban to you, sir,” Alan said, “but they were very proud of their organization and very proud of their grip on the local people. As for their names, they weren’t walking around with nametags. Only their leader gave his name. Abdullah Khan.”

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

“KHAN! THAT FOOL.” Imam Orani Khamiz was not happy to hear this.

Iranian support for this renegade group was tenuous enough, and now to hear that one of their leaders couldn’t control his tongue. He caught the eye of the two Taliban men in the room and said, “Perhaps you should have a word with Abdullah Khan, gentlemen. He seems to think his personal glorification is more important than our cause. We can’t have that.”

He didn’t wait for a response. He turned his attention back to Alan Davis.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“HOW WERE YOU treated by your captors?” a woman from Amnesty International asked Alan, and he heard the voice of an ally.

“Inhumanely, with brutality.” he replied, “I was kept indoors almost the entire time, moving blindfolded from hovel to hovel and cave to cave. Scores of them. I was given less than a cup of water a day, and it was putrid and rank. I was fed once a day, a meal that consisted of some sort of horrible paste and an occasional crust of bread. I was made to sleep on a stone floor with a potato sack as my mattress. My hands and ankles were bound the vast majority of the time. I was tortured with electric currents. And, as you can see...” Alan held up the hand with the missing finger for all to see. “...they cut off a finger of my hand. Otherwise, I had the time of my life. Next question.”

## **LONG ISLAND, N. Y.**

WHEN BETTY MILLAR saw Alan’s mutilated hand, her tears finally stopped. They stopped because she felt a wave of hot anger, and the anger made her clench her fists.

Betty was a kind woman. Hatred was something she had never really known, but there was no other word to describe what she was feeling toward Alan’s captors and Dan’s killers. If she could seek revenge, she would.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“DAVID WRIGHT WITH the *Christian Science Monitor*, Mr. Davis. Can you tell us how you spent your time?” The question caused Betty’s clenched hands to open. She wanted to hear Alan’s answer.

Alan said, “In the dark mostly in prayer, to be honest, mostly with thoughts of my wife and my friends wondering where I was and what would happen to me next. Then one day, tied up and lying on the floor of a stinking car for what seemed like hours, I was taken on a trip. I witnessed a beheading. I witnessed a twelve-year-old boy cutting off the head of his own uncle. Then he held up the head like a trophy, just like the Taliban had taught him. These are the prayerful Taliban thugs that took me captive.”

“And what were you threatened with were your ransom not paid? Were you told?”

“They torture people—they behead people—they hang people in the streets,” Alan answered. “I was threatened with all of these, and I knew their

threats were as real as they could be.”

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

FROM THEIR HOTEL room high above the Iranian capital, the two Taliban sitting next to Imam Orani Khamiz watched as a tall bearded man from the Associated Press gave his name. They knew him. He was the last reporter to see their leader Mohammed Omar al-Fayez alive. His question didn't surprise them.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“HAVE YOU EVER heard of an Afghan man named Mohammed Omar al-Fayez, Mr. Davis?”

“Absolutely. I heard his name many times over the last weeks,” Alan answered. “I was asked about him many times while I was being tortured.”

“Asked about what? About his death?”

“He was killed in Kandahar around the time I was there. That made me guilty by association according to my captors.”

“Have you any knowledge of his death?”

“Only what I was told while I was being electrocuted,” Alan replied brusquely. “Next.”

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

“HE KNOWS MORE than he's saying,” the one Taliban man said.

“If he does,” the imam said, “better that he remains silent. Half the world already thinks he's a hero. No need to canonize the man.”

“A well-taken point,” the Taliban agreed.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

BACK AT THE news conference, a lanky reporter from *Newsday* said, “I think we'd all like to hear more about your rescue, Mr. Davis.”

“As I said earlier, my rescue was made possible through the courageous efforts of some very brave men and a cleverly devised plan that just happened to work.



I can't tell you more than that," Alan answered, knowing there was more to come.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

HERB AND MARIE knew there was more to come too, and Herb was chain smoking, pacing, and talking to himself. "You know he's going to try and promote Adala without really saying anything about it," he said.

"That's the whole idea, isn't it?" Marie said. "Get people to step up to the plate and take some action against these criminals?"

"Good point," Herb had to admit. "Let's see what he says next,"

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

THE *NEWSDAY* REPORTER persisted, saying, "Come on, Mr. Davis. This didn't happen while you were sleeping. Who were these men? Where did they come from? At least tell us what you do know."

"The group is called Adala. They are all Muslim, Arabic-speaking Americans who have decided to take a stand against radical Islamic terrorists. Apparently they enlisted the help of elements of the coalition forces in Afghanistan, who agreed to set up a diversion. As you can see by my presence here, it worked."

"Fine," a woman from Fox said with a coy grin. "The group is called Adala. You say they're Muslims. You say they're American. And you say they all speak Arabic. Fine. What kind of group is it? When were they organized? Why haven't any of us ever encountered any of their members, Mr. Davis? Groups like these don't shy away from media exposure."

"Maybe it's a new organization. Maybe they've been acting in secret. All I know is that they're a very brave group of good Muslim men and women determined to return Islam to the true message of the Qur'an—a message of integrity and justice; a message of tolerance, mercy, and forgiveness; a call to fight for the truth, and part of that plan is to eliminate extremism and fanaticism. I don't know about you, but I intend to support them at every turn."

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

"WE HAVE TO find out more about this Adala," Saad bin Laden said to his comrades as the news conference continued.

"Yes," Imam Khamiz agreed, his hands moving pensively through his beard. "We

do not need our own people moving against us.”

“A minute ago you called them sheep,” one of the Taliban reminded him.

“Then we must cut off the head of this Adala before their influence grows and the sheep become men,” the imam replied.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“THEN YOU APPARENTLY know more about this group than you previously indicated, Mr. Davis,” a CNN correspondent chimed in. It may not have sounded like a question, but everyone in the room was waiting for an answer.

“This is what I was told by members of the Adala group who participated in my rescue. I think they wanted me to know more about them. I think they want the world to know more about them and their cause. It was also my impression that they are responsible for eliminating several terrorist leaders around the world. I have no personal experiences to back up that impression, only what I’ve read.”

Alan decided to take the initiative. He held up a hand and said, “Let me just say this; every time terrorists commit one of their heinous deeds, and every time innocent people are hurt or killed, good Muslims, the true followers of the Prophet, honorable Muslims who had nothing to do with the event and who find it as unconscionable and evil as you and I find it are stigmatized and persecuted. Certainly in America a Muslim can’t go anywhere in traditional dress without being looked at with suspicion. Ask any Muslim about his treatment at airports. Ask him about the looks he gets when he walks into a coffee shop or into a department store. It’s terrible, and most of us have been guilty of demonstrating the very same inappropriate suspicion ourselves. I was told by my rescuers that Adala was organized to return Islam to the level of respect it enjoyed in the Middle Ages when Muslims led the world in all the arts and sciences. Next question.”

“Are you a member of Adala?”

## **LONG ISLAND, N. Y.**

BETTY MILLAR WAS glad the reporter from Il Progresso had asked the question because she wanted to join their efforts, some way or some how, she needed to act, if not with Adala, then with a group having similar goals.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“MY APPLICATION FOR membership in Adala would probably be denied since I

am not a Muslim, though I honestly don't know how strict they are about that requirement. My wife is a Muslim, however, and likely would be considered more than acceptable."

"Now hold on a second, Mr. Davis. This is a group that has claimed responsibility for the deaths of several fundamental extremists of late," an Israeli reporter from Haaretz said to him.

"Yes, so I've been told. Haji Mustafek, Dawud al-Sanie, Mohammed Omar al-Fayez, Sheik Mohammed bin Shiza: bad men, evil men by all accounts."

"And you think taking action directly against men like that is acceptable?" the reporter pressed.

"I cheer their action. You bet I do. This is a war. The bad guys started it. They're responsible for more deaths and more carnage than any one of us can even imagine, and they need to be eliminated," Alan said.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

"WOW!" HERB BENTZ said.

"He came right out and said it," one of his colleagues said. He stood up in front of the television and pumped his fist. "Good for Alan. Good for us. Say what every person on the planet is thinking."

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

A CORRESPONDENT FROM the Philadelphia *Enquirer* jumped up and asked, "What do you know about the bombing of the Ibrahima Azkha Mosque in Riyadh, Mr. Davis? Are you aware of the death toll?"

"I'm only aware of what I've read or been told," Alan admitted.

The reporter said, "This group, Adala, claimed credit for that. Hundreds of religious leaders were killed or injured in the attack. Isn't that exactly the kind of terrorist act you're saying we need to fight against?"

