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BOOK 1

DON BROWN

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[[CIP TO COME]]

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[[Dedication to come]]

PROLOGUE



**EL-MINA, LEBANON
CORNER OF AL ISTIKLAL AND MAR ELIAS
NORTH GOVERNORATE, TRIPOLI DISTRICT
15 MILES SOUTH OF THE SYRIAN BORDER
85 MILES NORTH OF BEIRUT**

The cool gust was pleasant, heavy with the smell of saltwater from the Mediterranean Sea. But when the wind subsided, it yielded to an angry sun that again beat down, relentless and unmitigated, ending the temporary relief from the scorching conditions. Thousands of men, women, and children were crammed tight like cattle, with sweat drenching their clothes, faces, and underarms.

A mishmash of El-Mina police officers and Lebanese soldiers pushed against the crowd, waving them off the streets.

The man and his son had jammed themselves in the sea of humanity, hoping for a fleeting glimpse of the ambassador.

They stood behind the portable waist-high aluminum fencing that stretched along each side of the boulevard. The fencing posed a theoretical yet ineffective barricade designed to deter the crowds from spilling into the thoroughfare as the motorcade approached.

Armed officers positioned themselves in groups of two, spacing themselves very hundred yards or so on each side of the boulevard.

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The authorities had their guns and the light aluminum fencing to restrain the crowds.

But the crowds possessed overwhelming numbers.

If the crowds mobbed the motorcade as it rolled by, the people outnumbered the bullets that could stop them.

The emotions of the crowd soared hotter than the scorching mid-day sun. Angry throngs had come to protest the American ambassador, to shake their fists and bathe his car in spit.

Those on the opposite side of the debate, though fewer in number, had come to show their appreciation.

From the swarming crowd, hatred boiled as if in a hot cauldron, spilling into the air:

Hatred for the ambassador.

Hatred for America.

Hatred for Israel.

Hatred for Assad of Syria.

Hatred for the Shiites.

Hatred for the Palestinians.

The ambassador had been warned to stay away. But he stubbornly had accepted the joint invitation from the president of the National Orthodox University and the bishop at Saint Georges. As if he had some point to prove.

Overhead, three pale-green military helicopters, like giant locusts buzzing in the light blue sky, roared in a sonorous cacophony.

One helicopter flew circle patterns out over the Mediterranean about a hundred yards from the shoreline. A machine gun was pointed out from the cargo bay, keeping guard against any intruder who might approach from the sea.

Another helicopter hung over the T-intersection of Al Istiklal Boulevard and Mar Elias, over the motorcade route beside the National Orthodox College.

The third flew a few blocks inland, over Mar Elias, where the

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motorcade would pass on its way toward St. Georges Cathedral, where the ambassador would meet with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and address the crowd.

Each of the helicopters had on its fuselage an inverted white triangle with a red border, like a yield sign. The image of a cedar tree—the symbol of Lebanon—graced the middle of the inverted triangle.

Five uniformed policemen quick-stepped along the side of the boulevard with bullhorns in hand, barking instructions to the crowd gathered on the edge of the campus of the National Orthodox College.

“Stand back! Stand back!” a policeman barked in French. “The ambassador’s limousine is approaching. Make no unusual gestures!”

A second police officer repeated the instructions in Arabic.

Along the street, the shouting grew louder, as if challenging the roar of the helicopters.

Hasan Makari put his arm around his son Najib and pulled him tight. The boy had complained that morning when Hasan had gotten him out of bed so early.

Today the boy’s youth would not allow him to understand. But one day Najib would remember that on a scorching-hot day in July, his father brought him to witness history.

“I’m hot, Papa,” the boy protested yet again.

Hasan bent down and spoke into the boy’s ear, his voice competing with the roar of the three helicopters. “The ambassador will be here soon. This will be spectacular.”

A moment later, sirens could be heard coming from the direction of Al Istiklal, the seaside boulevard that curved around the peninsula on which the city of El-Mina was located.

“The motorcade!” someone shouted.

Dozens of police motorcycles, their mufflers rumbling in a steady roar, rolled into view from around the bend on Al Istiklal.

Paired in twos, the white Harley-Davidson bikes sported twirling blue lights on elevated poles behind the seats. Mounted on the cycles were elite police officers of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces.

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Sporting helmets, black visor-shields over their eyes, spit-polished black boots, and sidearms, their grim faces with jaws of steel gave the ISF officers an intimidating appearance.

As the motorcycle escort approached the T-intersection where Mar Elias dead-ends at Al Istiklal, Najib put his hands over his ears.

“The ambassador!”

Fingers pointed away from the motorcycles on Mar Elias and down toward Al Istiklal.

A black limousine, a Cadillac with headlamps burning, came into view from around the bend in the road. The flags of the Republic of Lebanon and the United States of America flew on small poles over the left and right headlights. The limousine tailed close behind a police car, flanked by police motorcycles. Forming a human buffer between the limousine and the motorcycles were eight armed soldiers carrying assault rifles walking beside the limousine, four on each side.

Another police car followed behind the limousine. More police motorcycles followed the squad car.

Hasan bent down and spoke in Najib’s ear. “The ambassador is coming!”

“Where, Papa?”

“Over there. Keep watching.”

The limousine rolled into the T-intersection, about to make its right turn onto Mar Elias.

The motorcade halted, with the limousine stopped in the left-turn lane.

Another cool gust from the sea brushed the crowd. The sight of the American flag fluttering in the wind incited the crowds on both sides of the parade route.

Jeering, cheering, clapping, and fist shaking greeted the black car, which was stalled right under the traffic light in the turn lane from Al Istiklal to Mar Elias, waiting for the motorcycles to move east down Mar Elias.

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Hasan took Najib's hand. "Come. Let us get closer."

They pressed forward a couple of feet, squeezing through narrow gaps between the shoulders of the crowds, pushing up to the edge of the boulevard.

From here, Hasan had a clear view of the intersection to his right and of the boulevard in front of him. At the moment he reached the aluminum barricade, the ambassador's car turned onto Mar Elias, only a few yards in front of Hasan and Najib.

As the car passed by, the chanting from the crowd intensified.

"Allahu Akbar!"

"Death to America!"

"Allahu Akbar!"

"God bless America!"

"Allahu Akbar!"

Hasan would keep his true feelings quiet. He could not join in with any chants, lest he be spotted and raise suspicions.

He wanted the boy to see this. Yet he also had to protect the boy.

The motorcade inched forward, having turned from the route that was parallel to the sea, and headed east, leaving the sea behind.

As the limousine rolled in front of Hasan's position, he strained for a look into the back to see the passenger. But a motorcycle officer blocked his view. Then the motorcade stopped again.

From his position along the sidewalk, he now stood no more than ten feet from the ambassador! But still he could not see.

Craning his neck to the right, Hasan waited for the motorcycle officer to move forward.

A brief glimpse opened up, but a foot soldier blocked his view.

The procession started moving again, and the soldier stepped forward, giving Hasan a clear view.

The windows were tinted, but not so much that Hasan could not see inside.

The ambassador wore a dark blue suit with a red tie. His thick white hair matched the shine of his teeth. He smiled, waving at the

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crowd, even at those shaking their fists and holding Death to America signs.

Hasan threw up his hand and gestured.

That seemed to catch the ambassador's attention. For a split second, eye contact!

Through the tinted glass, the ambassador looked at Hasan, smiled broadly, and waved. Hasan would never forget this providential moment—a moment of eternal destiny!

In the rush of the adrenaline, Hasan's heart pounded like a jackhammer. "He sees us! He sees us!" Hasan said as the ambassador's eyes darted elsewhere.

The limousine rolled on, picking up speed, then hitting its brakes again. The ambassador had passed. But Hasan stood still.

Watching.

Waiting.

About a hundred feet down the road, as the car passed, someone waved a solitary American flag. More screaming followed the sight of the flag.

The brake lights flashed on and off again.

A thunderous blast shook the earth.

The blinding explosion from the back of the limousine sent soldiers and bystanders diving to the street.

Screams.

Chaos.

Pandemonium.

Hasan shielded Najib from flying glass, but not before he himself had been struck in his cheek, just under his eye.

Sirens blared.

Crowds knocked down the flimsy barricades, pouring onto the boulevard, swarming the burning limousine.

"Allahu Akbar!"

"Allahu Akbar!"

From the angry fireball inside the car, orange flames danced above the roof. Thick black smoke engulfed the car.

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Police rushed in to pull back the throngs as the helicopters converged in a triangle overhead. Medics ran through the chaos with empty stretchers.

Hasan took the boy's hand, yanking him away from the carnage. It was time to go.

CHAPTER 1



MEDIA CENTER

USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ATLANTIC OCEAN

45 MILES EAST OF HILTON HEAD, SOUTH CAROLINA

11 YEARS LATER

In a room about half the size of a tennis court, a dozen American sailors, most wearing standard issue blue-gray camouflage Navy working uniforms, stood in line, waiting for a seat to open up at one of thirty computers lining the bulkheads.

“Now hear this. This is the executive officer. Set condition River City in five minutes. Repeat. Set condition River City in five minutes. This is the executive officer.”

The announcement did not sit well for the sailors in line. Some crossed their arms. Many cursed under their breath. Others cursed aloud. A few checked their watches. Others eyed clocks on the bulkhead.

The Navy used the term “River City” for a communications blackout regardless of reason. The XO’s announcement meant that a communications blackout with the outside world was about to take place. For those standing in line, hoping to drop a hello to a spouse or a child or a parent or a girlfriend, the dreaded fear was that the announcement would come before they could get to a terminal.

Although a powerful supercarrier like the USS *Abraham Lincoln*

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possessed tremendous broadband capabilities, most of its broadband remained devoted to the ship's war-fighting capabilities.

"Come on, man!"

"Hurry up."

"We got family too!"

Some of the more sanitary comments coming from several of the waiting grumblers were exhorting their shipmates to hurry along.

"Now hear this. This is the executive officer. Set condition River City in three minutes. Repeat. Set condition River City in three minutes. This is the executive officer."

"I ain't got time for this." The chief petty officer, who was next in line, checked his watch and cursed. "Good luck, bud," he grumbled at the aviation boatswain's mate third class standing behind him.

Just then the Marine corporal sitting at the far right terminal stood, prompting the duty officer to ask, "All right, who's next?"

"That would be me, sir!" The sailor next in line waved at the duty officer.

"Make it fast, Makari," the duty officer said. "Lights out in less than three."

"Yes, sir. Just need to check my email, sir." Najib Makari made a beeline for the vacant terminal at the end of the line.

He sat, tapped the Enter button on the right of the keyboard, then typed the URL for his email.

Connecting . . .

Connecting . . .

"This is the executive officer. All hands prepare for communications blackout in sixty seconds."

The inbox popped onto the screen.

Najib pressed the Control and *P* keys at the same time, sending the email to the laser printer.

"This is the executive officer. Set condition River City in three . . . two . . . one . . . All hands to duty stations. Communications blackout is in effect."

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Thirty monitors in the media center went black, prompting a collective groan from those sailors still in the middle of their personal business.

Although his screen had blacked out, Najib's printer kept printing. The message had reached the printer's memory cache before the blackout.

When the printer stopped, Najib retrieved the message from the outbox tray.

From: hasanmakari@beriut.com
To: nmakari@Cvn72.navy.mil
Subj: Visit to America

Najib,

This will confirm my flight to America in two days, arriving in Philadelphia on May 1. From there, I will catch another flight to Norfolk and await the arrival of your ship. I will contact you in Norfolk.

This will be a glorious occasion! The most glorious since the morning we went to see the ambassador!

God is great!

I shall look forward to our experience together.

With love,
Your Father

"All hands. This is the captain. Prepare to resume flight operations in fifteen minutes. All hands report to your duty stations to resume flight operations. AIRWING, stand by for further instructions from the CAG commander. This is the captain."

Najib's heart leaped with excitement! Indeed, God was great! Just as his father had taught him all those years ago.

He folded the message, stuck it in his shirt pocket, and headed up toward the flight deck.

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BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHT 442

15-MINUTE FLIGHT TIME TO PHILADELPHIA NATIONAL AIRPORT

MAY 1

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the voice announced in a heavy British accent. “The captain has turned on the fasten-your-seat-belt sign. We should be on the ground in Philadelphia in less than twenty minutes.”

From the back right window seat of the 757, just two rows in front of the rear toilets, Hasan Makari fished for his seat belt buckle to comply with the captain’s instructions.

There. Found it.

As he brought the canvas belt across his waist and clicked it, the giant 757 passenger jet banked in a slow swoop to the right.

The open blue water below gave way to a long, sunlit green-colored coast off to the right of the plane.

The shoreline of America!

Goose bumps crawled up his arms as he stared out the window in a near-paralyzed amazement, transfixed at the sight of the American Atlantic seaboard.

To many around the world, America no longer represented the shining city of freedom that she once was.

But to Hasan, America had never lost her luster. Not as a boy. Not as a young man. Even now, approaching his fiftieth birthday, the dream that America represented, the dream of freedom from religious persecution, that dream had never died.

Hasan had studied American geography since his childhood. His mother was given an atlas of the United States by Christian missionaries from America, Carol and Eugene Allison.

Eugene Allison always took time to spend with Hasan. When the Allisons were called from Lebanon by their missionary organization, they presented the Makari family the atlas and a Bible as gifts of remembrance.

“Please make good use of these books, especially the Bible,”

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Eugene told Hasan and his mother and brother around the dinner table on the night before they left Lebanon.

The departure of the Allison family left a painful hole in Hasan's heart. Eugene Allison had served as a surrogate father figure for Hasan, whose own father had been caught up in the cross fire of a battle for which he did not pick sides. The elder Makari left the small family flat one morning to buy vegetables at the market. He would never return. Muhammad Makari was killed by a stray mortar shell fired by pro-Syrian forces against anti-Assad rebels in Tripoli. As a seven-year-old boy who idolized his father, Muhammad's death crushed Hasan. For weeks he grieved the loss.

Eugene Allison had five children of his own, most of them adopted. When the Allison family arrived in Lebanon just months after Muhammad Makari's death, Eugene took to the Makari brothers as if they were his own. Hasan's older brother, Jamal, was seventeen. Hasan had just turned seven.

Hasan gravitated toward Eugene Allison, who read to him, played games with him, and told him stories about America and about Jesus.

Eugene also taught Hasan about American football. On Saturday afternoons, Eugene and his sons, Joel and David, would pick up Hasan and drive down to the "corniche," the two-mile stretch of palm-tree-lined wide, flat beach along the Mediterranean that stretched around the thumb-shaped peninsula and the old city of El-Mina.

They all played "tag" football, as his American friends called it, on a sandy beach in northern Lebanon. Proclaiming himself to be a lifelong Washington Redskins fan, Eugene pretended to be someone named "Joe Theisman." Hasan played the role of a person called "Art Monk."

Hasan never acquired the knack for throwing the awkward, oblong-shaped football. But as it turned out, he became the best receiver of the bunch, earning himself the American nickname "Art."

Sometimes the Allison family called him by his Lebanese name, Hasan, and sometimes by this bestowed nickname, Art.

Hasan loved the nickname. It gave him a sense of identity, making him feel a little bit part of America.

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“Here, my son.” His mother came into his bedroom the morning the day after the Allisons left. “Eugene wanted you to have it. Take this.” She handed him the atlas that the Allisons had given the family. “There’s a note on the inside cover.”

Sitting on his bed, Hasan took the atlas, stared at it, and then, with a slow reverence, opened it to the inside cover. His eyes fell on the handwritten note pinned by Eugene Allison.

To Hasan “Art” Makari.

We love you and will miss you. I will miss our talks and our football games!

Please keep this atlas of America as a remembrance of our time together. I hope that one day we will see each other again.

Perhaps in America!

Remember Romans 10:9

With much love,

The Allisons

From that day forward, Hasan had kept the atlas in his bedroom and opened it almost every night for the next two years. Years after he lost touch with the Allison family, he still treasured the atlas and became a self-taught expert on American geography. Not long before the assassination of the ambassador, Hasan presented the atlas to Najib.

As the British Airways plane crossed the shoreline, jetting west over the mainland, Hasan remembered the atlas and let his mind wander.

Below them, the state of New Jersey.

Out to the right, just out of sight beyond the horizon, loomed the great New York skyscrapers.

Somewhere off to their left, a hundred miles or so away, was the American capital city, Washington, DC, with the White House, the Capitol, and all the great monuments of marble to the great American presidents.

Washington was three hours by car from Norfolk. Before he

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returned to Lebanon, he and Najib would rent a car and visit the world's greatest capital.

Perhaps they could see the stadium where the Redskins play!

That brought another smile to his face.

The plane began its descent. Pressure mounted in his inner ears.

Hasan popped two sticks of gum in his mouth and started chewing, which at least seemed to neutralize the buildup.

Closing his eyes, he uttered a silent prayer of thanks to God.

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FLIGHT DECK

USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ATLANTIC OCEAN

62 MILES EAST OF CAPE HATTERAS, NORTH CAROLINA

The warm summer breeze gusted onto the great ship's flight deck, carrying with it a distinctive salty smell that reminded Najib of the ambassador's assassination. For on that day, all those years ago, in the minutes leading up to the killing, sporadic sea breezes had blown in from the Mediterranean, giving relief to the crowd from the oppressive heat.

He was a boy then.

Now he was a man.

But eleven years later, Najib Makari—now Aviation Boatswain's Mate Third Class Najib Makari, United States Navy—still had four indelible memories from that fateful day that would last for a lifetime:

The scorching heat on his head and shoulders.

The salty smell of the Mediterranean breeze.

Bright orange flames engulfing the ambassador's limousine.

The sound of sirens and helicopters.