Alan moved closer to the microphones. "I've been told that the victims of that bombing were all Wahhabis. I mentioned them earlier. These are the guys who take children from their homes and brainwash them with their extremist and false versions of the Qur'an and the Hadith. These are the guys who teach fourteen-year-olds the virtue of killing anyone who doesn't share their views. They sell martyrdom. They run factories for suicide bombers. Wahhabism is synonymous with the most radical elements in Saudi Arabia. Most of the foreigners fighting

with the insurgents in Iraq are Saudis. Fifteen of the nineteen extremists aboard the planes that went down on 9/11 were Saudis. I don't know about you, but I hope Adala kills every last one of the Wahhabis." Alan looked out at the rather stunned group of reporters and felt the glare of exploding flash-bulbs. He said, "Next."

"Let me ask you this, Mr. Davis," a longtime member of the *St. Louis Dispatch* said, "Why do you think the government of Saudi Arabia hasn't closed these Wahhabi schools? It seems too obvious."

Alan knew the answer to this, and it disgusted him. "Quite simple. The Wahhabis supported the royal family long before they came to power and then helped install them decades ago. They've also done everything they can to keep the royal family in power ever since. Things have changed, however. Now the Wahhabis want to drive the royal family from power and install the most radical fundamentalist government in the Middle East. And they want to rid the entire Arabian Peninsula of all infidels. We, ladies and gentlemen, are the infidels."

"So the royal family finds themselves between a rock and a hard place." the reporter said.

"Apparently," Alan agreed. "Next question."

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

"FINALLY," IMAM KHAMIZ said when he saw the reporter from Al Jazeera come to his feet again.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

THE MAN SAID, "You seem more knowledgeable about these issues than the ordinary man on the street, Mr. Davis. I find that interesting for a man who just came here supporting his wife's charitable projects. So answer me this. Isn't it true that over twenty-five percent of Muslims under the age of thirty in the United States support Al Qaeda? And isn't it true that over fifty percent of Muslims worldwide believe the Israelis were responsible for the attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11?"

"I wonder where they might have gotten such misinformation? You don't think it could have come from media sources serving the radical fundamentalists, do you?" Alan said. "My guess is that one hundred per-cent of intelligent and knowledgeable Muslims detest Al Qaeda. Those are the people a group like Adala is appealing to."

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

“THIS ONE IS smart,” Saad bin Laden said in reference to Alan, “and he surely knows more about this Adala than he’s saying.”

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“LISTEN,” ALAN SAID, once again asserting control over the news conference. “I firmly believe that Muslim extremists have distorted the Qur’an and Hadith. I don’t believe for a second that all Muslims subscribe to the extremist’s version of Sharia law. I know they don’t. The Sharia is religious law and interpretations of that law depend on the authority of the interpreter. To call Sharia law as it’s interpreted by radical Islamic clerics ‘severe’ would be an understatement. It demeans women and condemns them to slavery. It favors stoning adulterers and beheading infidels. Don’t tell me that intelligent and honorable Muslims subscribe to that. They don’t, and they don’t want to be associated with that kind of thinking either.”

“What about the Iranians? Do you think your Adala group would call them extremists?” a soft-spoken man from *Europa* suddenly asked.

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

BACK IN MANHATTAN on the eighth floor of the DII International building, Herb Bentz nearly had a heart attack. “He just called it ‘your’ Adala group, Alan. Don’t let him get away with that.”

Marie held her breath.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“FIRST OF ALL, sir, it is not my Adala group. They rescued me and I am eternally grateful, but that doesn’t make them mine.”

Alan continued, saying, “As far as your question about Iran goes, I don’t want to paint myself as an expert, but it doesn’t take any extraordinary powers of observation to know that the mullahs and imams running that country are extremists. When you fund terrorism around the world, promote radical Muslim world dominion, and conduct executions of your own disenfranchised citizens, you’re an extremist, and that’s exactly what they do. They run their country with an iron fist. Political freedom has no meaning. Personal freedom has no meaning. They own the army. They control the law-making bodies. Extremists? As extreme as they come.”

## **TEHERAN, IRAN**

IMAM ORANI KHAMIZ didn't blink when he heard this. His comrades didn't blink either. It was as if Alan had just commented on the weather, and the weather meant nothing to them.

“Why don't they ask him about American imperialism around the world?” Saad bin Laden said in a rhetorical voice.

“Let's be glad they haven't asked,” the imam said. “America's foreign policy is a shambles. They have few friends anymore. They've created the perfect environment for us in Iraq. They've put all their energy into that fine mess of a war and given us free reign to conduct our business everywhere else.”

“A brilliant observation, Imam Khamiz.” Saad bin Laden smiled. Then he heard Alan field a question about that very subject.

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

“WHAT ABOUT AMERICA'S unjustified invasion of Iraq, Mr. Davis? Isn't that enough to turn Muslims against the West?” a *Liberté* reporter inquired.

“We have differing views as to the justification for the invasion of Iraq, sir,” Alan replied calmly. “The liberal left continues to harp on our failure to find weapons of mass destruction.

“But as true as this has proven to be, the president acted upon intelligence he and the Congress believed to be completely reliable. Others argue that Saddam Hussein himself was a sufficient threat to our allies in the area to justify removing him.

For more than a decade, the United Nations has proven itself to be impotent in dealing with Saddam and Iraq, and George Bush felt a constitutional obligation to protect America. I feel he believed he was doing the right thing in making a preemptive attack. Mistakes have been made—big mistakes—in particular in assessing the consequences of the invasion; but hindsight is always 20/20.”

## **DAVIS INTERNATIONAL BUILDING**

HERB BENTZ STARED beyond Alan to his friend and colleague sitting behind him on the podium. He could see a small grimace etching the corner of Brian Hall's otherwise placid face. He and Brian had been hoping that Alan could skirt the subject of Iraq. There was little good to be gained from a discussion about

that war.

And then Alan said something that caused Herb to nod his head. “My concern with Iraq is that it will draw our attention away from other terrorist hotspots like Afghanistan and Palestine and even back home in the States. We can’t let that happen,” Alan continued. “Even if some Muslims have turned against the West due to our involvement in Iraq, my hope is that true and honorable Muslims everywhere will prevail. And I firmly believe that a group like Adala, a group composed of good, brave Muslims seeking to rid the world of these fanatics, is the answer. Maybe the only answer.”

“That’s perfect,” Herb said. “Get him off the stage, Brian. Do it now.”

## **KABUL, AFGHANISTAN**

IT WAS ALMOST as if Brian Hall had heard his friend’s urgent plea because he was suddenly on his feet and moving toward the podium. He was also gesturing toward the CNN producer, as if to say, “We’re done. It’s a wrap.”

Brian put a hand on Alan’s arm even as a dozen other reporters were shouting questions and waving note pads and recorders.

“Let’s get out of here while the getting is good,” he said in Alan’s ear.

Alan leaned into the microphones, raised a hand, and said, “Thank you all for your time. I appreciate it.”

Aly took Alan’s hand while Brian extracted him from the micro-phones, and the three of them exited the stage after nearly an hour of serious questioning. When they were behind the curtain, Alan put his arm around Aly’s shoulder, leaning heavily against her.

“I don’t know about anyone else,” he said, “but I need a drink.”

“I think you’ve earned one,” Aly said. “You were wonderful.”

“Not bad, boss,” Brian said. “Now let’s see how the bloody press responds and how people react. The only thing I’m willing to guarantee is that there will be a reaction. That we can count on.”

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## **20 - AN ISLAMIC RULING, A REACTION**

## OBSERVATION AND REACTION

BRIAN HALL COULD not have been more correct when he suggested the breadth and depth of the reaction to Alan's news conference.

In fact, most of the world was exposed to it in some fashion or other. Some viewed the news conference as it was being broadcast live from the hotel in Kabul. Many, many more saw it, from the Middle East to Africa, and from Asia to the United States and Europe. Within the next few hours, those in charge recognized just how relevant and dramatic Alan's story and his words had been, and they replayed the event again and again. The news conference and its message were front-page items in over a thousand newspapers and would continue to garner a place there for days to come as reaction spread. Radio talk shows worldwide bristled with the hair-raising topics Alan had broached. *Newsweek*, *Time*, the *Economist* and hundreds of other periodicals ripped up their cover pages and replaced them with photos of the former Taliban captive. Pointed references to Adala made the organization a household word within twenty-four hours, and curious approval for the group's "new" approach to fighting terrorism spread like wildfire.