Even now, sometimes when Navy Seahawk helicopters performed touch-and-goes off the flight deck, or with the salty smell of a gust

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from the ocean, he experienced chilling flashbacks to that fateful hot summer day.

Najib's father had taught him about America from the time he could walk.

"America is a place for freedom. There we can play, speak, and worship without fear of persecution," the elder Makari had told his son.

On the morning that the ambassador came up to El-Mina from Beirut, his father had gotten him up early.

The new American president at the time, Mack Williams, had reached out to Christians in the Middle East, reversing a heavy-handed pro-Islamic policy embraced by some of his predecessors. The ambassador had come to meet with the patriarch John X of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Williams's "fair and balanced approach" started with America extending a hand of friendship to the Greek Orthodox Christians of northern Lebanon and Syria.

And so on the day that Najib would never forget, the American ambassador arrived in a gesture of friendship, to show America's respect for Christianity in the Middle East, to address the perception that some earlier administrations had become too Islam-centric.

Despite Najib's initial nightmares and the sense of horror that had haunted him after witnessing the explosion at such a tender age, he had in time overcome the nightmares and fears because of the encouragement of his strong-handed, stable father.

Over the years, Hasan Makari had never wavered in his support for the American ideal of freedom of the individual, and the commitment to Christianity remained as the core of Hasan Makari's household.

When Najib learned of a program that would allow him to further his education through an educational visa to the United States, his father had approved of the plan. Then, when he learned that he could speed his quest for United States citizenship by enlisting in the United States Navy, Najib, with the help of a crack immigration lawyer from church, withdrew from his classes at George Mason University. The lawyer helped him get a work permit that he used

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to secure work as a janitor at a local church, and then a permanent resident card. One month later, he took an oath of allegiance to the United States.

He had joined the Navy to chase away his own fears and to fulfill his dreams and his father's dreams.

And now, a world away and a lifetime removed from that day of the ambassador's death, here he stood in protective helmet and jacket on the flight deck of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, one of the most dangerous yet exhilarating work environments in the world.

Despite the temporary flashback evoked by the scent of the ocean breeze, he could not dwell in the past.

Not even for a second.

The steel deck of an aircraft carrier might resemble an ordinary land-based runway, but because of its much smaller size, launching and recovering Navy jets at sea proved to be a much deadlier environment than any land-based airport.

With flight operations under way on this late spring afternoon sixty-some miles off Cape Hatteras, planes launched and landed from USS *Abraham Lincoln*'s flight deck at a furious rate in the limited space.

Crew members on the flight deck, wearing a variety of different colors, depending on their job, had been selected based on testing, psychological maturity, and motor-skills coordination.

Under windy skies, Najib wore his green jacket and helmet, signaling his status as an enlisted member of the "catapult crew." The other crew members wore jackets of blue, purple, red, green, brown, or white to signify their jobs on the flight deck.

The Navy handpicked each flight deck member, emphasizing no room for a slipup. In one careless moment, the twin jet engines of an F/A-18 fighter could suck somebody into the back of a jet or blast a crew member off the deck into the Atlantic.

Najib's catapult crew operated the giant steam-compression-powered steel catapult. When launching aircraft, the catapult crew performed the most important job on the flight deck.

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Because the carrier's runway is not long enough for a jet aircraft to take off on its own, Navy jets are literally thrown off the end of the carrier's flight deck by the giant steel catapult that the crew attaches under the nose of the plane. Then the jet's twin engines provide the forward propulsion as the jet climbs sharply into the sky.

In simplistic terms, the catapult system serves like a giant slingshot. The steel cable acts like a giant rubber band, with an F/A-18 "Super Hornet" fighter playing the role of the stone being shot from the slingshot.

"One minute to launch. All nonessential personnel, clear the area."

The announcement echoed across the steel flight deck. Crew members not needed for the launch scrambled back, away from the ship's forward section.

Najib stayed in place, as green- and yellow-jacketed air-handling officers and plane directors moved to the front of the runway alongside the jet out to the left.

The jets roared with a shrill whiney sound that could bore a hole through a man's eardrums if it weren't for special protective gear worn over the ears.

Standing between the plane's left wing and the ship's edge, under brisk winds blowing off the bow, Najib watched the jet blast protector, the garage-door-sized steel section of runway rising up from the deck at an angle, pushed up by hydraulic steel arms behind the jet's twin turbo fans.

The blast protector inched upward, upward, rising into place at an angle about forty-five degrees off the flight deck.

As steam seeped up through the catapult track, sweeping across the deck in a fleeting wisp, Najib held his right hand in the air and commenced a clockwise swirling motion, signaling that the jet blast indicator was in place, ready for launch.

The pilot, Lieutenant Mark "Maverick" Garcia, nodded at Najib from the cockpit, gave a confident thumbs-up, then turned his head to look straight ahead.

Everything was a "go."

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Hearts pounded. Adrenaline spewed like exploding lava. This moment washed away memories of that fateful day in El-Mina all those years ago.

Najib and four fellow catapult crew members took several steps back as the jet's engines roared to a deafening pitch.

The "shooter," the yellow-jacketed catapult crew officer, got down on one knee by the jet's nose. In a quick motion, he pointed his finger straight out front, off the bow of the ship.

More steam oozed up through the flight deck.

The thirty-seven-thousand-pound jet moved forward . . . faster . . . faster . . .

Then, like a slingshot shooting a rock, the giant steel catapult slung the jet fighter out over the water.

Twin afterburners kicked in from the jet engines . . . shooting angry orange plumes of fire behind the plane.

But even with the twin jets firing, something seemed wrong.

The jet veered to the right, then dropped quickly.

The splash into the Atlantic, off to starboard, sent plumes of water exploding into the sky.

Sirens sounded. Loudspeakers boomed all over the ship.

"Aircraft down! Starboard, forty-five degrees! All rescue teams to the flight deck. Prepare to launch choppers."

Najib and other members of the catapult crew ran across the deck for a better look.

The gray jet was floating at an angle, the cockpit submerged. Waves were lapping against the aircraft. Like the back end of a seesaw, the twin turbofans at the aircraft's rear rose above the waves. Black smoke plumed up from the turbofans.

As the USS *Abraham Lincoln* began a sweeping right turn in the ocean, cutting a protective circling pattern around the sinking jet, two SH-60B Seahawks flew into position over the crash site.

Within seconds, the turbofans slipped under the water. Then the twin tail fans disappeared, leaving only a trail of jet fuel and oil pooled on the surface.

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Two Navy frogmen in black wetsuits and wearing oxygen tanks dropped feet first into the water from one of the Seahawks.

Then two frogmen plunged into the water from the other helicopter.

Despite the roar of the helicopters, the *swoosh* of the rushing breeze, and the steady hum of the carrier's nuclear-powered engines, a stunned silence rushed over the ship. All eyes focused on an empty spot in the water—on a pool of rippling waves and floating jet fuel where the jet disappeared.

The heart-stopping moment rushed Najib back in an instant—again—to the day he had stood paralyzed, watching the ambassador's car consumed by a leaping, angry fire. Perhaps he would still be standing on the side of that street to this day, all these years later, had his father not snatched him by the hand.

But today no one snatched him away by the hand.

How had this happened?

Had he done something wrong? His mind rushed through a mental checklist, but he discovered no answers.

There was nowhere to go, nowhere to run. Najib could only breathe, watch, and pray.

Two more helicopters joined in the rescue effort. One dropped a raft into the water. From the other, two more frogmen plunged into the Atlantic.

It seemed like only seconds had passed since the jet plunged into the sea. But in witnessing events that meant life or death, time often became suspended, without measuring sticks. As Najib remembered from that fateful day years ago, the difference between an hour and a minute became meaningless.

"It doesn't look good," said the chief petty officer who was standing near Najib.

"No, it doesn't," said the lieutenant who had been the plane's "shooter." He was standing beside Najib and the chief.

"Look!" A petty officer pointed out to the area.

"Have they got somebody?"

"I think they've got him!"

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A head popped above the surface, but the back of the head was to the ship. The frogman turned in the water, his arm in a vice-like grip around the pilot.

Cheering and applause rose from the flight deck. Other frogmen joined in the rescue. One boosted himself into the life raft and helped to pull the pilot into the life raft. The cheering turned to silence.

“Is he alive?” somebody asked.

“Hard to say. Somebody better say a prayer.”

“This is the captain.” An announcement over the 1-MC, the ship-wide public address system. “All hands stand by. Clear all passages. Stand down for emergency medical personnel. Medical staff, prepare to transport the pilot to sickbay. Father Maloney. Report to the flight deck. Repeat. Father Maloney to the flight deck.”

“They’re calling the Catholic chaplain.”

“Is Lieutenant Garcia Catholic?” the lieutenant asked.

“Yes, sir,” Najib answered. “I’ve talked to the lieutenant about his religion. He is Catholic and has a wife and two young children.”

“Oh, man.” The chief winced. “I hope they’re not calling the chaplain up to read him his last rites.”

A metal stretcher, dangling from a steel cable below a chopper, was slowly lowered over the life raft, like a ball at the bottom of a pendulum.

A frogman reached up from the raft, grabbed the dangling stretcher, and pulled it in.

The wind was whipping up, and the orange life raft rode the waves. A diver bent down and started mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Chest compressions followed, then more mouth-to-mouth.

As one diver continued the CPR, two others strapped the pilot’s feet, then his legs, onto the stretcher.

The diver administering the CPR backed off, and another diver fastened a waist belt around the pilot. The second diver gave a thumbs-up, and the motorized winch aboard the Seahawk lifted the stretcher skyward.

The pilot’s hand flopped over the side of the stretcher as the Seahawk reeled him up, higher and higher. Seconds later, airmen

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aboard the chopper reached out and pulled the stretcher in. The gray chopper turned, dipped its nose, and flew back toward the *Abraham Lincoln*. As it touched down on the carrier's fantail, two Navy doctors and four hospital corpsmen pushed a mobile stretcher to the cargo door. The Catholic chaplain, Lieutenant Brian Maloney, trailed a few feet behind the medical team.

The chopper's cargo bay door slid open. Two airmen from the chopper stepped out to the flight deck. They turned and pulled the stretcher basket carrying the pilot out of the chopper. They grabbed onto the head of the basket, and two hospital corpsmen grabbed the other end, then lifted the stretcher-basket onto the rolling gurney. A doctor started chest compressions while two corpsmen cut Garcia's flight suit away from his chest, their scissors glistening in the sun.

The medical team worked quickly, ignoring the sailors, including Najib, who had gathered behind them in a hushed semicircle.

The doctor switched to mouth-to-mouth resuscitation as the two corpsmen removed the cut-up flight jacket from the pilot's chest.

The doctor came up for air and waved for two other corpsmen. One approached with a satchel and held it up as the doctor extracted two electrical pads attached by cords to an electrical defibrillator inside the case.

The doctor touched the pads together, then placed the paddles at an angle on Garcia's chest. He nodded at the corpsman controlling the defibrillator. Garcia's chest jumped in reaction to the powerful electric jolt.

The doctor felt Garcia's throat. He motioned to another corpsman standing a few feet away. The second corpsman strapped an oxygen mask over the pilot's face. The lead doctor motioned, and the corpsmen rolled the stretcher away from the chopper. The pilot's hand dangled off the side as they pushed the gurney across the flight deck, finally disappearing inside the superstructure.

For a long time, the men stood on the flight deck enduring a whipping wind, staring in silence, unable to muster words. All thoughts were on the fate of the pilot.

DON BROWN

Najib, too, could find no words to say. First the ambassador. Now this. Was his fate in life to witness sudden and unexpected tragedy?

“This is the air operations officer. All hands remain at your stations. Flight operations will be suspended until we can check the catapult to ensure full operational capacity. Stand by.”

Tragedy was best forgotten by getting back to work. But another stand-down would delay even that.

This was the nature of the Navy. Hurry up and wait. What if they discovered a deficiency in the catapult system?

And what about the pilot, Lieutenant Garcia? What if he did not survive?

The situation looked bleak, but Najib could not worry about that now. The pilot’s fate, and his own, remained in God’s hands.

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**BRITISH AIRWAYS FLIGHT 442
FINAL APPROACH TO PHILADELPHIA NATIONAL AIRPORT
MAY 1**

If there had ever been a moment of greater excitement in all of his life than this very instant—except for when his son Najib was born—Hasan could not remember it.

He looked out in amazement as the British Airways jet taxied toward the terminal.

Out to the left, under sunny blue skies and wispy clouds, airplanes attached to Jetways were docked in front of long terminals. Their fuselages featured the painted markings of the great airlines they represented.

US Airways.
American.
United.
Southwestern.

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Air Canada.

Delta.

But it wasn't the sight of the aircraft that saturated his body with amazement. He had seen airliners before at Beirut International. Rather, it was the realization of where he was.

America!

Here there would be no mortars flying.

No more grenades exploding.

No more booby traps blowing off children's legs as they played in a park.

No more radical Islamists firing AK-47s into the air in the public streets, indifferent to where their bullets fell.

Here little boys don't worry about their fathers being shot dead on a trip to the market, gunned down in a civil war over religion.

America!

The land of the free!

He thought of his wife, Sabah, who died last year after a short bout with breast cancer. He had always hoped that when he first visited America, she would be with him. How he wished she could be here to share in this moment of excitement.

The first teardrop left a wet streak down his cheek. His right eye had also flooded. He wiped both eyes with his hand, hoping no one would notice.

The plane rolled to a stop. After the sound of a single electronic bell in the cabin, passengers stepped into the aisles and began popping open overhead bins, retrieving bags, laptops, and other items that were stowed in the overhead.

Hasan did not like being jammed shoulder to shoulder in crowds. Crowds brought horrible flashbacks from the day the ambassador died. He tried avoiding crowds. The good thing about sitting in a window seat near the back allowed him to wait until everyone else cleared out.

After all, the sun was shining on a new day. A strange warmth overcame him. It felt as if finally, he was home.

DON BROWN

He uttered a silent prayer of thanks. When his eyes opened again, the space around his seat had cleared.

Hasan exited the plane, stepping into the Jetway, quickening his step toward the terminal, which was off in the distance, over the shoulders of a few passengers walking out in front of him.

Approaching the end of the Jetway, he checked his shirt pocket to make sure his passport, visa, and tickets were in place. His connecting flight to Norfolk was in two hours. He would have to find the US Airways terminal, but that would give him at least an hour and a half to explore the airport after he cleared customs.

He stepped out of the Jetway into a flood of blinding lights, forcing him to squint his eyes.

Were those television cameras off to the left?

“Hasan Makari?”

He looked to his right.

“Freeze! Federal agents! TSA! Hands in the air! Don’t move!”

There were four agents, three men and one woman. They wore black pants, sky-blue shirts with shiny badges, black neckties, and shoulder boards. On the black shoulder boards, the letters TSA were embroidered in white.

Each agent, with both arms extended, gripped a black pistol pointed straight at his head!

“Hands up and freeze, terrorist punk!” A blinding light beam hit Hasan in the eyes.

He squinted, blocking the blinding light with his hands. “I am sorry. I do not understand.”

“Hands up, punk, or I blow your brains out!”

Had the plane turned around? Flown back to Beirut?

A hard blow to his stomach sent Hasan to his knees, gasping for breath.

“Federal Agent! TSA!” Someone jammed a gun to his temple. Someone else grabbed his arms, shackling his wrists behind his back with cold steel handcuffs. “You will follow instructions when given instructions by United States federal agents. Is that clear?”

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“Yes, sir.”

“Good! Now move! There are people who have a few questions for you. You have some explaining to do.”

They grabbed him by the arms, pulled him up from his knees, and shoved him forward.

The blinding lights obscured his visibility, but Hasan by squinting could see they were rushing him down a roped-off corridor in the terminal.

People were lined along the roped-off barriers on each side of the corridor. Armed police officers were standing at regular intervals. Camera flashes exploded as the federal agents rushed him past the crowd.

“Terrorist!” someone shouted from the crowd.

“Murderer!” from a woman’s voice.

“Burn in hell! Muslim pig!” a man’s voice from off to the right yelled as another flash went off.

“Stand back! Stand back!” a TSA ELITE agent yelled. The agents cleared a path through the bystanders.

“This way!” another ordered.

They stepped off to the left, through a set of large double doors, and were out of the main terminal.

The windowless hallway had narrow concrete walls and steel beams overhead.

Angry shouts of the crowd gave way to clicks of the agents’ boots echoing off the concrete floors.

Suddenly, they stopped.

Hasan heard a clinking. One of the agents was fiddling with a large ring of keys. He inserted a key into a large steel door, then pushed the door open. The room was dark, chilly.

The agent flipped on a fluorescent light, revealing an empty room with concrete walls.

“Get in there!” They shoved him inside, slammed the door, and locked it.

Hasan was alone.

DON BROWN

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**71261 ENGLISH IVY WAY
OFF OLD KEENE MILL ROAD
WEST SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA**

To any Washington insider, the phrase “inside the Beltway” referred to living inside the “Capital Beltway,” meaning any geographic location within the city of Washington, DC, bordering out to the great sixty-mile freeway loop around the city known as Interstate 495.

The upper crust of Washington, from diplomatic officials to high-ranking federal workers to top military brass often sought a prestigious address “inside the Beltway” in the upper-crust neighborhoods of Georgetown, Rock Creek Park, Bethesda, Arlington, and Alexandria.

Yet despite the allure of the “in-crowd” cocktail circuit, which ordinarily required residence in a blue-blooded community like Georgetown or Arlington or Alexandria, not all high-ranking officers of the United States military were enamored by the prestigious addresses of back-slapping cocktail sippers.

In the modest nineties-vintage three-story brick townhome off Old Keene Mill Road in West Springfield, Virginia, in a townhouse community called Millwood in a community located *outside* the Beltway, a slender redheaded woman in her early forties, wearing a navy-blue spandex workout suit and white Nikes, stood at her kitchen bar stirring a cup of hot green tea.