Nowhere in the whole world was Alan Davis' news conference heard more clearly than at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Nowhere was the incendiary rhetoric studied with greater interest. And nowhere were the potential short-term and long-term effects of the news conference more severely dissected and pondered. The man for whom this remarkable event resonated more strongly than any other was the Islamic faith's Grand Imam, Mohammed Bin Abboud al-Kafra, successor to Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, the man most respected and revered by the Islamic clergy everywhere.

Unlike Catholicism with its neatly laid out hierarchy of priests, mon-signors, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and the pope himself, the Islamic religion permitted no intermediary between the umma, the faithful, and Allah. Yet just like any institution with millions and millions of followers, Islam had its fair share of issues that had to be resolved so as not to let the faithful stray too far afield in their thinking or actions. Conflicting theological, historical, and legal questions demanded resolution. As in so many other religions where freedom of thought was considered a dangerous thing, Islam turned to those men who had, through various means, risen to the ranks of scholarly theologians known for their opinions on Qur'anic, Hadith, and Sharia questions. These men were often viewed as holy, though not because they were any closer to Allah than any other Muslim. No, they had gained their status through the dedicated study of the Qur'an. Their diligence had gained them a level of expertise in the interpretation of the Hadith and the application of the Sharia. Earned or not, these scholar-cleric-lawyer types were nonetheless held in the highest esteem by the faithful



masses so in need of guidance. These holy men were well known in Muslim clerical communities and were often referred to as the “supreme court,” but at times these arbiters themselves faced questions they felt unqualified to resolve. When this happened, where did they go for answers? Who did they defer to on these irresolvable issues? The answer was the grand imam, or more literally the “grand holy man.” He would be the Islamic “pope,” if ever there were such a thing, though unlike the Catholic pope who was known both in name and by appearance to most of the Catholic world, Grand Imam Mohammed bin Abboud al-Kafra was not a public icon among the Islamic masses.

## **CAIRO, EGYPT**

TWO DAYS AFTER Alan’s news conference, in a huge room in the Islamic Studies Center located at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, a room usually reserved for guest lecturers and visiting speakers, highly regarded imams assembled, all summoned to Cairo from as far away as Casablanca, London, and Jakarta.

The nervous energy in the room was as palpable as the uncertainty was restrained. This meeting was unexpected, though it could have been predicted by anyone observing the spiraling effects of the radical fundamentalism that had infected the Islamic world.

The grand imam took his place on the stage overlooking the packed room. He was a tall, rangy man with a quiet calm about him that was impossible to dismiss. His small smile was reassuring, and the gentle tip-ping of his head seemed to represent not power so much as continuity and stability. His very presence brought a hush to the room.

When every eye was focused on him, he took his place in a hardback chair fitted with a small microphone and only then did the entire congregation settle into their seats. Mohammed bin Abboud al-Kafra greeted them with a short blessing; then, speaking as the head of their ever-expanding religion, began by saying:

“Thanks be to Allah for your presence here today. You have all come on short notice, and I am grateful to you. Needless to say, it is important. All of us have either heard of or read about the news conference conducted by Mr. Alan Davis of the United States. You are aware of his claims. You have heard his accusations. You know the events surrounding his time in Afghanistan.” The grand imam looked out at his audience. He gestured with an open palm. “Now I ask each of you whether Islam should respond.”

“Yes,” shouted a number of voices, “we must respond.”

“It is our duty,” a group of imams intoned.

“Our mosques shake with the anger of the faithful,” said another in a thundering voice.

“This Alan Davis has blasphemed Islam,” a voice rose up from the back of the room. “He must stand in judgment.”

“Even we who represent the faithful to Allah and instruct in His teachings have questions that only you can resolve, Holy One,” said still

another, and the murmurs of agreement that filtered through the room seemed unanimous in requiring the grand imam to step forward and make his declaration.

“I agree with all of you,” Mohammed bin Abboud al-Kafra said, his head nodding calmly. “We must respond on behalf of our Muslim brethren everywhere. Certainly Islam has been unfairly characterized. I will issue a statement later this day.”

The grand imam was an insightful man. He viewed the many incendiary issues Alan Davis had dredged up at his worldwide news conference as potentially cataclysmic. Alan alleged in no uncertain terms that Muslims believe in unjustified killing; that they believe suicide is an acceptable form of promoting the Islamic faith and a justified means of obtaining paradise. He also made it very clear that a certain segment of the Islamic world was teaching a heretical version of the Qur’an and distort-ing the teachings of the Prophet to achieve the ends they desired, that of establishment of a world caliphate. While the grand imam’s response might be considered a determination by some, an interpretation by others, or a clarification of Alan’s words by still others, Mohammed bin Abboud al-Kafra understood that a clearcut response to the faithful was absolutely in order.

Therefore, for the first time since his recognition as grand imam, Mohammed Bin Abboud al-Kafra issued a public statement to the world media. It was simple, straightforward, and nothing short of earthshaking. It read: “The Qur’an is the source of all knowledge, goodness, mercy, and justice. The messages therein reveal what is to be done and what is not. It is not for any deviant group to define Islam otherwise. The taking of a life, except in a just cause, is forbidden. The taking of one’s own life is equally forbidden. Those who ignore the commands of Allah will not see Paradise.”

THE IMPACT OF the grand imam’s groundbreaking statement on the heel’s of Alan’s remarkable news conference was as dramatic as it was polarizing. No one was without an opinion. The elation many people felt—millions upon millions of devout Muslims among them—upon hearing the most important and influential voice among Islamic leaders espousing the virtues of knowledge, goodness, mercy, and justice as the grand imam had done was nothing short of

monumental. Hearing the grand imam decrying, even condemning, the taking of life for purposes other than those sanctioned by the Qur'an was remarkable. His view on suicide, in light of so many ongoing "martyr" events, was astonishing. Islam, many said, had taken a huge step forward with the release of those words.

But there was a dark and disturbing side to the event. Many Muslims were filled with anger and dismay. And nowhere was there more rage than in the mind of one Muslim zealot living in Manchester, England.

## **MANCHESTER, ENGLAND**

HIS NAME WAS Abdul bin Afari. He was a twenty-eight-year-old immigrant from Saudi Arabia who had come to England in hopes of spreading the word of the Prophet among the growing Muslim population there. He worked as a mechanic and lived simply in a one-bedroom apartment across from the industrial park where most of his Muslim brethren worked.

That night, Abdul sat across from Tarik Awan, his most loyal and impressionable friend, drinking lukewarm tea and staring at a CNN news-cast on a seventeen-inch screen with barely adequate reception.

"This grand imam did nothing to contradict the statements given by that American dog at his news conference. What kind of Muslim is this Mohammed Bin Abboud al-Kafra? He should have been declaring jihad, not condemning the bravery of young men and women who have gladly given their lives in ridding our world of infidels like this Alan Davis." Afari spat in the direction of the television. "I studied in Saudi Arabia with the Wahhabi. I learned the true meaning of the Prophet's words, peace be upon him. And I heard the writings of the Qur'an interpreted by men with visions of a world caliphate dominated by Islam the way it is meant to be dominated. The grand imam, is he?" Abdul bin Afari growled. "Who is he to contradict what you and I know to be true within our souls?"

"You speak the truth with every word," replied the younger and more malleable Tarik Awan, "but what can be done about it? He is the most scholarly and studied man in the world of Islam."

"Very simple, my friend Tarik, very simple. The world of Islam must be shown the penalty for such heresy. The grand imam is no exception. He must suffer the penalty for blasphemy as outlined in the Sharia."

"Abdul!" Tarik Awan's eyes bulged in his head, as a layer of perspiration formed on his brow. "Are you saying...?"

"That is exactly what I'm saying," said Abdul pointedly. "The grand imam must be put to death! It is up to us to see that he is removed from his position. It is up

to us to see that a true believer is named as grand imam in his place. Imagine, Tarik! An act of this importance will enshrine us among the most influential men in the history of Islam. When we do this, we will finally be joined with the finest and bravest of the jihad. We will change the course of history. Are you with me?"

"I am with you, Abdul," the young man proclaimed, though the apprehension in his voice betrayed his fear. "In the name of Allah, I am with you."

Their plan was simple. That was to say, they had only the most rudimentary makings of a plan, and maybe that was for the best. These were simple men. Anger was their greatest weapon; it was also their most vulnerable attribute.