The woman had herself once been a naval officer, and a good one. If anyone had attained the professional and personal pedigree to occupy a more prestigious “inside the Beltway” address, it was she.

She attained the rank of lieutenant commander, becoming one of the best-known officers in the Navy JAG Corps. Her father was an admiral in the surface fleet. And now her husband served as a three-star vice admiral at the Pentagon.

But her husband never cared for fancy parties or political butt kissing. They lived where they lived because he had bought this townhouse

DETAINED

as a junior officer on an earlier tour at the Pentagon, and when he came back as judge advocate general of the United States Navy, though he could have afforded almost any respectable neighborhood inside the Beltway that he chose, he refused to waste the money.

“If my men can’t afford ‘inside the Beltway,’ and if it’s too expensive for our junior officers and enlisted men, then why should I separate myself from them?” he had asked her upon receiving news that he had been selected by the secretary of the Navy to return to Washington as judge advocate general. “And why spend the money?”

Her husband was a leader yet a man of the people. Brilliant yet unpretentious. Passionate yet cool under fire.

Handsome.

They began as bitter rivals, both as Navy lieutenants, fighting like cats and dogs. He won, and the electricity of opposites had left him irresistible to her. That enraged her—at first. But finally, Diane Brewer Colcernian, then a lieutenant commander in the United States Navy, surrendered her resistance. That cleft in his chin had sent her over the cliff. They were meant for each other.

And in the Rose Garden at the White House, in a surprise ceremony before the president, he had married her.

Even now, with her quadriceps aching from her vigorous daily workout, she remembered him and smiled. Still. After all these years.

Lights flashing from the flat-screen TV mounted on the kitchen wall caught her attention. TSA agents were leading a man in handcuffs through a tunnel of flashing lights. A message scrolled across the bottom of the screen: “Fox News Exclusive: Suspected terrorist arrested at Philadelphia International Airport.”

She reached for the remote and unmuted the TV. The voice of the venerable, longstanding Fox broadcaster Tom Miller filled the open-air townhouse.

“This is Tom Miller with this exclusive, breaking Fox News special report. Fox News has learned that US Homeland Security officers, primarily TSA officers, have arrested a suspected terrorist at the Philadelphia airport.

DON BROWN

“The suspected terrorist has been identified as Hasan Makari, who, according to TSA officials, is a suspect in connection with the murder of US ambassador to Lebanon George Madison, murdered by a car bomb in El-Mina in northern Lebanon eleven years ago.”

The screen switched to split shots, with a file photo of Ambassador George Madison on the left and an Arab-looking man on the right identified in a caption as “Hasan Makari.”

The screen switched back to footage of the handcuffed Arab-looking man being hurried along between a corridor in an airport terminal.

Tom Miller’s voice again: “Now Fox News has learned that Homeland Security and TSA agents intercepted Makari as he entered the country on a British Airways flight from Lebanon. We are told that the TSA has been investigating this case for some time, although we do not have more details. No comments from the White House, the State Department, or the Justice Department in connection with the capture of what we are told may be a high-profile suspected terrorist. Fox News will bring you more information as soon as we have it. And now we’re joined by terrorism expert Edward Lyons, who . . .”

Diane hit the Mute button. Her instinct as a former prosecutor screamed that something seemed fishy.

She picked up her iPhone and punched the first number on her autodial.

Voice mail.

She punched the second number.

Two rings.

“United States Navy. Office of the judge advocate general. Captain Foster speaking. You are on a nonsecure line subject to monitoring. May I help you, sir or ma’am?”

“Kirk?” She was talking to her husband’s chief of staff, Captain Kirk Foster. “This is Diane Brewer. Is the admiral available?”

“Afternoon, ma’am,” Foster said. “He’s on the phone with the secretary of the Navy. Would you like me to interrupt him?”

“Oh no. Just tell him I—”

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“Hang on, ma’am, I think he’s wrapping up right now.”

“Okay.”

“Here you go, ma’am.”

“Hi, baby.” The voice that still made her knees shake. “Sorry I couldn’t answer. Had SECNAV on the line. What’s cookin’?”

“Have you seen this breaking news story on Fox about an arrest of some suspected terrorist at Philadelphia International?”

“Hang on.” A pause. “Kirk, could you pass me that laptop, please?” A briefer pause. “Sorry, Di. No, I haven’t seen the report, but the secretary just mentioned it.”

“I don’t know what, but something seemed odd about it.”

“Sounds like the trial lawyer coming out in you. What’s odd about it?”

“I don’t know.” She sipped her tea. “It seemed so orchestrated, so contrived.” Another sip. “I mean, why have cameras there at the moment of an arrest? Can you imagine if SEAL Team Six had aired a live broadcast of the raid on Bin Laden?”

“No kidding. But you know these federal agent types. Especially TSA. They wish they were SEALs. Heck, they’d even give their left arm if somebody would call them FBI. Hang on a second. I’m going on the Fox website.” A second later. “Okay, I see it now. You’re right. Something does seem kind of odd about it. Smells like some publicity-loving bureaucrat tipped off the media.”

“I know,” she said. “I think I hate bureaucrats worse than my daddy did.”

“Spoken like a true admiral’s daughter.”

“How about like an admiral’s wife?”

“Now you’re talking about the luckiest admiral in the history of the US Navy.”

“Hah!” She sighed. “What time will you be home?”

“Let’s see . . . around eighteen hundred? That okay?”

“How about I thaw out a couple of rib eyes?”

“Get ’em thawed out. I’ll throw them on the grill,” he said. “Well done for you. Medium rare for me.”

DON BROWN

“Can’t wait to see you, Admiral Brewer,” she said.
“You too, baby!”

• • •

**TSA INTERROGATION ROOM
INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL
PHILADELPHIA NATIONAL AIRPORT**

Hasan sat alone on the concrete floor in a corner opposite the door. The calendar showed May 1, a season when the warmth of spring should have bloomed in the air outside.

But in this cinder-block windowless cell, hidden in the midst of a major American metropolitan airport, they had jacked the air-conditioning down so low that he was shivering.

His stomach ached with soreness from the punch he had taken. He could not even fathom the treatment he had received. Wasn’t this America? The land of the free? The home of the brave?

Thirty minutes had passed since they threw him in this place. He knew this because although they had taken his passport, his visa, his wallet, and his boarding pass for his connecting flight to Norfolk, and although they had not removed the steel handcuffs—for whatever reason—they had not taken his watch. He had set his watch’s alarm to go off at the top of the hour to help him remember the time for catching his next plane to Norfolk.

Above his head, in a panel in the ceiling, three fluorescent tubes buzzed, casting a white light in the room. It was the only sound.

Were they watching him?

He scanned the walls and the ceiling, searching for a small hidden camera. He saw nothing.

What a nightmare to start his visit to the land he had dreamed of. Hopefully they would clear this up and let him catch his flight to Norfolk in time for the *Abraham Lincoln*’s return from sea.

But what if they did not have it cleared up in time?

How would he get word to Najib?

DETAINED

The sound of shoes . . . boots . . . *click-clicking* against the floor outside. The clicking grew louder. Now more. The sound of multiple boots!

Perhaps they had the place bugged.

Perhaps they had heard the watch go off.

Jingling of keys.

The doorknob turned.

With a grating squeak from its hinges, the door opened.

He could see three or four in the hallway, milling about, talking. He could not hear what they said. They wore the same uniforms as the agents who confronted him when they threw him in this place—sky-blue shirts, dark pants. They all had guns.

A fat woman with short, cropped hair walked in carrying a metal folding chair.

She unfolded the chair and placed it in the middle of the room. “Stand up and sit in this chair.” Her voice was low, deep—a voice that sounded almost like a man’s. Her eyes were a pretty shade of green, set in a chubby, stoic face that showed no emotion.

“Yes, ma’am.”

He tried to get up, but with his hands cuffed behind his back, he lost his balance and fell down hard on the concrete floor.

“All right,” the woman said, “I’ll uncuff you. But don’t try anything stupid. We’ve got a dozen armed agents outside. If you try anything, you’re a dead man. Do you understand?”

“I will cooperate. But I do not understand why you are holding me.”

“I don’t care what you understand. Are we clear?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Roll over and lay on your stomach.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Hasan twisted himself around, belly down, his lips touching the cold concrete floor. Tears formed in his eyes.

“Martin,” the woman snapped. “Come help me.”

“Be right there.”

More footsteps.

A gun to his head.

DON BROWN

“All right, Mohammad,” the woman said, “I’ll take your cuffs off long enough so you can get up. But Sergeant Johnson here is going to keep this gun on you, and he will pull the trigger if you try anything.”

Hasan wanted to plead and tell her that this was a mistake. But something told him to remain silent.

She grabbed his wrist and fiddled with his handcuffs. Then the handcuffs unclasped.

“Okay. Push yourself up and go sit in the chair.”

He got on his feet, then sat in the chair.

As Hasan sat, the guard with the gun stepped back, keeping his gun pointed at Hasan.

“All right, Mohammed,” the woman said, “put your hands behind the chair.

“My name is Hasan. Not Mohammed.”

“You’re all Mohammed,” the woman sneered. “I don’t have time to debate with you about your name. Put your hands behind the chair or I’ll arrange to have your hands put anywhere I want them.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Before he could comply, she grabbed his arms with a vice-like grip. Her hands seemed too powerful for a woman. She clamped the handcuffs back onto his wrists.

“We’re ready, gentlemen.”

Two men wearing TSA uniforms rolled a cart into the room from the hallway. A medium-screen television sat on the cart.

As the two men were setting up the television, a third walked in. He carried a clipboard, and his uniform pants were tucked into black combat-looking boots.

“Are you Hasan Makari?”

At least he had gotten the name right. “I am he.”

“Tell me, Mr. Makari,” the man said as he glared at him, “are you Shiite or Sunni?”

“I am neither,” Hasan said. “I am not Muslim.”

“What are you?” the man snarled. “Are you Hindu?”

“I am Christian.”

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“Don’t lie to me, terrorist!” The TSA officer grabbed his pistol and whacked it across Hasan’s face.

“Aaaahhhh!”

Hasan jerked his head back. His nose throbbed. Blood ran down his lips and into his mouth.

“Clean the blood off his face,” his interrogator ordered.

The fat woman came toward him with a white rag in a gloved hand. He jerked back as she started to wipe off his face.

“Be still, Mohammed.” She put a hand on the top of his head and held him while she wiped the cold, wet rag across his face. When she pulled it away, it was drenched in blood. “There. That’s got it.” She walked out of the room, holding the rag in her hand.

The agent who struck him with the pistol said, “Do we have an understanding that it’s not wise to lie in response to my questions, terrorist?”

“I did not lie. I am not a terrorist.”

Slap!

Hasan saw stars after the open-handed slap to the left side of his face. The room started spinning.

“Hit him with smelling salts!” The man’s sharp voice cut through the fog.

“Hey, Mohammed! Wake up!” It was the voice of the woman again, sounding wavy, as if passing through water.

The smell of ammonia drifted up his nose.

Hard, instinctive coughing popped his eyes open. He blinked hard, gasping for air.

The grogginess evaporated. The room stopped spinning. The man’s piercing eyes glared at him.

“Now that we’re awake,” the man said, “we should become acquainted with one another. I am Inspector Gordon. Federal agent. United States Transportation Security Administration, United States Department of Homeland Security. I must confess, this is the first time I have ever ordered smelling salts for a terrorist and a murderer. I’d rather shoot a terrorist than revive one. So I must admit my disappointment in ordering smelling salts to your nose rather than a bullet to your brain.”

DON BROWN

“Please. This is a mistake. I am no terrorist. I love America.”

A prolonged belly laugh from the interrogator. “You love America? Now that is funny!” More laughter. “I tell you what. If you love America, then you love movies. Do you not?”

Hasan silently prayed for wisdom. The wrong answer could provoke another pistol-whipping. Perhaps worse.

“Well?” the TSA interrogator pressed. “Do you like movies?”

“Some I like. Some I do not care for.”

“Well, then,” Gordon said, “since you claim you have not had an opportunity to see many movies, I have some good news for you.” He paused, as if expecting Hasan to respond. “The United States government is going to help you make up some lost ground in the movie department. Sergeant?”

Another TSA officer aimed a remote control at the TV.

“I will be interested in hearing your comments about this movie,” Gordon said. The screen lit up.

A black limousine.

Motorcycles.

A parade route.

Lebanese and American flags.

Dear God, no! Hasan thought.

“Do I detect a look of recognition in your eyes, Hasan?”

“I remember this day.” His stomach knotted.

“I am certain that you do remember this day.” The interrogator sneered.

Hasan did not want to look. But he could not take his eyes off the screen.

The footage showed the ambassador’s limousine with the Lebanese and American flags flapping over the headlights as it moved along Al Istiklal Boulevard, approaching Mar Elias.

Cold sweat beads formed on his forehead.

On the screen, in slow motion, the ambassador’s motorcade approached the intersection of Al Istiklal Boulevard and Mar Elias.

Hasan’s heart pounded.

DETAINED

Why would God allow this to happen?

On the screen, the car turned from Al Istiklal to Mar Elias.

Hasan tried not to look. Yet he could not take his eyes off the screen.

The shot panned to the crowd. Then a closer shot.

“Freeze it!” Gordon ordered. He stepped to the screen with a pointer. “Closer.” The image enlarged. “Still closer!” The picture on the screen enlarged again.

The TSA officer stared at Hasan. “Tell me, Hasan Makari, do you recognize the individual right here standing beside this boy?” He tapped at the screen, pointing at the frozen shot of Hasan and Najib, both of whom were standing under the hot sun in the midst of the crowd, between two men carrying two signs proclaiming “Death to America.”

“Yes, I do,” Hasan said.

“So am I correct in assuming that this man, at the end of my pointer . . . that this man is you?”

“Yes, that is me.”

“And this boy”—*tap, tap*—“do you know this boy as well?”

“Yes. I know the boy.”

The TSA officer glared at him. “Who is he?”

“He is my boy, Najib.”

“And this is the same boy who now has infiltrated the United States Navy as a petty officer on board the USS *Abraham Lincoln*?”

“Najib is proud to serve in the US Navy. He enlisted legally with the help of a retired US Navy captain that he met at his church. I respectfully disagree with your characterization that he infiltrated the Navy.”

Gordon drew his hand back, in a striking position, and Hasan instinctively jerked back.

“You aren’t here to argue with my word choice. You are here to answer questions. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I understand.”

“So. It is true, therefore, is it not, that you and your son were there,

DON BROWN

and present, at the site, at the time and moment of our ambassador's assassination?"

Hasan nodded.

"Don't nod your head! Speak up! We are recording your statement. Our recorder cannot pick up a nod."

"Yes!" Hasan said. "We stood there alongside the road. We came to greet the ambassador. To welcome him to Tripoli and El-Mina."

"Hmm." The interrogator crossed his arms and stared down at Hasan. "And I take it you came to 'greet'—he made quotation marks with his fingers—the ambassador along with your friends? Did you?"

"I am sorry," Hasan said. "I do not understand."

"Your friends!" Gordon snapped. "The ones here. The ones carrying the signs saying 'Death to America.'"

"I do not know those people. I swear it."

"You don't know these people?" Gordon raised his voice. "They are standing beside you! One sign to your left and one to your right! For someone you do not know, you seem cozy with these two."

Hasan did not respond.

"You know, this will go much easier for you if you come clean." A pause. "Tell me, Hasan, the one on your left. What's his name?"

"I do not know him."

"You were standing right with him the whole time."

"No. Not the whole time. He happened to be there."

"Aw, come on. Who is the one on the right?" Gordon tapped at the other man, shown screaming and holding a Death to America sign. "Who is he?"

"I do not know."

"Liar!" The veins on each side of his head bulged. "You expect me to believe that moments before our ambassador is killed, you just happened to be standing between two angry Muslims holding Death to America signs, and you can't remember either one of their names?"

"There were others in the crowd holding pro-American signs," Hasan said.

"Aah." This time the TSA investigator wagged his finger in the

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air. “But you were not holding a pro-American sign, were you? You instead chose to align yourself with someone calling for the death of our ambassador.”

“I could not hold any signs, sir. I had my son with me. I could not lose track of him, lest he become lost in the crowd.”

“Hah!” Gordon sneered. “So your testimony is that you needed your hands free to keep track of your son?”

“My testimony?” Hasan said. “Am I on trial, sir? Many in the crowd that day did not hold signs.”

The TSA investigator leered at him. “Tell me, Hasan. Were there many in the crowd that day giving hand signals to cue a rocket attack on the ambassador’s car?”

Hasan hesitated. He prayed silently for wisdom. “I do not understand your question.”

“Aah! The same old terrorist refrain. ‘I do not understand,’” Gordon said with a tone of mocking sarcasm. “Perhaps this will jar your memory. Roll the tape,” he commanded. “Slow motion. Close-up.”

“Yes, sir.”

The image, frozen on the screen, moved again in slow motion.

The ambassador’s car turned left from Al Istiklal onto Mar Elias.

As the car turned, another close-up of Hasan flashed on the screen.

How he remembered the excitement of that moment. How proud he felt to be so close to the great American!

The slow-moving image showed Hasan throw his arms up, beginning a frantic wave at the American ambassador. What a happy moment that had been before . . .

“So, Hasan, how do you explain within seconds of your hand signals, the ambassador’s limousine exploded?”

“Hand signals?”

“Yes. Hand signals,” Gordon said.

“Those weren’t hand signals. I was waving at the ambassador.”

“Freeze the screen.”

The officer froze the screen.

“Close-up!”

DON BROWN

Another close-up frame showed Hasan pointing straight out.

"I see you are pointing at something. Perhaps signaling something?"

Hasan did not answer.

"Tell me, Hasan. Who are you signaling here? Or rather, what are you signaling?"

Hasan thought. "Wait a minute. This photograph is taken out of context. If you look at the film clip in its context, you will see that I am waving most of the time."

"Oh, I can see that you are waving up to a point," Gordon said. "But then you begin to point. Am I correct?"

Hasan did not respond.

"Well?" Gordon snapped. "Do you deny that you are pointing? Or are we imagining things as we look at the screen?"

"I do not deny what we see on the screen," Hasan said. "But I deny that I remember pointing. I do remember waving at the ambassador just before he died. It has been years."

Gordon nodded and toyed with his chin. "Just waving, and conveniently you do not remember pointing?"

"That is right, sir."

"Then tell me, Hasan, how do you explain this?"

He hesitated, then said, "Explain what?"

"Pull back on that angle and roll the tape, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir."

The screen flashed to a wide angle, still showing Hasan in the picture, his finger pointed out. The screen rolled again, in slow motion. Now in slower motion.

"Freeze it."

As the screen froze again, the tips of three rocket-propelled grenades, airborne, could be seen streaking in from the right side of the screen followed by three trails of smoke.

"Wider angle!"

The image on the screen morphed into a wider view.

On the screen, three RPGs flew at the limousine from the right side of the screen, just as Hasan had pointed from the left side of the screen.

DETAINED

“Okay, roll it.”

A TSA guard pressed the remote control, and on the screen was the image as the ambassador’s car exploded.

Hasan turned his head, wincing. Watching the explosion again, even on a screen eleven years later and 5,700 miles away, still cut to his core like a knife.

For the moment, the excruciating sensation of reliving that moment proved every bit as painful as the thug tactics that the buffoonish TSA agents had thrown at him the last thirty minutes.

“Do not feign horror with your facial gestures, as if somehow the event that you signaled is now somehow displeasing to you. No one will fall for your hypocritical theatrics.”

“I . . .” Hasan hesitated. He had read the words of Solomon, that even a fool appears wise when he remains silent.

“Well,” Gordon demanded, “what do you have to say for yourself?”

Hasan did not answer.

The punch across his jaw sent the room into a tailspin, generating a starburst across his eyes.

“Get him up!” someone said. They yanked him up by the arms, pulling him to his feet.

“Get him to the plane!” Gordon’s voice was like an echo through a fog.

“Where are you taking me?”

The TSA officers started to rush him back to the hallway.

“Hold him there,” Gordon said as he walked over to face Hasan. “You are going to a place where you will have far less incentive to stonewall when you are questioned by a federal agent.”

They shoved him along, back down the hall. They reentered the main terminal and were stopped by a wall of blinding lights and camera flashes.

“Stand back!” The TSA officers formed a human wedge and, pushing through the reporters, shielded Hasan in the midst of the wedge.

“Officer! Who is this man?” a reporter shouted.

DON BROWN

“Officer, is this man a terrorist?”

“Where are you taking him? What will you do with him?”

“No comment,” Gordon snapped.

“Officer. We’ve heard unofficial reports from some in the TSA that this man killed Ambassador Madison. Is this true?”

“No comment,” Gordon snapped.

“Just one question for the prisoner? Sir, were you involved in the plot to kill the ambassador?”

“Did you kill him?”

“Murderer!”

“I killed no one!” Hasan shouted at the blinding television lights as the TSA masters shoved him through the crowd.

A hand grabbed his mouth. “Shut your mouth, Mohammed.”

They crossed to the other side of the terminal and pushed through a set of double doors onto a concrete platform outside.

A gust of warm air and the whine of jet engines greeted them. Hasan squinted in the bright glare of the sun, and as he regained his vision, an officer pointed to a portable aluminum stairway leading down to the tarmac, where a white jet waited.

On the side of the jet, in dark blue, were the words “Department of Homeland Security—United States of America.”

“Down the steps. Move!”

Two TSA officers grabbed his arms and pushed him toward the stairway.

“Down the steps, Mohammed!”

Hasan started down the stairway toward the tarmac, but on the fourth step, his foot got caught. He instinctively tried jerking his hands to grab the handrails. But with steel cuffs clasp ing his wrists behind his back, he fell headfirst down the stairs.

His face smashed into the lower steps. Jets of sharp pain shot through his face and nose and teeth as he lay there, unable to move.

“Get him up!”

They grabbed his arms and yanked him down to the tarmac. His face scraped against the concrete.

DETAINED

“Mohammed, I’m going to uncuff you so you can get up. Don’t try anything.”

Hasan heard a *click*. A gun barrel was jammed against his head, then the handcuffs slid from his wrists.

“Push yourself up!”

“Please,” Hasan said as he pushed against the concrete, trying to get himself up. His eyes locked on the black front wheel of the big Homeland Security jet in front of him.

Two men grabbed him under the arms and yanked him to his feet. Blood was running down his face. He saw only a bright, unfocused swirl of sunlight, airplanes, blue sky, and men rushing about.

“Hey, wipe that blood off his face. The press could be filming this.”

“I’ve got a handkerchief.”

“Okay, wipe his face!”

A hand swiped a white handkerchief against his nose.

“Aaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

“I think he broke his nose. All right. That’s the best I can do with the blood, boss.”

“That’ll do. Get him in the plane.”

“Yes, sir. Move, Mohammed. Up the steps.”

•••

**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION HEADQUARTERS
ST. ELIZABETH’S CAMPUS
ANACOSTIA NEIGHBORHOOD
WASHINGTON, DC**

The middle-aged man, slightly portly and balding, crossed his arms over his belly and spun around in his chair. A large window behind his desk gave him a view of his vast brick and electronic kingdom. Beyond that, across the sparkling waters of the Potomac to the shores

DON BROWN

of Virginia, on the long runways of Ronald Reagan International Airport, a large jumbo jet touched down under the sunny Virginia skies.

The Chicago-based architectural firm of Perkins and Will had designed the secretary's office with one of the best views in Washington.

The battle over the construction of this massive project had divided along partisan political lines on Capitol Hill, with Democrats in Congress siding with the Obama administration to build it, and Republicans siding with former House Speaker John Boehner, branding it an expensive waste.

Not that it mattered now.

His kingdom was established. And though the man with his hands folded over his belly was a registered Republican, he smiled, knowing that in this case the good guys—the Democrats in Congress—prevailed, and Congress had spent the money to construct this state-of-the-art facility.

Fallington Strayhorn had registered as Republican because all career Washington insiders had to be registered to one party or the other. But the best career insiders understood that the camaraderie of bureaucratic philosophy that united them extended far beyond the nominal differences in the name of their political affiliation.

The role of the bureaucrat wasn't to be political. Both parties had funded his kingdom. Republicans established it under Bush. Democrats expanded it wildly under Obama.

Strayhorn gazed across the Potomac River.

The Reagans and Clintons and Obamas and Mack Williamses and Douglas Surbers and other flavor-of-the-day, flash-in-the-pan politicians would come and go.

Some, like Reagan and Williams, threatened to cut the Washington apparatus. Recently, the trend had gone too far in the wrong direction, with a bunch of budget-cutting garbage rhetoric from Congress and the new administration.

In public, Strayhorn always nodded, appearing to be in agreement

DETAINED

with his bosses at the White House. His private thoughts, however, did not match his public comments.

But he knew that in the end, the money faucets were always reopened. Career Washington insiders would remain forever.

The construction of the new Homeland Security headquarters overlooking the Potomac, built on the site of the old St. Elizabeth's Hospital, was a victory for government expansionism and, whether they understood it or not, a victory for all Americans.

"Mr. Secretary?"

Strayhorn wheeled around from his view of the river to pick up the phone on his desk. "Yes, Carol."

"The TSA director is here to see you, sir."

"It's about time he got here. Send him in, please."

"Yes, sir."

The secretary of Homeland Security rose to his feet as an aide pushed open his office door for the arrival of the administrator of the Transportation Security Administration.

"Come in, Billy," Strayhorn bellowed and reached out to shake the hand of his subordinate Billy McNamara, a tall, slender, balding man in his forties and the nation's newest TSA administrator. McNamara, career Civil Service, had proved himself as a loyal TSA man since the Obama administration.

"Thank you, Mr. Secretary," McNamara said. "I'm sorry I'm a bit late, sir. We were finishing the white paper that you had requested."

"Have a seat, Billy."

"Thank you, sir."

"Before we get to the white paper, it looks like your people have done a decent job with the situation in Philadelphia. I've been following some of the events on Fox and CNN. There seems to be some positive publicity so far. We need all the positive publicity we can get. You know as well as I do that some of our renegade Tea Party Republicans are talking cuts again. Our House leadership is having a hard time keeping them under control."

"I'm well aware, sir. We've gotten a slew of Congressional inquiries

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in the last week alone. Some are even talking about defunding or eliminating TSA. Congressman Barnes from Texas is on a rampage.”

“Barnes is out of control,” Strayhorn said. “I wish the president would call him on the carpet.”

“Where does the president stand on all this budget-cutting talk from these Tea Party types?” McNamara asked.

“Hard to say, Billy. He’s new. He’s got other fish to fry. He’s a hard-liner in the War on Terror and on China. He’s big on defense but talks a fiscal conservative line on domestic programs. If push came to shove, I’ve got a feeling he might side with some of these Tea Party kooks. That’s why we have to walk a fine line here. We have to make it appear on the outside that we’re toeing the party line with the president while at the same time protecting the interests of the department.”

McNamara nodded. “Agreed, sir.”

“Tell me”—Secretary Strayhorn took a sip of coffee—“what’s our current situation in Philadelphia?”

“The ground officer in charge is Inspector John Gordon, one of our more experienced armed air marshal officers. All of the officers on the ground handling the Makari arrest are armed air marshals. As you’re aware sir, air marshals are currently the only regular TSA agents authorized to carry weapons.”

“Hopefully, that changes soon.”

“Agreed, Mr. Secretary. Gordon and his men better keep everything under control. I hear they’re getting this Hasan Makari on the plane as we speak, sir. Our PR people have slipped talking points to the press, along with mug shots of Makari, with the credit line photo courtesy of TSA.”

Strayhorn nodded. “Nice touch. I like it. Keep the agency’s name in front of the voters and in front of Congress.”

“Thank you, sir. Our PR people are on top of it. We have a presser scheduled at TSA headquarters in one hour. As the cabinet member over the agency, you’re welcome to join me at the press conference, Mr. Secretary.”

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Strayhorn crossed his arms. “Since the public sees this as a TSA operation, let’s not obfuscate things. No, I think it’s best if you appear alone as TSA administrator. There’s a time and place for me to appear in the future, but not now. Not yet.”

“Very well, Mr. Secretary.”

“Now, about this white paper. You say you have it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you’re sure you’ve maintained absolute secrecy on this?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Because you know, if this thing leaked, with this Makari arrest going on, we’d have a colossal disaster on our hands.”

“Yes, sir. Understand. At this point, only three members of the general counsel’s staff have seen the document, and they were involved in drafting it with my input. Then there’s me and now you, sir.”

“Very good,” Strayhorn said. “Tell you what. Why don’t you head back to TSA to prepare for your press conference? You can leave the paper with me, I’ll study it, and we’ll discuss it in a day or so.”

“Yes, Mr. Secretary.” The TSA administrator stood up, pulled a package from his briefcase, and laid it on Strayhorn’s desk.

“You’re still planning to do the other press conference in the morning?”

“Yes, sir. We want to give the networks the chance to digest the news of the arrest today. We’ll announce tonight that we will have an important press conference in the morning. Word will get out, and members of Congress will tune in. Our PR people are telling us the presser will have maximum impact by letting the media chew on it all night.”

“Excellent thinking, Billy. We need to milk this for all it’s worth.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Anyway, good luck with your press conference today.” Strayhorn grasped the hand of his subordinate. McNamara’s handshake was the wimpish fish shake of the professional bureaucrat.

But that’s exactly why Strayhorn handpicked him. McNamara’s

DON BROWN

lack of ambition and his team-player mentality would advance the dual interests of the TSA and of Homeland Security. Plus, McNamara would keep his mouth shut. The Navy's famed saying "Loose lips sink ships" also rang true within the federal bureaucracy.

Loose lips and self-appointed whistleblowers had brought great embarrassment upon the State Department in the wake of the terror attacks on Benghazi.

He thought of the traitorous insiders who had brought great embarrassment upon the IRS's auditing practices during the Obama administration, including the grilling of one of its directors by irate members of Congress.

Confidentiality and information control were essential to the effective operation of any agency. That meant selecting trustworthy bureaucrats who lacked personal ambition, aside from the ambition of drawing a paycheck and perpetuating the agency.

Strayhorn personally selected these personality types to work under him. In this way, he would avoid the type of personal embarrassment that had befallen former secretary of state Hillary Clinton and former IRS director Steven Miller.

He would not tolerate traitorous information leakage at Homeland Security. His secret historic plans for the department—to make it the greatest, most powerful department in the executive branch—demanded confidentiality!

He would succeed with bureaucrats like McNamara. Effective. Unambitious. Tight-lipped with skilled paper-pushing abilities.

Strayhorn opened the packet McNamara had left on his desk and pulled out the document.

Confidential White Paper
United States Department of Homeland Security
Transportation Safety Administration
Overview of the SITUS Project
Proposals for Logistical Implementation

DETAINED

TOP SECRET

Eye Only Approval by the Secretary

He smiled. Goose bumps crawled over his shoulders and arms. His great vision would soon become reality.

• • •

71261 ENGLISH IVY WAY

WEST SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA

1 HOUR LATER

Diane Brewer, dressed in a white tennis skirt and pink polo shirt, checked her watch as she stepped out onto the front stoop of the townhouse. If she hurried, she could make it to Macy's to purchase a few items before heading to Arlington for a tennis date with Admiral Lettow's wife at Fort Myer.

The lime-green summer dress on sale was to die for. And Zack loved her in green. He said it brought out the color of her eyes. She had just called. One remained in a size 4 and would be gone soon if she didn't hurry. She wanted to surprise Zack when he got home. That thought brought a smile to her face.

If she left now, she could grab the dress, try it on, and buy it, but she would be late for her tennis match.

Maybe she should phone in her credit card and tell them to hold the dress.

But what if it didn't fit?

She made a command decision. She'd stop by the mall.

Besides, it wasn't like Admiral Lettow had more stars on his collar than Zack. Their husbands were both staff officers—Zack, the head of Navy lawyers, and Jeff Lettow, the chief of chaplains. No need for either admiral's wife to kowtow to the other.

Besides, Crystal Lettow was perpetually late. And Crystal would never pass up a deal at the mall, especially not for a tennis match.

DON BROWN

Diane slid into her Audi convertible, cranked the engine, and opened the top, relishing the sun and the warm breeze caressing her forehead and flowing through her hair.

She backed the Audi out her driveway and turned down English Ivy.

Just as she reached the entrance of the neighborhood, before she turned onto Old Keene Mill Road, she remembered.

“My tennis racket.”

She pumped her brakes, swinging the Audi into a tight U-turn. Zack would have to wait on the sundress surprise. Oh well. She had a couple of other options in the closet that he’d not seen in a while.

Not to worry. Zack adored her even if she wore the same thing for a solid month.

She smiled.

Wheeling the Audi into the driveway, she got out, slipped the key in the front door, opened it, and punched in the code to shut off the irritating *beep-beep-beep* of the alarm system.

She stepped into the townhouse, jogged up two flights of stairs to the cathedral-ceilinged master bedroom, grabbed her tennis racket from the closet, then ran back down to the main deck.

The image on the flat screen stopped her in her tracks.

The words on the bottom of the screen proclaimed, “TSA Administrator McNamara Addresses Press on Arrest of Terrorist.”

She watched the wimpish-looking bureaucrat with pale skin standing behind the podium. “This must be the new TSA administrator,” she thought.

She picked up the remote and pressed Unmute.

“This is a great day for the TSA and a great day for America. Today the agency has proven its value in maintaining security at the nation’s airports and as a crack investigative agency to be deployed in the War on Terror. Like Osama bin Laden, Hasan Makari has been on the terror watch list for years. What a watershed day for TSA, and for the entire nation. We take great pride in knowing that TSA cracked the case. I’d like to thank . . .”

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Her phone rang.

Zack.

She muted the TV.

“Hi, Zack.”

“Hi, sweetie. What’s up?”

“I was headed out to play tennis with Crystal and forgot my racket. When I came in, this new TSA guy is on the tube claiming credit for the biggest arrest since bin Laden. These wimps make my skin curl. I’m so glad I’m married to a handsome he-man.” She chuckled.

“Listen, baby, I’m afraid your handsome he-man won’t be home for dinner.”

“Really?” What now? She couldn’t contain her disappointment. “What? The secretary of the Navy again?”

“I wish. I’m going to Norfolk.”

“On such short notice?”

“Afraid so.”

“Are you driving down?”

“No, we’re taking the chopper.”

“Are you taking Kirk?”

“Yep. Kirk and Commander Melesky.”

They’d been married for eight years now, but even still, it crushed her when they were apart. “You can’t stop by for a few minutes first?”

“I wish.”

“I’ll make it worth your while.”

He laughed. “Don’t tempt me.”

“But I *love* tempting you.”

“I know you do. But this is a hot matter, and I have to deal with it.”

“I’ll be back as soon as I can, Diane. I’ll miss you.”

“I love you.”

“Love you too.”

The line went dead.

Diane looked up at the flat screen and cut the power.

Time for tennis.

DON BROWN

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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

BOEING DC-9

3 HOURS LATER

They had shoved him into a small jump seat and had chained his cuffs to a bar bolted into the bulkhead. Then they cut all the lights in the cabin and closed the door.

At least they had not hit him since the flight took off from Philadelphia. But the deep painful throbbing in his face and nose reminded him of their brutality.