They used the Internet to make plane reservations two days hence. The same travel service told them of a hotel less than a kilometer from the air-port, and they booked a room for two nights. They rented a car from National Car Rental and secured the reservation with a credit card. They used the Saudi Arabian embassy to make certain their paperwork into Egypt was in order and placed a dozen phone calls to trusted Muslims in the Manchester area, and one of them was finally able to secure the tools they would need once they reached Cairo. How they would attack a man as important as the grand imam seemed almost secondary in their think-ing. Allah, Abdul bin Afari insisted, would show them the way. Trust was their greatest ally. Righteousness was at the heart of their motivation.

They arrived in Cairo via Egypt Air less than seventy-two hours after the grand imam's historic statement. Upon arrival, they claimed their rental car and proceeded to the Novotel Cairo Airport Hotel. Late afternoon found the conspirators traveling the back roads of a deteriorated residential area called An Aashiwa'i. Number 272 Tripoli Street, a four-story hovel built of clapboard, would have been considered by most in the neighborhood as the area's nicest home. In Manchester, it would have been condemned long ago. They parked the rental out front, climbed out cautiously, locking the car door behind them.

They walked toward the front door trying not to look over their shoulders. The doorbell brought a short swarthy bearded man to greet them showing himself through the partially opened door retained by its chain lock.

"Identify yourselves!"

"I am Abdul bin Afari," Abdul said. "This is Tarik Awan. Ben al-Hakim sends his blessing and wishes you a long life."

These were the words their Manchester contact had told them to use, and now all they could do was hope he wasn't setting them up.

The bearded man grunted as if a long life were the last of his worries. He

released the chain, pushed aside the screen, and said, “Come in, I have the goods you ordered. Let’s see your money, two thousand pounds—cash.”

Abdul Afair knew he took a risk by trying to bargain, but it was in his blood. “We are here for the cause of holy Islam as you know, my friend, and have many expenses to be considered,” he said to the man. “Two thousand pounds is a tremendous burden. Could you accept one thousand since we are doing Allah’s work?”

“We are all doing Allah’s work, my friend. Our deal is for two thousand, not a pound more, not a pound less,” the man said with a trace of irritation.

“Two thousand for only two Uzi guns?” Abdul opened his palms to the man as if to say, ‘I know highway robbery when I see it.’

“The guns are new. I have tested them myself. The ammo is included,” the man said blandly. “More importantly, they are illegal in this country. Even more important than that, I do business with you at considerable risk. I can sell them to anyone for two thousand, and many for three. So make a decision and make it fast. Well?”

Two thousand pounds later, the amateurs from Manchester were stow-ing their automatic weapons in the trunk of their car. They drove with considerable haste until they were back in the city proper and surrounded by the skyscrapers of downtown Cairo.

With Tarik Awan poring over a city map, they made their way to the campus of Al-Azhar University on Rosetta Avenue. The university was housed on fourteen acres of well-groomed grounds, with a an asphalt ribbon of road snaking between buildings that looked like something lifted from books dedicated to classic Colonial architecture. They parked the car next to the administration building and set out on foot determined to learn the layout of the campus and to discover those areas most often frequented by Mohammed Bin Abboud al-Kafra, the grand imam.

They acted like tourists, and this allowed them to ask questions of people walking around the campus. Students and teachers were helpful. They discovered that the grand imam spent much of his time at the Islamic Affairs center across from the campus mosque and that he always participated in morning prayer in the prayer room of the mosque. Both the center and the mosque were easy to find. They just looked for the minarets rising above the mosque. The Islamic Affairs Center was newer than most of the facilities and built of red brick.

It was getting dark, so they only peeked through the front doors and took note of the entrance and the corridors. Then they followed the path-way from the center,

through a garden area, and over a small pond to the mosque itself.

“Very good,” Abdul said this with a wide smile. A plan was formulating in his mind, and he explained it to Tarik as they drove back to the hotel where they changed out of the Western clothes they had been wearing all day.

In the morning, they unpacked the more traditional Egyptian garments they had brought along. First, they put on the full-length undergarment known as a thobe. The aba was a roomy outer garment that was almost like a cloak and perfect for concealing their weapons. The traditional fez for their heads completed their costuming. They could now travel with relative ease among the populace and pass for Muslims on holiday or men exploring Cairo for potential job opportunities.

AN HOUR BEFORE dawn the following morning the two conspirators set out in their rental for Al-Azhar University and what they imagined to be their date with destiny.

“Let’s go over it one more time please,” said Tarik Awan, now clearly nervous and questioning the less-than-specific nature of their plan.

“First this: we did not come here to die, Tarik; that is not part of our plan,” Abdul bin Afari said, meeting the eye of his youthful compatriot. “We have covered our tracks. It will be very difficult for anyone to trace our movements or to identify us. Our weapons cannot be traced. We will dis-card these clothes and the weapons as soon as our mission is complete and head straight to the airport dressed as we arrived. By 11:00 we’ll be on our way back to London, heroes of the movement. Don’t worry. Allah is our ally, and that alone is our most powerful weapon.”

Abdul drove east into the city as the first light of dawn colored the horizon in a mist of purple and pink. “We will arrive on campus at 6:15,” he said, quizzing his compatriot. “Then what?”

“We park in the alleyway behind the Islamic Affairs Center. We walk around the center toward the university mosque,” said Tarik.

“Yes, exactly, where we know the grand imam begins his day saying first prayer in the mosque prayer room.” Abdul could feel Tarik relaxing slightly as they focused on the task at hand. “We also know that our quarry travels with his entourage from the center along the garden pathway that leads to the mosque. Then what?”

“We will use the trees on the left side of the pathway to track his progress.”

“Yes. And when he reaches the footbridge that crosses over the garden pond...”

Abdul said no more.

“Yes,” Tarik said, and they fell silent.

Sunrise was beautiful this morning as the pinks and purples flushed with hints of orange and gold, and a cool breeze touched the tops of the towering trees so prominent on the Al-Azhar campus. Abdul backed the car into the alley next to a metal dumpster and left the keys on the floor of the front seat where he could easily retrieve them. They scurried into the trees and, hidden under the branches, carefully slipped their Uzi's beneath their abas, tucking them inside their belt loops.

They left the car unlocked and walked as casually as possible around the Islamic Affairs Center to the parkway and the gardens separating it from the mosque. They entered the garden at 6:35 and played the part of tourists enjoying the well-tended flowerbeds. They left the main path and examined a copse of perfectly shaped pear trees until they heard the sound of footsteps and quiet conversation coming their way.

“It's them,” Abdul whispered. “Praise Allah. Our time has come.”

The group was nearly a dozen strong: visiting imams, teachers, two bodyguards, and a tall, slender figure with stooped shoulders, a salt-and pepper-beard, and a snow-white gown that was a perfect match for his head scarf. The grand imam looked younger than his sixty-six years, and a soft smile seemed a permanent part of his calm expression.

When the group was opposite the pear trees, the path narrowed in front of the foot bridge. This was where Abdul bin Afari and Tarik Awan suddenly materialized, their automatic weapons held out before them.

Abdul bin Afari cried out, “Mohammed bin Abboud Al-Kafra! May Allah forgive you your sins!”

The group was too stunned to react, and long before the grand imam's bodyguards could shield him, the staccato roar of Abdul bin Afari's Uzi filled the air and drowned out the screams of his victims. Less than a second later, Tarik Awan unleashed his weapon, his finger locked on the trigger, and a wild grimace etching his face. The two killers emptied their guns as a dozen men sprawled on the ground, blood spilling across the walk and trickling into the pond.

Abdul and Tarif stared at the carnage they had created for nearly five seconds before lowering their guns, turning, and walking down the path and around the center to their waiting car.

“Victory, my brother,” Abdul said as they drove off.

## **JFK AIRPORT, N.Y.C.**

THE DAVIS INTERNATIONAL Boeing Business Jet set down smoothly at JFK airport and taxied along a tarmac reserved for private planes. As soon as the plane came to a halt, three black limousines filled with private security guards swooped in and circled the aircraft.

Not a moment later, Herb Bentz and Marie Chavez hurried from the back of one of the limos and waited anxiously for the Boeing's passenger door to open. When it did, Aly, Alan, and Brian emerged, as dogged and weary as three travelers could be.

As the guards formed a gauntlet leading to the limos, Herb and Marie stepped forward and greeted each of them with warm hugs.

“Thank God you're safe. You scared us all half to death,” Marie said to Alan, though her smile conveyed the deep affection she felt for the man and his wife.

“Glad to be home,” Alan said.

“Well done,” Herb said to him. He shook Brian's hand and shared the kind of look two professionals do when a close call turns into a smashing victory. “Nice work, my friend.”

Herb put an arm around Aly and led her toward one of the limos. He said, “Don't know if I could have held up as well as you did, young lady; proud of you.”