How long had he been strapped in the plane? He guessed at least three hours because he knew his body could last only two and a half hours without a bathroom break.

The sharp pain in his bladder had become unbearable some time ago. He finally had lost control, relieving himself in his pants. Now the throbbing in his head and nose had subsided a bit.

About twenty minutes or so ago, after the accident in his pants, the plane had gone through severe turbulence. The bumping started as sporadic, then became more violent. In the dark cabin with no visibility, each hard bump, each sudden drop in altitude, each rattling sound seemed magnified.

Jets of pain shot through his mouth. The TSA bullies had broken a tooth when they punched him.

Through the darkness, he saw a jump seat in front of him and a small solitary red light, about the size of a Christmas-tree light, burning up in the forward section of the plane, over what appeared to be the closed entryway to the cockpit.

The Americans had transformed this jet into a dark prison plane.

With the plane flying smoothly again, his mind wandered back to the days of his youth, to the stories Eugene Allison had told him about the great apostle Paul being held in prison for his faith. Eugene Allison had warned him of the cost of following Christ.

DETAINED

He remembered the words of the missionary even to this day.

“Hasan, the time is coming when they’ll imprison us for our faith in Christ and torture us. And not just in places like Iran or Lebanon. I’m talking America too. So if you accept this Jesus, you need to know that doing so could come at a heavy cost.”

“I want to accept him, knowing all the costs,” Hasan had said that night. The missionary had led him in something called “the sinner’s prayer” and gave him some Bible verses.

Years later, memories of that night had never faded, and Hasan never forgot what Eugene Allison had told him about Paul being in prison. Hasan went on to memorize portions from the apostle’s letters about imprisonment.

Was this, now, his personal punishment for embracing Christianity? His price for following Christ?

That made no sense.

His interrogators had referred to him, sarcastically, as “Mohammed” and accused him of being Muslim.

“Jesus, what’s going on? Please help me!”

Najib!

Wherever they were taking him, it probably was not Norfolk. Najib would sail into port, and he would not be there.

How would he get a message to Najib?

Even if the face bashing he had taken had broken his nose, his tear ducts had not been damaged. But thinking of Najib standing alone, searching for him, not knowing his fate . . . cool tears flowed across his bruised cheeks, accentuating the throbbing pain.

Najib was all he had here on earth. In the dark reality of this, the darkest hour of his life, he could not stop thinking about his son.

He had replayed the scene in his mind a thousand times—and now—a thousand and one. He had planned on shooting Najib a smart salute the moment he stepped off the ship. Then he would hug him and not want to let go.

But now, in this dark prison plane, Hasan wondered if he would ever see Najib again before they met in heaven.

DON BROWN

His throat thickened, signaling the onset of more tears.

For the moment, the darkness in the plane was a blessing. They could not see him cry. Still, he sensed their evil presence, like predators hiding in the shadows.

Hasan closed his eyes and prayed. Perhaps he could sleep.

A change in the whine of the engines was followed by pressure in his ears. The high-pitched sound of the engine morphed into a muted garble. The pressure intensified, as if someone had connected a pressurized tire pump to his head.

Hasan tried working his jaw to relieve the tightening, but the pain in his jaw would not permit it.

The pressure sharpened, like someone pushing a power drill in each ear. His head was like a balloon about to explode. He winced from the pain, and then . . .

Pop . . .

Pressure relieved. Thank God.

The sound of the jet engines returned, at least halfway, and then his stomach jumped up as the plane dropped.

Another drop. Then another pressure-relieving *pop* in his right ear, leaving his right ear liberated. His left ear was still half plugged.

A whining sound: the plane's landing gear activating.

His prayer was whispered. "Lord, whatever happens to me, please protect Najib. Please be with him."

Another *pop*. This time in his left ear.

A bumping jolt. The thudding sensation of rubber wheels on a concrete runway. A reverse swooshing from the engines, then braking.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters . . ."

The plane rolled to a stop.

Bright lights flooded the cabin, blinding his dilated pupils, sending his eyes into a protective squint.

"Okay, Muhammad, we're here." The gruff voice came from the back of the plane. "We're home."

DETAINED

Hasan looked up. Two TSA guards stood in the aisle. One stepped past his seat and leered down at him with piercing black eyes.

“Hold your hands out,” the other said. But the guard’s demands were impossible, since Hasan’s hands were chained to the bulkhead.

Hasan remained silent.

The guard reached over him and inserted a key in the dead-bolt lock. The chains fell to the deck of the aircraft. The guard did not unlock the handcuffs.

“Okay, get up.” The guard tipped his head back, displaying a cocky-looking smugness on his face.

Hasan pushed up with his legs and discovered that his right foot was asleep.

“Move to the back of the plane,” the guard ordered.

Hasan stepped into the aisle between the empty seats, but his right foot had not recovered sensation. Unable to brace himself because his hands were cuffed behind his back, he stumbled to his knees.

“What’s the matter with you, Muhammad?” The guard grabbed him by the collar, yanking him to his feet. “You’ll have plenty of time to pray to Mecca where you’re going.”

“I am sorry. I stumbled.”

“Move!” A hard shove in the back.

Hasan stepped forward. An armed TSA agent standing in the back of the plane, in front of the rear restroom, pushed open the door of the cabin. Sunlight flooded the back of the rear cabin.

The TSA guard behind Hasan said, “Keep moving.”

Halfway down the aisleway, Hasan caught a whiff of warm, moist, salty air, which brought back memories of that day in Tripoli, in El-Mina.

“Keep moving.”

Hasan reached the tail section of the aircraft, where the rear guard pointed out the door. “Out of the plane!”

He stepped out onto the top of the portable Jetway. The airstrip lay on a narrow peninsula, with aqua-blue water on both sides.

Several US Navy and US Coast Guard planes sat on the tarmac. At the bottom of the stairway, a group of armed men in light-colored

DON BROWN

camouflage military uniforms, wearing caps and boots, stood in a semicircle. On their sleeves they wore armbands with the initials "SP." A tan Humvee sat parked behind the men.

"Okay, down the steps. Those men waiting down there are US Marines. When you reach the tarmac, if you know what's good for you, you will do what they tell you to do."

"Yes, sir."

The salty breeze whipped up again as Hasan took his first step down into a sun-drenched, late afternoon. With his hands remained cuffed behind him, Hasan proceeded carefully. He stepped down the portable stairway with his left foot, then his right.

"Get a move on!"

He took another step. Then another. The tropical breeze caressing his face was refreshing. He was grateful to be outside.

The TSA officers up in the plane behind him barked at him a couple more times, but he paid them no mind and stepped down onto the tarmac.

A uniformed man stepped forward.

"Mr. Makari. I'm Captain Roger Kohlman. United States Marine Corps. If you would follow me please, sir, we're going to have you take a seat in the back of this Humvee over here. A couple of my men will be riding with you."

"Certainly, Captain," Hasan said. He walked toward the Humvee with the two Marines, one on each side.

A Marine opened a back door and directed him into the seat. Hasan noted the difference in how they treated him. They had a matter-of-fact, polite professionalism. They were US Marines.

This brief handover from the TSA to the Marines gave him hope that the United States military, of which his son was a member, was way above the TSA gangsters.

A Marine guard, a pistol in his side holster, got in the backseat beside Hasan. Another armed Marine got in on the other side of the Humvee, squeezing Hasan into the middle of the backseat.

Captain Kohlman got into the front seat, beside the driver.

DETAINED

They remained silent as the Humvee moved forward.

As they pulled away from the plane, Hasan looked over his shoulder. Another Humvee full of Marines followed close behind. He had not noticed this second Humvee when he stepped off the plane.

They drove past the terminal, leaving the runway behind.

The large sign posted beside the terminal sent his body into an instant chill.

Welcome to
Leeward Point Field
United States Naval Station
Guantánamo Bay, Cuba

• • •

FLIGHT DECK

USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN

APPROACHING NORFOLK NAVAL STATION

The long string of warships, a tapestry of battleship-gray lined up along the four-mile waterfront of the Norfolk Naval Station, represented the mightiest display of concentrated firepower of any place on earth.

A quarter mile out, in bay waters that were beginning to stir, a long, sonorous blast from a navigation tug off to the starboard of the supercarrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* signaled that the concentration of firepower along the world's largest naval base would soon grow greater.

All along the perimeter of the *Lincoln's* flight deck, more than a thousand sailors stood shoulder to shoulder at parade rest in white uniforms and Dixie cup hats.

Along both sides of the carrier, four navigation tugs pushed the great ship toward Pier 12, to be moored alongside her sister ship, USS *George H. W. Bush*.

Petty Officer Najib Makari, standing along the starboard of the ship, held his shoulders back and jutted his chin out. Keeping his head straight in the afternoon Virginia breeze, he allowed his eyes to wander

DON BROWN

to the left and right, scanning the large crowd of well-wishers and family members down along the pier.

He bit his lower lip to suppress his smile. Warriors weren't supposed to smile, which would prove unmilitary if his father happened to be watching him through binoculars. Najib would look the part of the brave, disciplined American sailor to make his father proud.

Of course his father, whether he had spotted Najib yet or not, was out there smiling, taking pride in the accomplishments of his son. Neither father nor son would ever forget this day, and never had Najib been prouder to be a member of the United States Navy.

For the moment, anyway, the mishaps that had plagued the ship for the last couple of days—the loss of a jet in the Atlantic, the still-uncertain fate of the pilot, Lieutenant Mark Garcia, whose plane had plunged in the ocean on takeoff—faded in the pageantry of the moment.

Najib found himself lost in it all. He could not wait to see the look on his father's face when they were reunited.

The navigation tugs pushed the *Lincoln* up against Pier 12 as Najib stood on the starboard edge of the flight deck, the side facing the cheering crowds down on the pier.

He searched along the pier, hoping to catch a glimpse of his father. Amid the cheering throngs and smiling faces, dozens of signs were held by loved ones hailing the return of the great ship.

Welcome Home Petty Officer Martinez!
We Love You Daddy!—Helena And John Paul
Lieutenant Evans—Welcome Home And Roll Tide!
Chief Gimler And The Us Navy! #1 In Our Hearts!

Hundreds of signs were interspersed in the crowd of several thousand. Between the signs, throughout the crowd, camera strobes exploded, and television crews stood along the dock, determined to cover the triumphant return on the evening news.

On the other side of Decatur Avenue, across the street from Pier

DETAINED

12, the base McDonald's had a sign draped on it that read, "Welcome Home USS *Abraham Lincoln*."

The signs provided no clue as to the whereabouts of Hasan Makari in the crowd. Najib's dad was too reserved for such attention-getting flamboyance.

Down below, on the hangar bay, as the Navy band transitioned from "Anchors Aweigh" to "God Bless America," sailors threw ropes at shore station crewmen on the pier.

Pier crewmen started moving catwalks into place. A few minutes later, Najib's shipmates began walking across the gangplanks, stepping on the pier to a sea of hugs, kisses, high fives, and handshakes.

One major advantage of being assigned to the honorary deck detail on the flight deck was that the high vantage point allowed one to see everything down below as the ship pulled into port.

The biggest disadvantage—the deck detail would disembark the ship last. Witnessing the joyous family reunions down below, Najib wished that he had not been selected for deck detail as his heart pounded with excitement about being with his father again!

His mind wandered to the coming evening. He would take Hasan out for a big, fat, juicy American steak at the Norfolk Chophouse, the highly popular, longstanding steakhouse near the main gate of the naval base.

Najib loved the Chophouse. Fabulous food. A reasonably priced menu fitting the budget of a third-class petty officer.

"Petty Officer Makari."

Najib turned around. The ship's executive officer, Commander Hugh Bennett, was walking out from the superstructure. This marked the first time the XO had ever called his name.

"Yes, sir."

"Would you step over here, please?"

Two men in dark shades and navy-blue civilian suits stood beside the XO, along with Master Chief Martinez, the ship's master at arms.

Najib broke from the ranks and walked across the flight deck toward the XO.

DON BROWN

“Sir.” Najib popped a salute at Commander Bennett.

“Petty Officer.” Bennett returned the salute. “Please follow us.”

“You want me to fall out of formation, sir?”

“You heard me, son. Fall out and come with us.”

“Yes, sir.”

Najib swallowed hard and followed the men to the ship’s towering steel superstructure looming over the flight deck, referred to as the “Island.”

Something felt odd. Who were these men in navy-blue suits?

They stepped inside the main doors of the Island. Bright fluorescent lighting flooded the large steel interior spaces. Only a skeleton crew remained inside, as most of the ship’s crew members had gathered on the deck and were now forming into lines to cross the catwalks for liberty.

The XO directed the two men to walk over to his left. Then he looked at Najib. “Petty Officer Makari, this is Special Agent Harry Kilnap of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.”

One of the blue-suited men stepped forward and stood just in front of Najib. “Aviation Boatswain’s Mate Third Class Najib Makari?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’m Special Agent Harry Kilnap, a federal agent. Naval Criminal Investigative Service.” Kilnap glared angrily with piercing eyes. His salt-and-pepper hair sported a grayish streak. His baritone voice revealed a twisted Yankee-sounding accent like the sailors from Long Island.

Najib stood still, at first unable to speak. Then he managed to say, “Yes, sir.”

“It is my duty to inform you that you are under arrest.”

“Under arrest? For what?”

“Master Chief,” Kilnap said, “please cuff the prisoner.”

“But—”

“I’m sorry, Makari.” The master at arms stepped behind Najib, grabbed his arms, and cuffed his wrists behind his back.

“Petty Officer Makari,” Kilnap said, “it is my duty to inform you

DETAINED

of your rights under Article 31 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

“You have the right to remain silent. If you give up the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be used against you. You have the right to speak with an attorney, and to have an attorney present with you during questioning . . .”

• • •

**HEADQUARTERS
MID-ATLANTIC REGION LEGAL SERVICE OFFICE
DEFENSE SERVICE OFFICE SOUTHEAST
US NAVY JAG CORPS
US NAVAL BASE
NORFOLK, VIRGINIA**

The United States naval officer, decked out in his comfortable working khaki uniform, wore the two silver bars of a Navy lieutenant on his right collar and the millrind insignia of the US Navy JAG Corps on his left collar. He leaned back in his chair, kicked his feet up on his desk, and watched the clock on his wall *tick-tick-tick* toward 1700 hours.

He was listening to the carryings on of his latest dalliance, the Lieutenant Commander Amy Debenedetto, who at that moment sat at her desk at the Regional Legal Services Detachment at Oceana Naval Air Station, some twenty miles away.

They had dated twice, secretly, in the face of the institutional military taboo against dating senior officers. Frankly, their dates had been out of this world.

Amy sizzled. But why did they all want to get so serious so fast?

“Talk to me, Matt,” she said. “What are you afraid of?”

“Me? Afraid?” He chuckled. “You know I’m not afraid of anything, ma’am.”

“Stop calling me ma’am. You don’t have to do that in private. You weren’t doing that on your sailboat last Friday night.”

He smiled. “I guess you’ve got a point about that.”

DON BROWN

“That’s part of the attraction.” A flirtatious yearning saturated her voice. “You’re the only Navy JAG defense lawyer who lives on a sailboat. How can a girl not be attracted to that?”

He chuckled again and looked out his window at the sparkling waters of Hampton Roads. “That I plead guilty to, ma’am.”

“I told you to stop calling me ma’am!” A short pause. “You make me sound like your grandmother!”

“Okay! Okay! To the charge of being the only JAG officer who lives on a sailboat, I plead guilty.” A pause. A smile. “You’re a great-looking sailor!”

“I like that.” A thrill in her voice. “That’s more consistent with your sailboat language, if I recall correctly.”

“Oh, I’m sure you recall correctly,” he said. “Just make sure I don’t slip up with that in public.”

“Oh, I don’t envision any slipups from you. Besides, you know I’m just one pay grade above you, Matt. I’m not that much older, so it’s not like an admiral dating an ensign or something. One pay grade difference can work. Besides, we’re not even in the same chain of command. That could be raised as a defense if anybody said anything.”

Matt shifted his feet, from right over left to left over right. “No, we’re not in the same chain of command. At least not yet. Right now, you’re in charge of helping sailors with wills and powers of attorney. But if they make you senior trial counsel at Oceana, like they’ve discussed, then you become a supervising prosecutor, and we’d have a direct conflict of interest. And you know it.”

Silence.

“Also,” he added in the face of her silence, “although it’s true that we’re only one grade apart, with me being a lieutenant and you being a lieutenant commander, you know as well as I do that you’re up for the next promotion board to commander, and if you get picked up, there will be two full pay grades between us. A lieutenant and a lieutenant commander is one thing . . . but a lieutenant and a full commander? Please. Tell me that won’t bring out the fraternization nannies.”

Three sharp raps on his door.

DETAINED

“Hang on, Amy.” He put his hand over the phone. “Come in.”

The door opened.

The sudden sight of high-ranking brass.

“Attention on deck!”

Matt slammed down the phone and shot up from his chair, coming to full attention.

For the first time in his young naval career, he was speechless. Of course, this marked the first time that a three-star admiral had paid a visit to his office with a full-bird navy captain.

His mind flew into instant hyper-gear. Why were they here? How had he screwed up?

He must have been busted. That had to be it. Someone had blown the whistle. People talk. Maybe someone saw Amy come onto his sailboat down at the marina. He should have known better. Women talk.

The scuttlebutt got out. NCIS probably followed her to his sailboat. They probably had pictures and a full report.

He tried to think. Had he closed the curtains over the portholes? He couldn't remember. Sweat beaded on his forehead.

Now his commanding officer and the judge advocate general of the Navy had come to personally bust him. Perhaps take him to admiral's mast here on the spot. Or even worse, announce that they were convening a summary court-martial against him for unlawful fraternization.

Why did he have to like an older, higher-ranking woman?

“Captain Rudy. Admiral Brewer. To what do I owe this honor so late in the afternoon?”

“Are you saying, Lieutenant Davis, that our presence here is an honor only because we are here at a time, as you describe it, that is ‘late in the afternoon’?”

The words of the admiral stunned him again. Matt Davis stood in awe of only a handful of people. But the judge advocate general of the Navy, Vice Admiral Zack Brewer, was in that group.

Admiral Brewer's sudden presence in his office was the JAG Corps equivalent of Moses descending from Mount Sinai.

Matt's tongue froze, then unthawed again. “Sorry, sir. No, sir. Of

DON BROWN

course it's an honor to have you here any hour of the day. A Freudian slip, sir."

"Nice recovery, Lieutenant," Brewer said. "Listen, son, the captain and I need a word with you. And for your sake, it would be better if what we have to say is not broadcast to the public. But if we have to stand out here in the passageway and tell you what we have to tell you through this open door, there's no telling who might hear."

He was cooked. He knew it. "My apologies, Admiral. Captain. Please come into my office. But my office is small. Perhaps there's another place that's more comfortable for you. Perhaps you would wish to chat in the captain's office or somewhere else?"

Brewer looked at Rudy. "What do you think, Captain Rudy?"

"The lieutenant's office is fine with me, Admiral. As far as I'm concerned, the sooner we get this done, the better."

"Agreed." Brewer stepped in and motioned for Rudy to follow him. "Captain Foster?"

"Yes, sir." Another officer stepped into view in the hallway. Captain Kirk Foster was Brewer's chief of staff.

"Would you get the door, please? We need some privacy with Lieutenant Davis."

"Certainly, Admiral." Foster closed the door, leaving Matt alone with Brewer and Rudy in the small office.

"Sit down, Lieutenant," Brewer ordered.

"Yes, sir."

"Mind if the captain and I also sit?"

"Not at all, sir. Please, have a seat."

"I think we'll take you up on that." Brewer sat in the chair on the left facing Matt's desk. Rudy took the chair on the right.

"So," Brewer began and held his eyes with a penetrating stare, "I hear you live on a sailboat, Lieutenant Davis."

They knew.

Brewer in his day was the best trial lawyer in the Navy. In fact, perhaps the best in the world. And he had proffered the question with the savvy of a skilled cross-examiner about to pounce on his helpless prey.

DETAINED

Matt cleared his throat. “Yes, sir, Admiral. I keep her moored over at the Little Creek Marina.”

“Good choice,” Brewer nodded. “Tell me about her.”

“Thirty-foot sloop. Manufactured by Alpha out of Seattle. She runs a mainsail and a jib under way. Makes for a great place to bunk out during the week, sir. Sure beats paying rent, sir.”

“Sounds sleek,” Brewer said. “What did you name her?”

Matt looked away, then looked back at Brewer. “Well, sir . . . I . . . I named her *Not Guilty*, sir.”

The admiral raised an eyebrow. “So did you name her that because of your string of ‘not guilty’ verdicts in the last ten general courts-martial you’ve tried? Or because of your supreme confidence in your own abilities as a defense counsel?”

Matt looked down. “Sir, I christened her *Not Guilty* when I found out they were sending me here from the Justice School to be a defense counsel. So at the time I had no not-guilty verdicts under my belt. So, to answer your question, Admiral Brewer, I suppose the name had more to do with my confidence than with my track record. Because at the time, I had no track record, sir.”

Brewer chuckled. “I like a little cockiness in a trial lawyer. Of course sometimes that cockiness can get you into trouble. Did you know that, Lieutenant Davis?”

“I don’t understand, sir.”

“How many portholes have you got on that boat?”

“Four, sir.” Matt thought. “Two on the port cabin. Two on the starboard.”

“Sounds about right,” Brewer said. “Tell me, Lieutenant. You keep the curtains drawn over the portholes while you’re in port?”

“Sir?”

“You know”—Brewer toyed with his chin—“might not be a bad idea. You know, for security purposes. I mean, there’s light security around these public marinas. You never know who might be lingering around.”

“Yes, sir.”

DON BROWN

“You know, you aren’t the first JAG officer I’ve known to live on a sailboat.”

“Sir?”

“Back when I was a young Navy prosecutor in San Diego, we had a defense counsel. A Lieutenant Morris. A kind of free-wheeling, non-conformist type, pretty good in a courtroom. Morris tried all kinds of off-the-wall tactics. The kind of stuff that drove the commands crazy. Know what I mean?”

“I think so, sir.” But Matt was lying.

“Anyway, Morris bought a sailboat and kept it moored at the San Diego Yacht Club down near Shelter Island. He lived on it when he became a defense counsel at the Defense Command in San Diego.” Brewer crossed his arms. “Know what turned out to be his downfall?”

Matt caught himself bouncing his knee under his desk. “Ah . . . no, sir.”

“Women,” Brewer said matter-of-factly.

“Women?”

“Yep. Seems like Ole Lieutenant Morris had a thing for a couple of good-looking enlisted paralegals. Started taking one of ’em out to that sailboat of his. Got busted.”

Matt’s heart pounded like at the end of a hundred-yard sprint.

“Went to admiral’s mast, if I recall,” Admiral Brewer added. “Then disappeared.”

Brewer stopped talking, then glanced over at Captain Rudy, who shook his head.

Matt decided not to speak unless ordered to speak. If ordered, he might invoke his rights under Article 31.

“Anyway,” Admiral Brewer said, “we’re not here to talk about your sailboat.”

Matt exhaled. “You’re not?”

“Why would you think we would be?”

“Aah . . .”

“I’m here to talk to you about a sensitive special assignment that I’m going to order you to take.”

DETAINED

Matt sat back, unsure of what to make of it all. Brewer had a reputation for making people squirm. Had he heard that right? A new assignment? Perhaps Adak, Alaska. The ultimate dreaded duty station in the Aleutians that all JAG officers tried to avoid.

“Tell me, Lieutenant . . . how do you like cold weather?”

No doubt.

Adak.

They were transferring him as far away from Amy as possible.

“I’m prepared to serve wherever my country needs me, sir.”

“I’m glad to hear that, Lieutenant. But you didn’t answer my question.”

“Permission to speak freely, sir?”

“Of course,” Brewer said. “Not that you’ve asked permission for anything else recently, but go ahead.”

“Well, sir. I don’t do well in cold weather. But I am happy to execute any orders you have for me.”

“Well, today is your lucky day, Lieutenant, because this time, I’m not sending you to Adak.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Brewer was toying with him. “In fact, where I’m sending you, not only is the weather gonna be a ton hotter than Adak, but your assignment will be even hotter, from a professional standpoint.” Brewer leaned back in his seat. “Son, get ready to pack your bags. You’re going to Guantanamo Bay.”

Matt hesitated, and then the admiral’s words hit him. “GITMO?” Matt looked at Captain Rudy. “Am I being transferred to the detachment down there?”

“Not permanently. But your assignment could be prolonged and high profile,” Captain Rudy said.

“I don’t understand, sir.”

Admiral Brewer stared at him for a moment, as if deciding whether to say anything else. Or perhaps he would change his mind about Adak.

“Are you familiar with the Guantanamo Military Commissions?”

“You mean the terrorist court at GITMO, sir?”

DON BROWN

“Some people might call it that, I suppose,” Brewer said.

“I’m somewhat familiar with it,” Matt said.

“What do you know about it?”

“Let’s see.” Matt scratched his chin. “Top-secret court. Veiled in secrecy. Established during the Bush administration at the US Naval Base in Cuba so accused terrorists could be tried outside the United States. Part of the reason was to keep terrorists off of US soil. But another part of the reason was to try these cases outside of the US so that these defendants would not have the benefits of the constitutional rights afforded to Americans in a court of law.”

Brewer nodded. “How much have you been paying attention to the news the last couple of days?”

“I’m afraid I’ve gotten behind on my web browsing the last couple of days, sir.”

“Yes. I understand you’ve been detained by other matters,” Brewer said. “But if you had not been detained, you’d know that the TSA arrested a Lebanese national at Philadelphia International Airport—”

“Oh yes,” Matt said. “I saw the Google headline on that but didn’t get a chance to read much in detail. Something about this is that guy they’re accusing of having something to do with the assassination of the US ambassador a few years ago?”

“Maybe you haven’t been as distracted as I thought, Lieutenant.” Brewer looked at Rudy. “Captain, pass me that dossier, please.”

“Aye, sir.” Captain Rudy pulled two manila folders from a briefcase and handed them to the admiral.

“Lieutenant,” Brewer said, “this is the dossier on a Hasan Makari. Here’s all I know about him. He’s a Lebanese national. He was just arrested by the TSA at Philadelphia International. Now TSA ran this investigation from start to finish. That’s a little unusual, because apparently the TSA now wants into the business of investigating and tracking terrorists overseas.”

“Sounds like an agency turf war to me,” Captain Rudy remarked.

“Ya got that right, Captain,” Brewer said. “Anyway”—he looked back at Matt—“Lieutenant, I have no idea whether this guy is innocent

DETAINED

or guilty as sin. I have an inherent distrust for the TSA. For the time being, there are two things you should know about him. First, he's been transferred to Guantanamo Bay, where he's facing a trial before the Military Commissions Tribunal."

"I don't remember reading that on the Google news report, sir."

"That's because it hasn't been announced yet," Brewer said. "That'll be out soon enough."

"Understood, sir," Matt said. "You said there was something else I needed to know?"

"Right." Admiral Brewer glanced at Captain Rudy, then back at Matt. "The other thing you need to know, Lieutenant, is that this Hasan Makari, who the TSA claims is the biggest terrorist since Osama bin Laden, is now your client."

"Excuse me, sir?" Had Matt heard that right? "Did you say this man is my client?"

"You got a problem, Lieutenant? Some conflict of interest or something? Or maybe you don't want to defend someone accused of terrorism?"

"Ah, no, sir, Admiral. That's not it. But—"

"But what, Lieutenant?" Admiral Brewer glared across the desk with angry green eyes. "Spit it out."

"But sir, I thought as a JAG officer, my obligation was to defend only active-duty military."

Brewer leaned back and crossed his arms. "Lieutenant, as a naval officer, your duties are to obey the lawful orders of your superiors. Not to question those orders."

"I wasn't questioning my orders, Admiral, I—"

"And secondly, your question reveals a lack of understanding of the history of the GITMO commission. Because if you'd studied the operation of the commission in any significant detail, you would know that several senior military officers—JAG officers from various branches—have been appointed to defend a number of these detainees, and that there has been a mix of civilian and military defense counsel involved in the defense of these matters."

DON BROWN

"I should have known more about the commission. My apologies."

"No apologies necessary, Lieutenant. In fairness, most of the JAG officers appointed in these situations—Commander Walter Ruiz and Lieutenant Colonel Sean Gleason—were senior officers. You're the first junior officer appointed to defend one of these guys."

Matt responded in a disbelieving voice. "Why me, sir?"

"Because you may be a royal pain in the rump, and you know what I'm talking about. But you're the best defense counsel we've got right now."

"Thank you, sir." He tried to absorb it all. "I'm stunned. I don't know what to say, sir. I've never defended a civilian, let alone a foreigner."

"Well, if it makes you feel better, Matt, this civilian foreigner won't be your only client when you get down there."

"Sir?"

"This Hasan Makari has a son who's in the US Navy. As a matter of fact, the son is stationed on USS *Abraham Lincoln* right here in Norfolk."

"The *Lincoln* returned today from a Med cruise," Matt said.

"Yes, they did. And as soon as they tied up to the dock, NCIS arrested BSM3 Najib Makari on charges of terrorism and murder." Brewer checked his watch. "He's probably boarding a jet right now for GITMO." He looked at Matt. "Lieutenant, you're also Petty Officer Najib's lawyer."

"I'm representing both of them?"

"That's affirmative."

"But . . ." Matt found himself tapping his fingers. "Isn't that a potential conflict of interest, sir? I mean, if the son has incriminating information on the father, or the father has stuff on the son, how do I represent them both?"

"I can't answer that. I can say the conflict of interest rules don't apply in Cuba. Neither do a lot of other rules designed to protect civil liberties in American courts." Brewer checked his watch. "Matt, enough chitchat. Pack your seabag and prepare to move out. Your plane

DETAINED

for Cuba takes off from Oceana in two hours. Now if you'll excuse us, we've got other duties to attend to."

Brewer rose, and Matt shot to his feet and came to attention.

The admiral turned, waiting for Captain Rudy to open the office door. Rudy stepped outside into the hallway, and Brewer turned around. "You know, Matt, I almost sent you to Adak. But you're the best I've got. Go down there and do your job, and let the chips fall where they may. Got it?"

"Aye, aye, sir. Got it."

"Very well." Brewer stepped out of the office and closed the door.

• • •

BUILDING AV624

UNITED STATES NAVAL STATION

GUANTÁNAMO BAY, CUBA

30 MINUTES LATER

Above the tall palm trees, the sky had turned a deeper blue, and the clouds seemed puffier, taller, threatening to waltz into the formation of a squad of afternoon thunder boomers.

Based on the downward trek of the sun, Hasan estimated that thirty minutes must have passed by now. In that time, they had gone nowhere.

Instead, they sat in the Humvee, parked with the motor running, in front of the two-story, white cinder-block building down the road from the terminal with the sign welcoming visitors to Guantanamo Bay.

The building resembled some barracks or military housing complex. Over the main entrance, a painted sign declared Building AV624. Under that, the phrase "Honor-Bound to Defend Freedom."

Captain Kohlman had left the vehicle and walked inside the building to "take care of some paperwork," leaving Hasan with his three Marine guards.

The guards remained silent, sitting there motionless, their eyes scanning the area outside the vehicle.

DON BROWN

At least the Humvee had an air conditioner.

And no one had struck him or spit on him or cursed at him.

Not yet, anyway.

Military trucks and Humvees with US Navy markings zoomed along the two-lane asphalt road in front of the cinder-block building.

Three large jets, two white ones with US Navy markings on the side and a green one with MARINES painted on the side, had landed over on the airstrip in the time that the Humvee had been sitting in the parking lot.

“Here comes Cap’n Kohlman, a Marine said, breaking the silence.

Hasan looked to his right. Captain Kohlman, with an envelope in hand, was walking back toward the Humvee.

Kohlman got into the Humvee. “All right. We’re good to go,” he told the driver. “Just like I thought. They’re taking him to Camp Delta. Let’s roll, Corporal.”

“Camp Delta. Aye, sir.” The Humvee rolled forward, turning left onto the two-lane asphalt road. As the Humvee pulled onto the road, Hasan saw a street sign: First Street.

As they proceeded along First Street at a slow pace, off to left the rolling, scruffy hills rose above the naval base. To the right, they drove parallel to the runway. Off beyond the runway, the aqua-blue waters of the Caribbean Sea were mixed with the late-afternoon orangish tint of the setting sun.

How could a place with such a sinister reputation for torture look so enticing?

They drove down a small strip of land extending into the water. The base runway occupied most of that strip.

When the jeep reached the point of the road opposite the end of the runway, the road angled to the left about forty-five degrees.

They rolled forward another hundred yards or so, and the Humvee came to a stop. The land had run out. They had water on three sides. They were sitting on a point beyond the end of the airstrip.

To their right was an old military jet, restored and propped up on

DETAINED

four steel poles. Three artificial palm trees rose over the jet, resembling something in an old aviation museum. A green three-leaf clover was painted on the tail.

Just off to the left was a wide asphalt parking lot leading to a dock. Above the dock was another sign with navy-blue lettering:

Guantánamo Bay Ferry Terminal
United States Navy

Captain Kohlman checked his watch. "He's running late again."

"With respect, sir," the driver quipped, "if the Marine Corps were running that ferry, she would be on time every time."

"Ya got that right, Corporal. But if we were running the ferry service, that'd be a bruising blow to the Navy's ego. They already have an inferiority complex."

"Roger that, Cap'n."

"Here she comes, sir." The Marine sitting to Hasan's right pointed out to the bay.

A gray ferry sitting low in the water was heading toward the dock.

When the ferry turned, they could see the number 91 in white on the bow.

The vessel looked to be about sixty or seventy feet long and had no vehicles on it.

The ferry captain guided the ferry between two concrete docks extending out into the water. A US Navy sailor, wearing a light-blue shirt, dark blue pants, and a white Dixie cup hat, walked down the ramp from the ferry and motioned for the Humvee to pull forward.

"That's our signal, Corporal," Captain Kohlman said.

"Aye, sir. Roger that."

The sailor stood on the asphalt, just beside the steel bridge, and like a traffic cop in Beirut, signaled the *move forward* motion as the Humvee edged up to the adjustable ramp, then rolled onto the deck.

One other Humvee followed them onto the ferry.

DON BROWN

The ferry's engines revved, and it soon had backed out into the blue waters of the bay.

Hasan looked back. The old jet and three palm trees grew smaller as the ferryboat churned toward the middle of the bay.

Hasan turned and faced the open water ahead.

His heart pounded. What would he face on the other shore?

• • •

**MID-ATLANTIC REGION LEGAL SERVICE OFFICE DETACHMENT
OCEANA NAVAL AIR STATION
BUILDING 320
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA**

Lieutenant Commander Amy Debenedetto, JAG Corps, United States Navy, sat alone at her desk in the Command Services section of the Mid-Atlantic Region Legal Service Office Detachment.

With the clock approaching 1800 hours, most people, except for the command duty officer up front and a couple sailors, had left the building.

Her stomach had suddenly turned chaotic.

First, she'd gotten a text from Matt about forty minutes ago: "THEY KNOW. CAN'T TALK RIGHT NOW. TTYL."

After the text, she had gotten a call from Captain Rudy with ominous instructions. "Amy, I'm instructing you to remain at your post until we can talk. Admiral Brewer is in town. We need to speak with you about a personal matter."