“I'll fall completely apart when I get home, believe me Herb, but thank you,” she said. She looked around gratefully. “No press. How'd you manage that?”

“We flat out lied,” Marie said with a wide smile, “and Herb's pulled some strings and made arrangements for a quick and easy dash through customs, so we should be on the road in no time.”

And indeed Marie was right about customs; the procedure was both private and speedy, and their caravan was headed for Glen Cove shortly thereafter.

They arrived at EDEN by mid-afternoon. Arrangements had already been made for the entire Adala management team to spend several days in seclusion there to decompress. At EDEN, they would be able to avoid the press and meet in private to discuss where the events of the last few days had left the organization—that was, of course, if the media and paparazzi could be successfully thwarted. To this end, Herb had arranged for additional around-the-clock security.

“As long as the food holds out,” he said, “we should have the place to



ourselves.”

They carried their bags inside, allowed the staff to help them get settled, and then were treated to the kind of dinner that made them grateful for all they had been blessed with living here in the States.

Alan managed nearly seven hours of sleep that night, the longest he had slept in years. He awoke refreshed and energized.

Aly was the last one up; when she went downstairs, Alan, Marie, Herb, and Brian were drinking coffee, and the whole house smelled of vegetarian omelets, fresh fruit, and wheat toast.

“What’s the reaction been like?” Alan wanted to know.

“It’s the biggest thing since the moon landing,” offered Marie without a trace of irony in her voice. “Every newspaper on the planet gave it front page coverage; TV like you wouldn’t believe, CNN, MSNBC, FOX, the works. And what they don’t know for certain, they can’t stop speculating about.”

“That’s right,” said Herb, “but more important, I think, is the reaction in the Muslim press. Hard to believe, but some respected journalists have come down on the side of objectivity. They’re starting to ask some hard questions, particularly regarding the Wahhabi suicide factories and the so called Qur’anic ‘obligation’ calling for the death of all infidels, Muslim or otherwise.”

“Thank God,” offered Aly. “Putting an end to that insanity is not only in the best interest of Islam, it’s for the good of all mankind.”

“As long as we’re on the subject of fanatics, I should update you on Imam Mohammed Aziz’s status,” Herb said as Chef Henry and his temporary staff served breakfast and refreshed their coffee.

“So what’s going on with our once and former friend?” Aly asked with just a trace of cynicism. “I hope he’s sweating bullets.”

“He’s scared to death. That’s the good news, and the better news is that he understands he’s safe only so long as he cooperates with the FBI. Seems he was the conduit for eight terrorist cells located in and around the eastern seaboard. Very unsavory. Very dangerous. The bureau found out the cells were all in possession of explosive devices and of various sophisticated detonators to go along with them.”

“Serious business,” Brian said, his face knotted in a ball of concentration.

“Oh, yeah. But wait until you hear this. They were planning a major attack on the first day of Ramadan—eight targets, mostly historical monuments with heavy

tourist traffic. The bureau knows of three for certain: the Alamo, Independence Hall, and the Jefferson Memorial.”

“Can you imagine the stampede that would have caused?” exclaimed Marie.

“We’d be right back where we were on 9/11,” Brian said. Then he looked at Herb and asked. “How’d the bureau react?”

“Two days ago they took down all eight cells—sixty-four agents breaking down eight doors at exactly the same moment—a thing of beauty. They arrested thirty-three people in total, all Muslims.”

“What about the two imams that Mohammed Aziz brought to our house that night, Herb?” Aly wanted to know.

“They were picked up that same morning along with Aziz. They turned out to be Egyptian chemists in the process of setting up a lab to manufacture ricin talc and spray. The idea was to contaminate the air circulation systems in public places like a subway station or a prominent high-rise.”

“Dear God. Insane,” Marie said.

“Oh, insane is as accurate as you can get,” Herb agreed. “A grown man who inhales ricin can expect to be dead in three hours.”

The five of them sat in silence after hearing that. They tried to eat, but eating didn’t exactly go with the conversation. They drank coffee simply to keep themselves busy.

Eventually, Brian filled the void when he said, “I know we’ve got a hundred things to discuss, but my main concern is Adala. The organization is out in the open now and no one is going to let it die. The media has a mystery to solve. I would expect they’ll call for a congressional investigation by both houses. We need to get our ducks in a row and figure out what the future of Adala is, and we need to put it at the top of our priority list. We’ve put in too much work to see it die on the vine, and we’ve seen how effective it can be when it’s handled right.”

“Well, now that you mention it, I have to admit that I’ve taken some good old-fashioned initiative on the very matter,” Herb said, gazing over his coffee, his eyes moving from Brian to Marie and coming to rest on Alan. “I hope you don’t mind, boss.”

“You know how strongly I feel about good old-fashioned initiative, Herb.” Alan laid his fork aside. “Fill us in.”

“You know who Arnold Goodman is.”

“You mean Arnold Goodman the director of the Central Intelligence Agency? Yeah, I know who Mr. Goodman is.”

“Well, I took the liberty of arranging a luncheon with the man on Friday afternoon. Actually, the meeting was his idea.”

“His idea?” Brian leaned forward.

“Yeah. It seems the director knew a lot more about Adala than we thought; he didn’t say how, and he wants to meet each one of us and talk about it. I’m picking him up at LaGuardia at 10:00 in the morning on Friday and I’ll drive him here.

“Fine with me,” Alan said; then he glanced over at Aly. “Darling?”

“Truthfully, that’s one of the last things I wanted to hear,” Aly admitted. “Henry’s leaving for his vacation on Friday. I’d better bring in the caterers.”

“Not to worry guys, Goodman’s not coming with handcuffs.” Herb told them. “This is business. I think he sees something of value in Adala, and I think what he has to say will prove interesting to all of us.”

“Let’s hear him out,” Alan said.

## **CAIRO, EGYPT**

THE CAIRO ASSASSINS stopped at a deserted rest area ten minutes from the airport. The parking area was shadowed by a row of shaggy elm trees, and Abdul pulled the car as far away from the road as possible. He jumped into the back seat and began shedding his Egyptian clothing in favor of the blue jeans and button-down shirt he had arrived in less than twenty-four hours ago. Tarik did the same in the front seat, but his hands were shaking so badly that he had trouble buttoning his shirt.

They bundled the Arabic clothes into one plastic trash bag, stuffed their Uzis and spare ammunition into another and carried both bags to a large metal dumpster behind a brick structure that housed the rest area’s toilets. They opened the lid and buried the bags deep within the refuse; then they wasted another minute washing their hands before hurrying back to the car.

They hadn’t gone a half mile before Tarik looked over at his co-conspirator and confessed, “Abdul, I have to tell you I’m frightened. Everything has gone too well.”

“My friend, you need not worry. Everything has gone well because Allah has seen to it, and he will see to our safe return to Manchester, too.” Abdul looked at

his wristwatch. "Our plane to London departs in two hours and forty minutes. We need only turn the car in at the rental place just like any good tourist would and await our departure. Soon, my friend, respect and recognition will be ours."

The next hour went as planned. They turned in their rental car, signed the receipt, and caught a shuttle to the terminal. They walked inside. The police guarding the entrance watched them closely, but they watched everyone with equal suspicion.

The two men entered the concourse and filed along with a long line of other passengers through the security checkpoint. They followed the signs to Gate B-42 and found a lounge area.

Tarik was almost beside himself. "Abdul! There are police everywhere. What should we do?" he said, his voice trembling.

"The first thing you're going to do is get a hold of yourself, Tarik Awan," Abdul said sternly. "And then we do nothing; we do nothing except wait until they call us for boarding. The police are only doing their job. They always monitor the entrances, and I see no more of them today than I did when we arrived. Now you must get hold of yourself. Do you hear? Go to the men's room and throw some cold water on your face. Do it!"

Tarik Awan did as he was told. When he returned, he seemed marginally calmer. He stopped at the nearest newsstand, bought two local newspapers, then took a chair across from Abdul and tried to smile. They ordered coffee from the bar and hid behind their newspapers.

Ten minutes before their scheduled boarding time, an announcement came over the airport loudspeaker system.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE ARE IN A STATE OF EMERGENCY. NO ONE MAY LEAVE THE AIRPORT. ALL DEPARTING PASSENGERS MUST PROCEED TO THEIR DEPARTURE GATE, WHERE A SPECIAL SECURITY CLEARANCE WILL BE CONDUCTED."

"Allah, save us," pleaded Awan.