The one-two punch of Matt's call—proclaiming "they know"—followed by Rudy's call could spell nothing but trouble.

"They Know," translated into this: they knew about her tryst with a junior officer. In situations like this, the senior officer always got punished. The junior officer would often skate. Or if they did not, there would be a private slap on the wrist in a manner that would not totally damage the JO's career.

DETAINED

That's how they would paint this, even though Matt threw the first flirtatious glances, flashed that candle-wax-melting irresistible smile, and dropped those close-to-the-line flirtatious comments that could be considered borderline disrespect.

She liked the comments so much—even though she should have reprimanded him—she wanted more.

“No way you're old enough to be a senior lieutenant commander, ma'am.”

Or . . .

“Ma'am, can I volunteer to transfer to your command and become your personal assistant? I'll work hard for you and take care of all your professional needs.”

She should have stopped him right there. She knew it.

But when he shot those blue eyes and that hopelessly enticing smile at her, her resolve melted in the Atlantic breeze. Matt was her Kryptonite.

Their relationship smoldered on and on, nuclear hot under the surface, obvious to them but not to the rest of the Navy.

Her good judgment failed. She accepted his invitation to dinner. And then, next time, to his boat.

He would prove to be her undoing.

She read Matt's text message again. “THEY KNOW. CAN'T TALK RIGHT NOW. TTYL.”

Can't talk right now?

Really?

The heck with that.

Who was the superior officer here, anyway?

She punched the Call button.

One ring. Two rings. Three rings.

“You have reached Lieutenant Matt Davis, United States Navy. I'm unable to take your call, but—”

DON BROWN

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**HEADQUARTERS
MID-ATLANTIC REGION LEGAL SERVICE OFFICE
DEFENSE SERVICE OFFICE SOUTHEAST
US NAVY JAG CORPS
US NAVAL BASE
NORFOLK, VIRGINIA**

Matt checked the caller ID: “LCDR Amy Debenedetto.”

“Not now, baby. Not enough time,” he mumbled and returned his eyes to his computer screen.

A headline popped up:

**GITMO DEFENSE COUNSEL ACCUSES GOVERNMENT OF
SPYING, CENSORING EMAILS.**

A new bombshell revelation surfaced today at the controversial military tribunal trials at Guantanamo Bay. Defense Lawyers assigned to defend high-profile terror suspects accused the government of illegal censoring and in fact in many cases reading sensitive emails which go to the defense of their clients cases.

According to one source who spoke on condition of anonymity, the government planted listening devices in attorney-client meeting rooms, disguised as smoke detectors, and then spied on confidential conversations between defense attorneys and their clients. Defense lawyers also claim that the government has illegally accessed their emails and servers, giving the prosecution an unfair and illegal advantage in trial preparation.

Then another headline:

DETAINED

LETTER TO OBAMA COULD LAND Famed GITMO Lawyer

Six Months in Prison

Clive Stafford Smith, the most distinguished of the civilian defense lawyers representing detained prisoners at the U.S. prison facility in Guantanamo Bay, has been accused of “unprofessional conduct” by Pentagon officials monitoring communication between GITMO prisoners and their lawyers. Defense lawyers have sided with Smith, arguing that confidential communications between Smith and his client Binyam Mohamed are illegal. Yet now, according to sources, Smith faces a possible a six-month jail sentence because he wrote a letter to President Obama detailing his client’s allegations of torture by US agents.

Then another:

Guantanamo Detainee Lawyers Accuse Government of Harassment.

A federal investigation is now underway over allegations of U.S. government harassment of defense lawyers representing terror suspects at the U.S. Naval prison facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. At the center of the investigation is prominent “GITMO” defense lawyer Clive Stafford Smith who has already been “investigated” at least four times for a variety of allegations, including from rules violations on handling classified information to smuggling contraband to his clients.

Mr. Smith denies all the allegations, calling them government attempts to intimidate defense lawyers. Smith reports that he and other defense lawyers working at Guantanamo Bay have received numerous threats, including anonymous death threats, made simply because the lawyers are trying to do their jobs.

Thus far, no arrests have been made of anyone making the death threats, and the government investigation continues.

DON BROWN

“What?” Matt mumbled. “Death threats?”

Another headline claimed even more intimidation of defense lawyers:

GITMO Standoff: Prosecutors Threaten Defense Lawyers.

Courtroom Cleared.

By James Bell, June 21, 2013

A military judge cleared the courtroom at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, today, in the midst of death penalty proceedings against five Guantanamo Bay detainees convicted of terrorism. The Judge, Colonel James Pohl, stopped proceedings when a defense counsel's cross-examination of former GITMO prison commander Rear Admiral David Woods led to a heated exchange between prosecutors and defense attorneys. Commander Walter Ruiz, a US Navy JAG officer, and appointed defense counsel, had been questioning Woods about his knowledge of CIA control over the detention center, and CIA restrictions on defense counsel having access to clients. When Woods claimed lack of knowledge about CIA involvement, Ruiz pressed the matter further, asking about other intelligence organizations that were operating at GITMO.

Ruiz's questioning prompted an angry response from Justice Department prosecutors, who threatened that Ruiz was “playing with fire” by pressing the matter with Woods.

When Ruiz responded that he would not be threatened by the prosecution, Judge Pohl cleared the courtroom and convened a secret, closed-door session to take the matter under advisement. No details were made available about what happened in the secret session, and the death-penalty hearing later re-convened in open court.

Matt shook his head.

The ramifications of what he had just read were clear. If Justice Department prosecutors tried intimidating Commander Walter Ruiz,

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a career officer two full pay grades above Matt's rank, think of what they would try with a mere lieutenant like Matt.

Perhaps that's why he was chosen—perhaps this had nothing to do with his abilities as a defense counsel. Perhaps they were theorizing that a junior officer defense counsel would not question high-ranking DOJ prosecutors like a higher-ranking officer such as Commander Ruiz had questioned them.

If this was their assumption, they would soon find out that they were wrong.

Still, these allegations of threatening intimidation against defense counsel within a constitutional republic were troubling.

He conducted another Google search. "I can't believe this," he mumbled, reading the next search result on the screen.

Was Former Guantanamo Bay Defense Attorney Murdered? . . .

The body of Andy P. Hart, 38, a lawyer from Toledo, Ohio, who had defended notorious Guantanamo Bay Detainee *Mohammed Rahim al-Afghani*, was found today in his Ohio Apartment. Cause of death was a single gunshot wound to the head.

Authorities claim to have discovered a "suicide note" with the body, along with a computer thumb drive containing Hart's client files, including sensitive client information for Al-Afghani. The Government claimed that *Mohammed Rahim al-Afghani* was Osama bin Laden's personal translator and a high-level Al Qaeda operative.

Mr. Hart's death comes in the wake of numerous death threats to several Guantanamo Bay defense attorneys, including prominent civilian defense attorney Clive Stafford Smith and others.

In recent weeks, Mr. Smith and others had complained about anonymous death threats and direct threats from the government, which Mr. Smith referred to as "intimidation tactics."

U.S. Navy JAG Officer, Commander Walter Ruiz, one of the senior military JAG officers assigned to defend Guantanamo detainees, accused Department of Justice prosecutors of openly threatening him in court,

DON BROWN

suggesting that he was “playing with fire” by pressing a witness, Rear Admiral David Woods about Woods’ knowledge of secret government agencies asserting control of the Guantanamo Bay Prison facility.

In the wake of all those threats, now comes news of the death of Andy Hart, who had shown no suicidal tendencies in the weeks leading up to his death. And while authorities were very quick to dub Hart’s death as a suicide, without any meaningful investigation, considering the multiple threats made to GITMO defense counsel, that fast-trigger determination will raise more questions than it answers.

“This sounds fishy.” Matt clicked the next set of search results.

Andy P. Hart: Suicide or Murder?

Guantanamo Prisoners’ Attorney Andy P. Hart: Suicide or Murder?

A cold fear cascaded through his body. Something smelled.

A knock on the door.

“Enter.”

“Excuse me, Lieutenant.”

Master Chief Ronnie Lewis, in a working khaki uniform resplendent with seven rows of service ribbons on his chest, stood at the door.

“Master Chief.”

“Sir, I understand you’ve got a plane waiting for you at Oceana. The skipper asked me to give you a lift.”

“Ah, yes.” Matt tried to ignore the dead GITMO defense counsel. Was this his punishment for fraternization with a senior officer? He should have volunteered for captain’s mast. Even a court-martial. At least he might escape alive.

“Be right there, Master Chief. Also, I need you to stop by the boat so I can pick up a few things for my trip. Not sure when I’m coming back.” *Or if I’m coming back.*

His cell phone rang again: “Amy De Benedetto.”

They’d gotten in this together, toying with forbidden fruit, playing with dynamite.

DETAINED

He wanted to hear her voice. To sail with her up Chesapeake Bay in his boat. He started to pick up, then changed his mind.

The master chief stood outside the door. Best to stay quiet, especially if they were building a case for fraternization.

“Okay, Master Chief. Let’s roll.”

“Aye, sir.”

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**MID-ATLANTIC REGION LEGAL SERVICE OFFICE DETACHMENT
OCEANA NAVAL AIR STATION
BUILDING 320
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA**

Why wasn’t he answering? This wasn’t like Matt. They must have gotten to him.

Perhaps they ordered him not to speak. In fraternization cases, they always approached the junior officer first. They considered junior officer as the “victim” in such cases.

Amy knew the fraternization drill. As a former Navy trial counsel, she had prosecuted three fraternization cases. She once prosecuted a navy commander, the former executive officer of the naval air station, for an affair with his staff judge advocate, a woman who was a senior lieutenant.

In every case, they called the junior “victim” to testify against the senior officer, always considered the “aggressor.”

The facts did not matter. Even in a military court. Oftentimes the agenda trumped the facts.

And in difference-of-rank fraternization, the agenda was always the same: blister the senior officer.

They made every JAG officer study the case of the USS *Chief*, the 225-foot minesweeper out of San Diego. The Navy had relieved the commander of the minesweeper for fraternization with his female second in command.

In that case, Lieutenant Commander Laird, the executive officer,

DON BROWN

had been fired for “misconduct” after “an investigation into a violation of the Navy’s fraternization policy.”

Such punishment ends a naval career.

And what a career hers had been. Years ago Amy served as the enlisted legalman for Admiral Zack Brewer, back when *Lieutenant* Brewer was a rising star in San Diego. As Brewer’s paralegal, she helped him gather evidence in the court-martial titled *United States v. Olajuwon*, a case that made international news when Brewer prosecuted three Navy chaplains for treason.

As a result of her work in that case, they commissioned her as an ensign in the Navy JAG Corps and put her through law school.

Now, after all that, to throw it all away.

Zack Brewer went on to become judge advocate general of the Navy.

And she rose through the enlisted ranks, then into the officer ranks, and then into the JAG Corps.

Theirs was once a special professional relationship. Not the type that would bust her career—like her relationship with Matt—but the relationship of proud mentor and eager student.

She remembered the case of the USS *Chief* and then considered her own case. In the case of the *Chief*, the two officers were of the same rank. A lieutenant commander in a relationship with another lieutenant commander in the same chain of command.

But her situation proved more egregious. Her case involved a lieutenant commander in a relationship with a lower-ranked lieutenant in the same chain of command.

The phone rang. Her pulse accelerated. The caller ID showed RLSO Duty Officer from the Regional Legal Service Office.

“Lieutenant Commander DeBenedetto.”

“Ma’am, this is Lieutenant JG Anderson at the duty desk.”

“How can I help you, Lieutenant?”

“Ma’am, the skipper called. He and Admiral Brewer are at the main gate of the air station. The skipper asked me to relay this message. He and the admiral will be at the RLSO in five minutes. Meet them at the OIC’s office.”

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Amy hesitated. “Thank you, Lieutenant. I’ll be right there.” She hung up. Now there was no doubt. She was about to get blasted. The skipper had sent instructions through an officer two grades below her. A classic power move.

What would she do? Of course there would be no prison sentence, but they would demand her resignation. Her best-case scenario? A reassignment, followed by being passed over for commander.

Then they would drum her out of the Navy by a Selective Early Retirement Board—well short of her twenty years. Then she would have to look for a legal job with a law firm or a district attorney’s office with a starting salary below her current pay and without her military pension. If they asked for copies of her military record and discovered that she had been kicked out for fraternization, her job hopes would vanish. Maybe she could start her own practice, which would prove challenging, considering the civilian economy and the glut of lawyers being churned out of those warehouse-on-the-corner-turned-law-schools.

“Get hold of yourself, Amy,” she muttered. “Just keep your cool.”

She stood, checked her watch, and headed out of her office for her meeting with the admiral and the captain.

Stepping into the passageway from her office, she heard another text signal. She reached into her purse to check her phone.

Text from Lieutenant Matt Davis.

“Check that. Not sure they know. I think they probably know. Can’t say for sure that they know. Maybe they do. Maybe they don’t.”

“What? What are you talking about, Matt? Do they know or not?”

Frustration flushed her body, mixed in with all the twisted anxiety in her stomach. She tried calling Matt again.

One ring.

Two rings.

Voice mail again.

“Come on, Matt.” She hung up and walked toward the OIC’s office to await the admiral and the captain—and her fate.

DON BROWN

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UNITED STATES NAVAL STATION
GUANTÁNAMO BAY, CUBA
US NAVY FERRY
APPROACHING FERRY TERMINAL

Under an orange glow and long shadows in the sparkling blue waters from a setting sun, the US Navy ferry containing the Humvee with the four US Marines and Hasan Makari approached the ferry terminal opposite the side from which they had departed.

Not a word had been spoken in the twenty minutes or so that Hasan had estimated the ferry ride to have been.

But as they chugged in close to the terminal, it became clear that the most active side of the Guantánamo Bay naval base was on the other side of the bay, the side they had just left.

Under palm trees swaying in the late-afternoon breeze, the approaching shoreline featured a small harbor with docks and piers, mooring a number of small craft that were rocking from the light swells. Out to the left, two sleek-looking identical gray US Navy warships floated at anchor.

As the ferry swung around for a final approach to the landing, he saw a large sign behind the piers:

US Naval Station Guantánamo Bay
Welcome to the Windward Side

The Windward Side.

It hit him. He had read an article several years ago in the *New York Times* about the Guantánamo Bay hunger strike put on by prisoners stationed there. Now the article was like a searing memory he could not shake.

The Guantánamo Bay Prison Camp, with its dreaded torture

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chambers, was located on what was called the “Windward Side” of the base.

Some of those who were tortured he knew were bloodthirsty terrorists from places like Afghanistan, Yemen, and Pakistan. Others were innocent, having been rounded up like herds of cattle, having done nothing against the United States.

Hasan felt like a man condemned to the gallows, having finished his last meal, being led by his executioners to the wooden trapdoor platform, where a noose of large, coarse rope would be tightened around his neck.

He wished he could choose the hanging.

If he were hanged, at least the pain would be short. Tomorrow his suffering would be over.

But the excruciating torture he now faced could last for months, even years.

The ferry inched into the port terminal, then came to a stop.

With a humming mechanical sound, the ferry’s bow opened for the vehicles to exit.

A sharp clang followed. The sound of steel against the dock.

“All right Corporal, get ready to move out.”

“Aye, sir.” The driver started the Humvee’s engine. Another sailor stepped out in front of them and, playing the role of traffic cop, motioned the Humvee forward.

The driver pressed the accelerator, and they drove down across the steel ramp, onto the concrete driveway at the end of the pier.

“Okay, Corporal. Take us to Camp Delta. Camp 1.”

“Camp 1, sir?” The corporal raised an eyebrow.

“You heard me, Corporal.”

“Camp Delta. Camp 1. Aye, sir.” The Humvee turned right onto the main two-lane road outside the ferry landing.

Hasan’s forehead grew clammy, then his hands did. He wanted to heave, to vomit right there in the jeep. He bowed his head, whispering, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name . . .”

DON BROWN

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**MID-ATLANTIC REGION LEGAL SERVICE OFFICE DETACHMENT
OFFICE OF THE OFFICER-IN-CHARGE
OCEANA NAVAL AIR STATION
BUILDING 320
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA**

Amy sat alone in the waiting area of the OIC's office, checking her watch. They were two minutes late, probably a deliberate tactic designed to accelerate her heart, to torture her breathing, and to compound the cold sweat beads that had formed on her forehead.

How had she gotten into this mess?

"Attention on deck!" The command came from the hallway, from the duty officer.

Amy rose as her old friend Vice Admiral Zack Brewer and her commanding officer, Captain Rudy, strode one behind the other into the office.

"Follow us, Commander," Rudy said. "And close the door behind you. We have some sensitive matters to discuss."

"Aye, Captain." She stepped in and closed the door.

Admiral Brewer was sitting behind the desk normally occupied by Commander David Reams, the JAG officer who was officer in charge of the legal services detachment. Captain Rudy pulled up a chair next to the desk.

Amy stepped in front of Brewer's desk and came to full attention. Silence and cold stares followed.

"At ease, Commander," Admiral Brewer said.

"Thank you, sir."

"Pull up a chair if you'd like," Brewer said. "There's no point in making you stand for this."

"Thank you, sir."

Amy sat down across the desk from the JAG.

DETAINED

Brewer flashed those famous hazel eyes at her and held his stare.

She wanted to look away, to stare at the clock on the wall as his eyes bore down on her. But looking away would prove guilt, and weakness, a sign of capitulation.

This she had learned from the great Zack Brewer himself. She even remembered his words: *"If you blink first, you look weak."*

"Amy, you and I go back a long way."

"Yes, sir."

"In a way"—he steepled his fingers together and spoke in that distinctive Tar Heel accent—"I'd say both of our careers got launched at the same time. Wouldn't you say?"