"Stop that kind of talk right now! Pull yourself together. There were no witnesses this morning. As far as anyone is concerned, we are business-men returning to England after a day or two in Cairo. Nothing unusual about that. And this emergency is probably routine," Abdul bin Afari insisted, though he really didn't believe his own propaganda.

When their flight was called, the two killers hoisted their duffel bags and approached the main security checkpoint surrounded by 30 or 40 other

passengers. It was Tarik who first spotted the swarthy bearded arms dealer standing between two burly armed police officers and taking in the faces of every passenger.

“Allah save us, it’s him! The one who sold us the guns.” His legs buck-led beneath him; he staggered and was dropping to the floor when Abdul reached out and grabbed him under the arm.

“Stay calm,” Abdul said. “There is nothing we can do except play it out. Keep walking. Read your newspaper. Keep your head bowed.”

They were twenty feet from the checkpoint when the weapons dealer thrust a finger in their direction and cried out.

“There they are. Those two are the ones who bought the guns.”

Before Abdul could protest or run, he and Tarik Awan were wrestled to the terminal floor by a swarm of police officers. Their arms were pinned to their sides and their hands cuffed behind them. Then they were ignominiously hauled to their feet. A camera flashed, then another and another. It was photographers from the local news media, and Abdul bin Afari knew he would never again have such an opportunity. He looked straight into the camera’s broad lens and shouted at the top of his lungs.

“We claim credit for eliminating the blaspheming traitor Grand Imam Mohammed bin Abboud Al-Kafra. Allah Akbar!”

## **OBSERVATION AND REACTION**

THE NEXT MORNING brought the news of the assassination of the grand imam. CNN gave the event exclusive coverage, as did its major competitors at FOX and MSNBC. They spent hours scrutinizing the assassination and discussing worldwide reaction to the slaying. They talked to cor-respondents all over the Middle East. Suddenly, the grand imam, a man who had lived in the shadows of his position, was on the front page of every paper.

“Those crazy lunatics!” cried Alan when photos of Abdul bin Afari and Tarik Awan were flashed across the television screen. “They’ve just slit their own throats. Who would want to kill this man?”

“Jihadists, that’s who. They have committed an unforgivable sin and they will pay dearly for it in this world and the next,” offered Aly.

“I don’t get it,” said Brian. “This only serves to turn Muslim against Muslim. It’s as you said in the beginning, Alan. We needed to get good Muslims to eliminate the bad Muslims, and this event is guaranteed to do just that. And Adala had nothing

to do with it. Turns out to be some crazies from the UK. I can hardly believe it.”

“Seriously, the world isn’t going to take this one lying down,” said Alan. “I expect mass unity among both Muslim and non-Muslim communities coming out and condemning the assassination without reservation. Someone or some group is going to take charge, and we might well see the last dying gasp of organized terror groups like Al Qaeda. We might even see people coming out and putting an end to the Wahhabis and the Pakistani madrassas. The ball is rolling, my friends.”

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## **21 - RESOLUTION**

### **EDEN, GLEN COVE, N.Y.**

EVERY TELEVISION SET at EDEN was tuned to one cable news channel or another, each chronicling the shooting death of Grand Imam Mohammed bin Abboud al-Kafra with facts that had, by now, grown stale and repetitious.

Aly, Alan, and Marie were huddled in front of the fifty-two-inch set in the family room watching a CNN correspondent reporting live from Cairo. They could see the red brick Islamic Affairs Center in the background, the stone minarets of the mosque to the reporter’s right, and the yellow crime scene tape stretched in front of the garden pathway. The number of police and army troops standing watch over the scene reminded Alan of the footage he had seen of Robert Kennedy’s assassination. Most were in complete shock and milling around with little purpose, especially now that the perpetrators were in custody.

The reporter was telling her audience that NATO had called an emergency meeting to discuss the ramifications of Mohammed bin Abboud Al-Kafra’s assassination, and yet sidebars showing rioting in the streets of such notable places as London, Berlin, and Paris made it very clear what the ramifications would be.

“All of the European heavyweights are screaming for blood. The French, the Germans, even the Italians,” Marie was saying. “Time to put the hammer down on radical fundamentalism, and now they have most of the Muslim community agreeing with them.”

The CNN reporter went on to say that the United Nations had already called special meetings of both the General Assembly and the Security Council.

“You called that one right, boss,” Marie said to Alan. “Here comes the bluster.”

“No way NATO is going to pass on this one,” Alan said. “My bet is that they’ll do something very significant.”

“Significant, as in military action?” Aly wondered.

“That’s what the organization was created for. It’s a military alliance. Time to muster up the troops and start ferreting out every terrorist organization in every tenement house, back alley, or mountain cave from London to Peshawar. Shoot first and ask questions later,” Alan said, coming to his feet and pacing. “But the UN can call all the meetings they want, and it won’t matter. The UN is the most useless bunch of do-nothings on God’s green earth. Their plan is always the same. They’ll debate this situation ad nauseum and then they’ll do what they always do. They’ll issue a resolution which will be ignored, followed by another debate resulting in yet another resolution also ignored leading to more and more debated resolutions ad infinitum.

“Please don’t give up on the United Nations just yet, Alan,” Aly said. “This isn’t like the Iraq situation. Even the UN can’t drag their feet on something this big.”

“I hope you’re right, my love, though I wouldn’t bet a plug nickel on it,” Alan admitted. “I do know this. I sure as hell wouldn’t want to be in Pervez Musharraf’s shoes right now, and I wouldn’t trade places with King Abdullah for all the sand in Saudi Arabia.”

It’s about time the world community held their feet to the fire,” Marie said adamantly. “They’ve been turning a blind eye on terrorists acting inside their borders for decades now. It’s time to face the music and they know it.

“Let’s hope so,” Aly agreed.

HERB AND BRIAN HAD stolen away to a small study on the second floor; it may have been the only room in EDEN without a television regurgitating the news of the day. They sat around a small coffee table with a speaker phone connecting them to Brian’s assistant chief of security, Rafael Spiers. Like Brian, he was a former member of MI-6 who now made a whole lot more money working for Davis International Industries. For the moment, he was stationed on the grounds outside of EDEN not 100 yards away.

“Rafe. You there, mate?” Brian asked.

“I’m here, Brian,” the heavily accented voice said.

“Can you fill Herb in on the situation with Chef Henry please?”

“Sure thing. Herb, this is the situation. You are aware that the FBI has been

monitoring Imam Mohammad Aziz ever since he brought his two chemist friends to Aly and Alan's house last month, right?" Spiers said.

"Guy's up to his ears in trouble," Herb added.

"Indeed, he is. Well, part of their investigation, as you might have expected has been to keep tabs on Aziz's telephone records, current and past, and it's made for some very interesting reading."

"One of his most frequently called numbers was right here at EDEN," Brian said, looking over at his colleague, "to the private line in the apartment over the garage. We're talking about dozens of calls, both to and from EDEN. Most of them were made or received when Alan and Aly were not at home."

"What the hell?" Herb said. "You're kidding."

"Turns out one of his conspirators lives right here on the premises. None other than Chef Henry."

"Unbelievable!" Herb said.

"Yeah, exactly what we thought," Rafael Spiers said.

"Unfortunately, the FBI didn't think it was relevant," Brian said. "They chalked the excessive calls up to the fact that Henry attends the same mosque of which Imam Aziz is the religious leader."

"I thought the calls were more significant than that, so I've had Rafe keeping tabs on things here."

"And?" said Herb.

"Chef Henry is as dirty as Aziz is. They're members of the same bloody cell as far as I can tell," Rafe said. "At the very least, Henry's up to his elbows in some serious stuff. When he was working in the kitchen, we did some forensics on material we collected in his unit over the garage. We found trace evidence of C4 and a cell-phone detonator and tools under the base-board molding. We left everything there."

"This is very bad news," Herb said, "especially with the director paying a visit today. I'll have to call it off."

"No," Brian said. "According to Aly, Henry's scheduled to leave on his vacation today. Now whether that's pure coincidence or not, I don't know."

"I don't happen to believe much in coincidence, especially when it happens to



involve what looks to me like a Muslim terrorist,” Spiers said.

“Then you think he’s up to something,” Herb replied.

“We’ll keep our eyes on him. He’s got at least one phone detonator and likely some C4 explosive hidden somewhere. Two of my men will be working with the caterers serving lunch today, and we’ll have another two men on the outside with me,” Rafe said. “Anything comes down, we’ll grab him.”

“Herb, I suggest you go pick up the Director just as you planned,” Brian said. “We need to hear what he has to say about Adala. Rafe and I will keep an eye on Henry.”

“It’s your call,” Herb said and came to his feet. “I’m on my way.”

IT WAS JUST before one in the afternoon when Herb’s Buick Le Sabre pulled into the circular drive in front of EDEN, and he and Arnold Goodman, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, climbed out.

Goodman looked like a tall, lanky professor of economics or world history rather than the most powerful man in the field of global intelligence. He wore an inexpensive though nicely tailored brown suit, and his finely chiseled features were set off by a wry smile on his thin lips and wire-rimmed eyeglasses.

Aly and Alan met them at the door. Alan took the agency man’s hand and said, “Director Goodman, welcome to our home. Thank you for coming.” Then he introduced Aly. “Allow me to present my wife, Aly Davis.”

“It’s a pleasure,” the director said taking her hand. “Sorry to come on such short notice.”

“Not at all, Mr. Goodman, we’re delighted you could come,” said Aly.

“If you wouldn’t mind the informality, I’d appreciate it if you’d call me Arnold,” the director said as they walked toward the living room.

“We’re big on informality,” Alan assured him. Alan opened his hand toward the rest of the Adala team. “Of course you know Brian Hall, once a proud member of the British MI-6; he’s now our director of security.”

“It’s a pleasure, Brian. Herb’s told me all about you.”

“Director, I’m honored.” There was genuine respect as the two men shook hands.

“Say hello to Marie Chavez, Mr. Director,” Alan said.

“Yes, of course, head of operations for Adala,” Goodman said cordially. “Glad to meet you.”

“What will you have to drink?” asked Aly. “It’s a little early, I suppose, but the bar is open.”

“If I might trouble you for a club soda and lemon, thanks,” was the director’s response.

While the group made their way with drinks in hand toward the dining area off the veranda, Brian Hall’s phone vibrated. He gave Herb a brief nod and then made a quick detour onto the balcony overlooking the circular drive out front. He activated his phone and said, “Rafe? What’s up?”

“Take a look outside. It’s our friend loading luggage into the back of his Ford Mustang,” Rafe said.

“I see him.” Brian stared down at the Lebanese chef, but Henry’s expression was as it always was, stoic and unreadable. The Mustang was parked alongside Herb’s Buick, and Henry spent thirty seconds arranging two bags in the trunk. He also placed a small duffel bag on the passenger seat and spent a few moments between the cars and out of the sight of Brian or Rafe doing something or other that neither Brian nor Rafael Spiers could see. Then the chef went back inside to his apartment.

“Keep an eye on things,” Brian said. “I’ve got a meeting to attend.”

The moment Brian returned to the veranda, Aly announced that lunch was being served.

The caterers entered and served what could only be described as an all-American meal. Lunch began with jumbo Gulf shrimp cocktail, then Caesar salad, followed by sliced turkey with stuffing and potatoes and green beans. Dessert was homemade apple pie served with real whipped cream.

Comments about the assassination of Grand Imam Mohammed bin Abboud Al-Kafra dominated the conversation during lunch, but as the last of the apple pie was cleared away, the topic changed.

Alan took the lead, saying. “You’re a busy man, Arnold, and as much as I’d like to think you came all this way just to share a bite of lunch with us, I realize you’re here on business, and my friend Herb tells me that it has to do with Adala. He also tells me that you’re more familiar with the organization than any of us might have guessed. I won’t ask how.”

“Good,” the CIA director said genially. “To begin with, we know about the training facility in Texas; actually, I’ve got a couple of men keeping an eye on it at the

moment, things being what they are after your rather dynamic news conference.”

“I didn’t mean to stir things up quite as much as I did, but I’m kind of glad it worked out the way it did,” Alan admitted.

“We also know the names of your trainees and your instructors; a good pair, those two,” said Arnold Goodman. “I have a pretty good idea why you created Adala, and I also think I have a clear picture of where you intended to go with it. If I’m right in assessing your motivation for creating the organization and the extraordinary funding behind it, I would also be correct in thinking you have largely accomplished your goals and in some cases, exceeded them. Am I right about that, Alan?”

“Sounds good to me,” said Alan in a rather cavalier manner. “Please go on.”

“Let me say this; up to this point, our investigation into your group has been kept top secret. I thought it was in everyone’s best interest to do so,” the director assured them. “And, I will go further and say that Adala has performed magnificently. You should all be proud.”

“Nice of you to say that,” said Alan. “It was definitely a team effort.”

Arnold Goodman formed a steeple with his fingers, anchored his elbows on the table, and leaned forward. “But know this; the media will destroy Adala the minute they get their inquisitive little hands on it. They’ll grab on, and they won’t let go; in the process they will likely destroy each of your lives as well not out of malice but because of exposure.”

“Are you proposing a solution, Arnold?” Alan said hopefully.

“I am. Adala is far too valuable an operation. I would like you to turn the entire organization over to the agency immediately. The whole works. Herb Bentz and I have already discussed the idea in theory, and if you were agreeable to the idea, he would join us temporarily to facilitate the transfer. We would relocate the covert training site to a military base of our choosing, but the nuts and bolts of the operation would stay the same.”

“The exception would be the Cayman Island bank accounts that we have been using to fund the operation,” Herb added.

“Oh, yes, of course, the Cayman Island accounts would be yours,” the director assured them.

Alan nodded. His eyes moved slowly around the room. He took in each of his collaborators one by one, holding their eyes momentarily, and giving thanks in his heart for all they had done, not only in honoring the memory of Dan Millar, but in giving millions upon millions of people worldwide the opportunity to live in

freedom. Marie, Brian, Herb, and finally Aly, whose soft smile told him the feeling was mutual.

Finally, he looked across the table at CIA Director Arnold Goodman and said, "It's a deal, Mr. Director," but then he raised a hand, signaling a caveat to their agreement, "except for one thing."

"What's that, Sir?"

"The funds in the Cayman Island bank."

"Yes?"

"I don't want the money back. I want it to be placed in a special fund to be used for the benefit of Adala's OWLs and HAWKs and their families," Alan said, "and I'd like Herb to serve as trustee of the fund."

"A fair proposition," the CIA director said, nodding his head. "In fact, it's a remarkably generous one."

He smiled that wry smile of his, and then he rubbed his hands together and looked across at his host saying, "And now, if I may, I think I'll have that drink."

AS THE MEETING gravitated to the main salon, Brian Hall broke off for a brief update and punched Rafael Spiers' cell number into his phone. "How are we doing?" he whispered.

"We took a look under the fender of Herb's Buick and found a surprise under the right front fender. It looks like one of those cell phone contraptions."

"Well, we knew we might run into something like that," said Brian. "It's probably a gift for Herb and the director. I think Henry is very thoughtful, but that sort of gift is not acceptable. Let's return it."

"Would it be okay if I wedged it under the driver's seat of Henry's car?"

"Now, that's an idea I don't think we should pass up. I would expect the director to be on his way in thirty minutes or so," Brian said. "Let me know if there's a problem."

Brian entered the salon just as Alan was raising his glass in the direction of CIA Director Goodman. "You're a man with an open mind, Arnold, and I'm hoping you'll indulge me and listen to something I think you, your colleagues at Homeland Security, and the president should consider."

"Fire away, Alan; I'm all ears." Goodman said.

“I believe it’s time for drastic changes in the way the United States looks at international travel, specifically who we allow to enter our country. The way it works now, once a visitor from a foreign country gets into the USA, the consequences of any criminal acts he performs here are not the responsibility of the foreign government issuing the passport.”

“I have an idea that would turn this system squarely around. I say make the visitor’s own country responsible for him. For instance, if a country, let’s just say Saudi Arabia wants to allow its citizens to visit or study in our country, then it must agree that it will be responsible for any criminal acts performed by its citizens while in our country.

“This responsibility includes personal injury, property damage, and business losses caused by any criminal acts of their passport holders. Of course, the USA would agree to be responsible for any criminal acts of its citizens on any foreign soil. The idea is that each country would be held responsible for the criminal activities of its citizens when abroad. What do you think Arnold?”

“That’s a lot to chew on, Alan.” the director admitted. He took a short sip on his drink. “So under your plan, for instance, the British government would be responsible for the criminal acts of any British citizen traveling in the U.S. or in France or Japan or anywhere else for that matter.”

“That’s exactly right. If a country is going to issue a passport allowing one of its citizens to travel abroad, then they are in effect saying they accept all responsibilities for that person’s criminal activities.”

“So let’s suppose that Saudi Arabia, for example, refused to accept such liability. Then what? Should we unilaterally deny entry to all their nationals?”

“Absolutely,” Alan answered without hesitation. “Every last one of them.”

“So we just forfeit whatever tourist income they might have brought to our country, correct?”

“Correct,” Alan answered, “but what is that loss compared to the costs of 9/11? In fact we wouldn’t have had the horrendous 9/11 if my system were in place. I don’t have to remind you that fifteen of the nineteen terrorists on 9/11 were Saudi nationals.”

The CIA director dipped his head. “Good point.”

“So think about it,” Alan said. “If the Saudis agreed to accept responsibility for the criminal acts perpetrated by every single one of their nationals, you can bet your last bottom dollar they’d investigate them before issuing them passports. And in the case of the 9/11 hijackers, the Saudi government knew full well that

some of the hijackers were known extremists. If they might have to pay hundreds of billions, the actual loss, to the victims of 9/11, would they have issued passports? I think not.”

Aly chimed in, saying, “But we would be better off in either case, Arnold. If the Saudis’ investigation uncovered information that disqualified some of its citizens from receiving a passport, we may well have avoided the 9/11 catastrophe altogether. If, on the other hand, the terrorists responsible were issued passports and the Saudi government were held responsible for their criminal acts, then the families of those murdered on 9/11 would have recourse for fair compensation. The City of New York, the airlines, every business sustaining a loss, the owners of the Twin Towers, and the courageous firemen and policemen suffering breathing damage would have recourse to the Saudis.

“You certainly have a good point there, Aly,” said the director.

“But of course it works both ways,” Alan continued. “The United States also agrees to accept responsibility for any criminal acts perpetrated by our citizens while traveling in foreign countries. Quid pro quo. But the key again is that we refuse to allow entry to any foreign national if their government refuses to accept responsibility for criminal acts they commit while in America. Period.”

“You know, Alan, I think I’d support something like that. I think it might be worth taking it up with Homeland Security. Shake things up,” the director said.

“Thanks for the support. I appreciate it. Maybe you could get me an introduction to Mike Chertoff,” Alan suggested.

“I think Mike Chertoff will welcome you with open arms after I have a word with him,” Arnold Goodman said. He finished his drink and came to his feet. “You’ll have to excuse me; I hate to rush off, but duty calls.”

“Thanks for a great lunch. Thanks also for the work you’ve done. I am proud to have met each of you, and I’ll make sure Adala lives up to your expectations. That’s a promise.”

“We can’t ask for more than that,” Alan said walking him to the door and outside. They stepped outside. The director shook everyone’s hand; then Herb led him toward his Buick.

Everyone but Brian went back inside. He walked halfway down the walk, where he caught a glimpse of Chef Henry’s Ford Mustang exiting the gate in front of EDEN.

As Herb’s Buick started around the circular drive, Brian went back inside the house. He entered the main salon just as a tremendous explosion boomed in the

distance.

Aly nearly dropped her drink. “My God! What was that?” she cried.

“I don’t know, but it sounded an awful lot like a plane crash,” Marie called.

“No, not a plane crash,” Brian said. “I’m sorry, but I believe your chef has had an accident.”

“My God. What? Henry? What are you talking about? Is he all right?” Aly started to panic.

“Brian. What’s happened?” Alan demanded.

“Chef Henry was working with Imam Aziz,” Brian said quickly. “All this time, they belonged to the same terrorist cell.”

“That’s impossible,” Aly snapped.

Brian shook his head calmly. He explained about the phone calls and the covert interaction the FBI had uncovered between Henry and Imam Aziz. “The Feds didn’t think it was worth following up on. We did, and I’m glad we did because Henry just tried to plant a bomb under Herb’s Buick. His plan was to assassinate the director of the CIA and kill our friend. I have a man outside, so I had him look Herb’s car over. He found a cell phone detonator connected to a bundle of explosives in the wheel well of Herb’s car. He removed the device and attached it to Henry’s Mustang. Once safely off the estate, I think Henry dialed the phone number thinking he was blowing up Herb’s Buick. Imagine his surprise.”

“Dear God!” Aly said, a hand over her mouth.

## **THE NEXT TEN DAYS**

IN THE END, Alan was right about everything. NATO sent a military force of 200,000 men with orders to root out Al Qaeda terrorist groups and Taliban fighters from the rugged mountains of western Pakistan and the tribal areas of Afghanistan. In response to the unprecedented political pressure exerted by Pakistan’s Muslim population, President Pervez Musharraf ordered the army to stand aside, and NATO forces swept through the country unimpeded. As Alan had predicted, they shot first and asked questions later. The results were astonishing.

In Saudi Arabia, the royal family saw the writing on the wall and closed down every Wahhabi school in the land. In their place, they set about creating a nonsectarian school system emphasizing the arts and sciences and after-school activities as well as Islamic studies based upon the true virtues of the religion:

justice, tolerance, forgiveness, goodness, and equality.

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**BEFORE WRITING THE LAST SENTENCE OF THIS BOOK, THE AUTHOR  
HAS INVOKED HIS PRIVILEGE OF INTERJECTION.**

I believe, with all my soul and intellect, that Muslim fanatical terrorism poses the greatest threat to freedom the world has yet seen and unless defeated will ultimately conquer us.

Amid the lands of Islam stands a beacon, an enclave of freedom...Israel. From the moment of my baptism in the River Jordan, and for the last thirty-seven years, I have been deeply concerned with the hopes and aspirations of all peoples of the Middle East. My many visits to the region and my work in the private intelligence service have enabled me to set down these words.

I originally intended this book to be a work of nonfiction based on my experiences in the Middle East. It soon became little more than a collection of dry facts and statistics available in library reference books. Yet, the very reason for writing the book was to convey to as many as possible the peril we face and to suggest a viable winning strategy. I therefore set out to embody my thoughts in an entertaining and suspenseful novel well salted with fact. You, the reader, will judge my success or failure.

I call this winning strategy the Privilege of Passage Plan (POP Plan). It consists of three powerful elements.

First, we must recognize that the only way to defeat Middle East terrorism is for American Muslims to stand up, speak out, and even fight if necessary to reclaim their religion. The non-Islamic world must do all it can to support these good and brave people.

Second, we must call in the overwhelming power of free enterprise which, until now has been largely idle, instead of relying on governments or an ineffective United Nations for the protection of their assets. Business and Industry have everything to lose from terrorism and must become proactive in support of a sane Islam. Their tremendous power, ingenuity and economic resources, if applied collectively, would destroy terrorism now.

Third, the POP Plan is anchored by a revolutionary pass-port acceptance program designed to curtail the issuance of passports to those who might harbor anarchistic or terroristic leanings.

It would work like this: the United States government would assume financial responsibility for any criminal acts committed by its passport holders anywhere



in the world if the victim or legitimate claimant could not be compensated by the responsible party.

At the same time, the United States government would deny entry to any foreign national whose government refuses to accept financial responsibility for its passport holders' criminal activities.

If the POP Plan had been in effect on 9/11, how might the outcome of that day been changed? Since fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were Saudis carrying Saudi Arabian pass-ports, a nation well known for financing jihad both inside and outside its borders, the Saudi government would have to pay something close to 150 billion dollars. And they certainly have the money.

Faced with such potential loss, no government would issue passports to anyone suspected of terrorist leanings. In the case of 9/11, the Saudi authorities knew of the activities and inclinations of some of the hijackers, but they were not at financial risk and therefore issued the passports.

If the Saudis had refused to accept liability for the hijackers, they would have been denied entry to our country!

Just think what we would have been spared: The loss of thousands of lives, the anguish suffered by thousands of families, the massive cost of the damages to businesses and property, the ongoing medical problems of survivors and rescuers, and the psychological damages to Americans living in a land they believed secure.

Of course, the implementation of the POP Plan would necessitate groundwork. The State Department would consult with all nations and jointly develop a workable treaty. A governing body and a body of adjudication for dispute resolution would be formed, and regulations would be promulgated. It is absolutely doable and would pay for itself with minimal

entry/departure fees collected by common carriers.

This author is prepared to discuss the POP Plan with any interested party. In this ever so important election year, 2008, candidates seeking our highest offices must be strongly urged to study the POP Plan and look into its merits or plainly tell us why they haven't the time.

With thanks to you, the reader, I shall now end our story with a final sentence.

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The United Nations spokesman announced a scheduled debate on Middle East violence seeking to determine if such acts represent terrorism or patriotism.

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The author and the publisher sincerely hope you enjoyed reading this book and that you will tell others, whether it be praise or criticism. We simply must realize the terrible threat to mankind and life as we know it posed by fanatical extremist Muslim terrorists. We would appreciate your comments, which may be sent to the address below.

GOD BLESS AMERICA

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