She nodded, remembering that she first fell for Matt because he had reminded her of a younger Zack Brewer. A confident, young, swash-buckling naval officer from the Carolinas. Zack was from Plymouth, North Carolina, and Matt from Rock Hill, South Carolina.

Truth be known, she'd gotten into trouble because Matt fulfilled that long-ago infatuation she had for Zack Brewer himself.

Zack never knew.

Why couldn't the self-discipline she exercised as a junior petty officer have followed her throughout her career?

"What? You don't agree?"

"Sorry, sir. I was distracted. Yes, sir. I think that's fair to say, sir."

"Remember the first case we tried together, with me as lead prosecutor and you as my legalman paralegal?"

"Yes, sir. How could I ever forget?"

"Remember the defendant's name?"

"Of course, sir. Petty Officer Antonio Blount, US Navy SEAL. Accused of raping Ensign Marianne Landrieu at the North Island Naval Air Station. Ensign Landrieu, the niece of a prominent United States senator from Louisiana. Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, as I recall. You were under tons of political pressure to deliver a conviction. And, of course, you delivered, sir. And then you turned around and delivered when you prosecuted the case of the three Islamic chaplains."

DON BROWN

Admiral Brewer nodded at Captain Rudy. He looked back at Amy. "You remember well, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"And you mentioned the case of the Islamic chaplains."

"Of course, sir. It was the highest profile case in the world."

"Yes, well." Zack seemed to ponder his thoughts. "Those guys were not only terrorists, but they were masquerading as officers. It's a shame when someone wearing a naval officer's uniform makes the officer corps look bad."

Ouch.

"Do you know what I mean, Commander?" His reversion from calling her "Amy," back to the more formal "Commander," signified a less-than-friendly change in tone.

"Yes, sir." She maintained eye contact but tried to project softness, not defiance, in her eyes and her speech.

"Sometimes this job is pleasant. Sometimes it's unpleasant. And sometimes whether it's pleasant or unpleasant depends on the parties involved. On their goals. Their objectives."

She nodded.

"The Navy has invested a lot of money in you."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me, Lieutenant Commander Debenedetto, what had you hoped to achieve in your naval career?"

Hoped to achieve? I'm already toast. "Sir, my greatest hope is to serve my country."

Zack's face twisted into a pained, somber expression. "Well, I regret to say, Amy, that if you continue to serve your country, it won't be here."

His words gut-punched her. She felt breathless.

"Captain Rudy is here because he is your commanding officer." A pause. "Effective this afternoon, you are relieved of your duties."

Her lips trembled. She wanted to cry, but that would never happen.

Not here.

Not now.

DETAINED

She would cry in front of them when hell froze over.

Captain Rudy nodded and said, “We’ll miss you around here, Lieutenant Commander Debenedetto.”

“It’s been an honor to serve under your command, sir. I hope that I haven’t let you down.” She paused. “I suppose I’ll need to vacate my office.”

Brewer nodded his head. “Yes, Amy. The sooner the better.”

The lump in her throat swelled into grapefruit. Matt’s instincts were correct.

They knew.

“Sir, would you like me to take leave and get out of the way for the time being?”

“Leave?” Brewer raised an eyebrow. “You think we could let you off that easily, did you?”

Here came the news. She faced a court-martial. The admiral was about to read her her rights. “I understand, sir.”

“You cannot remain here, at the RLSO.”

“Understand.”

“We’re transferring you to Guantánamo Bay, where you’ll be detailed to the prosecution team against two accused terrorists who were arrested within the last couple of days, one being a US Navy member.”

“Sir?”

“You heard me. Get packed. Be ready to move out in two hours.”

“But, sir?”

“Something wrong, Commander? Would you prefer some other options that I have in mind?”

“No, sir.”

Brewer’s hazel eyes bore right through her. “You know, Amy, sometimes second chances come by tackling tough assignments.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Then get out of here before I change my mind.”

“Yes, sir.” She commenced a quick about-face and walked straight to the door.

DON BROWN

“Amy!” Brewer’s voice stopped her.

“Yes, sir.”

“About-face. There’s a little matter I forgot to take care of.”

She turned around.

“Attention on deck!”

She jumped to attention.

“I’m sorry about this. But this isn’t a matter of transferring out of here and leaving it at that.”

He walked over to her. Close to her. So close that she caught a whiff of his cologne.

Still Geoffrey Beene. Grey Flannel. After all these years.

He took hold of her right collar, then proceeded to unpin and remove the gold oak leaf that signified her rank as lieutenant commander.

Of course.

She should have expected this. She would face admiral’s mast and receive a demotion in rank. Still, this was preferable to a court-martial.

At least there would no longer be a rank difference between her and Matt, which meant they could resume their relationship and avoid fraternization charges.

“You know I’m doing you a favor, don’t you?”

“I trust your judgment, Admiral. I always have.”

“Lieutenant Commander Amy Debenedetto, United States Navy. It is my duty to inform you that you have been deep-selected for the rank of commander, United States Navy. And therefore, I am frocking you to the rank of full commander, United States Navy, effective immediately.”

Before his words sunk in, he had reached into his pocket, retrieved a silver oak leaf, and pinned it on her collar in place of the gold oak leaf that he had removed.

He wagged his finger in her face. “Do not blow this. Understand me?”

“Aye, sir.”

DETAINED

She could no longer choke back the tears.

“Get out of here, Debenedetto. Before I change my mind again.”

“Aye, sir.”

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UNITED STATES NAVAL STATION GUANTÁNAMO BAY, CUBA APPROACHING CAMP DELTA

The change in the landscape, or rather the change in the types of buildings along each side of the two-lane roads, signaled that they were entering a different sector of the base.

The base McDonald’s, the Navy Exchange, the residential communities alongside the road, the military barracks and ball fields—all these were left behind. Now, as the Humvee slowed, they were passing a steel chain-link fence with sharp barbed wire coiled at the top. Signs along the fence declared “Guantánamo Bay Detention Center—Keep Out.”

The prison sat on a bluff overlooking the Caribbean, an isolated corner of the remote US Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay.

Hasan knew in his gut, by the Humvee’s change in speed and the somber looks on the faces of the Marines guarding him, that his time was short.

The Humvee slowed again, then turned left and came to a stop outside a gate with a guard tower looming over it, reminiscent of the design of the guard towers at Nazi prisons in World War II. Draped under the guard tower observation post hung an American flag.

A white sign on the fence with a graphic of the Pentagon was to the left of the locked gate:

Camp Delta
JTF Guantánamo
Honor-Bound to Defend Freedom

DON BROWN

Dark green boards had been placed all along the chain-link fence to block any view of the interior.

Two armed Marine guards came from inside the compound and unlocked the gate.

As the twin steel-caged doors swung open, the Humvee rolled onto the grounds of the prison camp. Marine guards shot sharp salutes to Captain Kohlman, who crisply returned the salutes.

The Humvee rolled a hundred yards or so inside the compound, then stopped.

Hasan looked off to his right. There were four of them. They wore dark blue pants and blue T-shirts. Stenciled in gold were the words: TSA ELITE Forces.

The phrase "ELITE Forces" on their T-shirts was new to him. He had not seen it on the uniforms of the TSA officers back in Philadelphia.

The ELITE Forces each wore aviator-style shades, Ray-Ban style, and they each had an assault rifle slung over a shoulder.

Like the four horsemen of the apocalypse, they marched toward the Humvee.

"Here they come," the driver said.

"Yep," Kohlman said. "Right on time."

"I guess having just the CIA and the FBI in here wasn't enough for 'em."

"Typical civilian bureaucracy," Kohlman said. "Everybody wants a piece of the pie. Everybody wants their day in the sun. Show off to Congress what they can do to justify more money. That's the end game. Money. They spend some money for new T-shirts and a couple of he-man training manuals and call themselves ELITE Forces." The disgust in his voice was clear. "I guarantee you none of these ELITE boys would last a week at Parris Island." Kohlman removed his sunglasses. "Well, let me deal with these cats. Then we can go home, get some shut-eye, and start all over again tomorrow."

Kohlman stepped out of the Humvee. "Gentlemen," he said, as the foursome approached.

DETAINED

“Captain,” the man in front said. “Special Agent Ira Jacobs, TSA. I’m the new chief investigator on the ground here. These gentlemen are my assistants.”

“Welcome to GITMO, Mr. Jacobs.”

“That’s Special Agent Jacobs.”

“Excuse me. Special Agent Jacobs,” Kohlman said with a tinge of disgust.

“If you will hand over the prisoner now, Captain, you are relieved of your duties in this matter.”

“Mr. Jacobs. We will deliver the prisoner to you. But let me be clear. The only ones who can relieve me of my duties are the commanding general of this base, the commandant of the Marine Corps, or the president of the United States himself. I don’t see any stars on your collar, sir, and I do not, and never will, work for the TSA or Homeland Security.”

“Whatever, Captain. You’re wasting my time. Now surrender the prisoner.”

Kohlman turned around. “Corporal. Sergeant. Produce the prisoner.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Let’s go, sir.” The sergeant opened the back right door of the Humvee.

His hands still cuffed, Hasan slid along the seat to the open door, pivoted on his butt, and stepped out of the Humvee.

“Okay, we’ve got him now, Captain,” the TSA agent said as two other agents grabbed Hasan by the arms. “That will be all.”

“This is still a military base,” Kohlman said, “not a TSA compound. I’ll decide when ‘that will be all’ only by a lawful order from a superior officer.”

“The military isn’t equipped for this,” Jacobs shot back. “I’ll see you next time, Captain.”

“Yes, you will.”

Jacobs turned his back on Captain Kohlman. “Let’s get this terrorist to his cell. We’ll give him a taste of the consequences of terrorism against America.”

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**OCEANA NAVAL AIR STATION
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA**

Ever since the federal government bailed out General Motors, US government agencies had been instructed to purchase GM products as a means of trying to protect the government's tax dollars investment.

As part of that boondoggle, the Navy, known for huge gray ships and black submarines, to the extent that it needed automobiles for its shore stations, fell under the "buy GM" mandate. That mandate had trickled down to the Navy Regional Legal Service Office in Norfolk.

Matt Davis didn't care for the notion of being seen in a Chevy Malibu. If he was going to be seen in public in a General Motors product, that class of vehicle would include only a convertible Corvette, like the brand-new limited edition Corvette (C7) Stingray, with a sweet 450-horsepower, LT-1, V-8 engine under the hood, painted in garnet and black in honor of his beloved South Carolina Gamecocks.

In the final analysis, it wasn't his sailboat that persuaded Amy to risk her career for him, but rather that powerful, sleek driving machine of a gorgeous sports car that he raced about in. He saw it in her eyes the first time he opened the door for her.

She would never have admitted it, but if the truth were told, his Stingray cast a psychological and physical spell on her.

And then, there was the spell she had cast on him.

She had shown up in civilian clothes, trying to disguise herself. White Bermuda shorts, designer sunglasses so big they could have passed for something Jackie O would have worn. She was drop-dead stunning, especially when she loosened her shiny blonde hair to dangle from that military-style bun, freeing her locks to bounce so teasingly onto her shoulders. What an oxymoronic paradox she became, a conflict of regulation against free spirit, a juxtaposition of precision in the day

DETAINED

against flowing lava in the evening. His chest pounded like a driving bass drum at the sight of her.

In retrospect, he messed up by lowering the top.

Of course, every girl likes riding in a sports car convertible in the summertime with the top down.

But having the top down made them vulnerable for getting spotted.

He knew this at the time, but the dare-devilish rush of flirting with detection ran through his veins, fanning the excitement of it all.

Matt would rather think all day about Amy than anything else.

But the sight of the twin engine US Navy C-26 Metroliner, its engines running, brought Matt back to Andy Hart, the GITMO defense lawyer mysteriously found dead. The death-by-suicide version reported by the press smelled rotten.

Interesting how people who got too close to the truth always seemed to “commit suicide” or suffer from a death-producing heart attack. Or in some instances, they were just murdered.

From Lee Harvey Oswald, shot in the stomach by Jack Ruby to keep Oswald from talking, to Jimmy Hoffa who disappeared from the planet, to former Clinton commerce secretary Ron Brown who “died in a plane” even though military investigators found a bullet hole in his head, to former White House counsel Vince Foster who allegedly put a gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger, to Andrew Breitbart who suffered a fatal “heart attack” days before he threatened to release damaging information on President Obama, and to Andy Hart and another case of a press-reported “suicide” by a lawyer. All these cases had this in common: each of these men died under mysterious circumstances, and they all died with knowledge that, if exposed, could have been extremely embarrassing to some very powerful people.

Matt had this feeling of foreboding that he would soon discover something that some people would not want exposed. The more he thought about it, the more the names of the dead flashed through his mind: Oswald, Hoffa, Brown, Foster, Breitbart, Hart.

All too close to the truth.

DON BROWN

All stone-cold dead.

“You okay, Lieutenant?”

The master chief’s question brought him back into the moment.

“I’m fine, Master Chief. Just a last-minute mental checklist.”

“Your first trip to GITMO, sir?”

“Is it that obvious?”

“You’ll be fine, sir. Just do your job. They pick the best for a reason, sir.” He pulled the Malibu to a stop a few feet from the plane. “I’ll get your bags on the plane, Lieutenant.”

“Thanks, Master Chief. But no point in you grabbing all that stuff by yourself.”

Matt hadn’t packed much. Seabag. Computer. Suitcase. Uniform bag. He reached in the backseat and grabbed his computer and seabag, and the master chief grabbed the rest.

As they reached the stairway heading up into the plane, Matt turned around.

“We’ll miss you, Lieutenant. Go down there and do us proud.”

The master chief saluted. “Knock ’em dead, sir.”

Matt returned the salute. “I’ve got a feeling somebody’s going to knock somebody dead. I’m not sure who’s going to be left standing.”

“You’ll do great, Lieutenant. Fair winds and following seas.”

“Fair winds to you too, Master Chief.” Matt turned and boarded the plane.

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GUANTÁNAMO BAY DETENTION FACILITY

CAMP DELTA

UNITED STATES NAVAL BASE

GUANTÁNAMO BAY, CUBA

The TSA agents grabbed Hasan’s arms, squeezing so tight he winced in pain as they rushed him down the center of the dusty prison courtyard. He was sure that their vise-like grips would leave dark bruises on his upper arms and shoulders.

DETAINED

Like tentacles stretching from an evil amoeba, several long caged entrances jutted about twenty feet or so into the courtyard from the cinder-block prison facility. These cages each had a metal canopy to shield occupants from direct driving rain but were otherwise open-aired on the sides—like a kennel where impounded animals await either their master to come rescue them from captivity or the moment when, abandoned, they were “put down” by an executioner’s injection.

Guarding the entrance of the cages were armed military men in fatigues who looked like US Marines.

Several more armed guards had joined their security detail and had moved into a circle around him, much like they had done at Philadelphia International Airport.

Hasan thought perhaps they were leading him to the back of the prison to be shot in the head.

If only he could be so lucky.

“Move!” a TSA ELITE agent shouted. They jerked his shoulder, yanking him off to the left toward one of the extended walkway cages. They passed the first cage, then the second, third, and fourth.

The fifth caged walkway, like the others, was framed in wickets of coiled stainless steel barbed wire. An agent punched some numbers on a combination pad on the gate, triggering a sinister-sounding *click*, followed by a *clank*. Then two more, *clank*.

With a humming buzz, the steel-caged door swung open.

“Okay, move!”

They shoved him forward into the walkway cage. But because of its narrowness—barely enough room for three men to stand abreast—the TSA ELITEs were forced to realign themselves to fit in the cage with the prisoner. Two stepped in, single file, ahead of Hasan. The others shoved him in and followed him into the cage.

A tropical breeze gusted through the open steel wires of the cage, providing relief from the heat. The breeze would have refreshed his face, but the heaving convulsions and contorted twisting in his stomach nullified its benefits.

A steel *clank* sounded behind him. The door locking them in.

DON BROWN

“All right, let’s move,” an agent said. They started forward again but had gotten no more than a couple of steps when a loud, shrill whistle pierced the air, surrounding them.

In an instant, all activity froze.

Then the shriek of the whistles stopped, and the still air yielded to the blare of an almost eerie-sounding bugle call. The bugle produced a haunting call, with a tune sounding almost like taps but not quite. A bit more lively.

“Colors,” one of the agents mumbled, obviously disgusted.

“What a waste,” another said. “These military types waste so much time with their stupid patriotism crap and garble about the Constitution.”

Marines and sailors stood at attention, salutes flashed toward the large flagpole in the middle of the courtyard.

At the base of the flagpole, a Marine honor guard worked furiously to bring the American flag down for the evening as dozens of other Marines paid reverent homage.

For Hasan, this sight brought comfort in the midst of his nightmare. The reverence shown by the US military for the flag that stood for freedom represented what Hasan always associated with America. His heart told him that the military officers he had seen and these TSA ELITEs were not the same.

The words of the Lee Greenwood ballad came to mind. “The flag still stands for freedom. God bless the USA.”

He prayed, *God bless America again. I don’t know what’s happening here, and I don’t know what will happen to me. But please restore America as a beacon of true freedom, and please protect my son.*

Forced to wait for the bugler to stop, a couple agents cursed under their breath, disgusted by the interruption of their routine.

The flag reached the bottom of the pole, and the Marines folded it sharply, tucking it into a red, white, and blue cloth triangle. The bugle call faded. The whistles blew again.

The pause ended, salutes were dropped, and activity returned to GITMO.

DETAINED

“All this for a dang flag,” an agent said.

“All right. Enough of that,” Jacobs said. “We’ve wasted enough time. Let’s move.”

Jacobs took the lead. The TSA ELITE entourage, with Hasan jammed in their midst, walked down the caged corridor to a steel door to the main prison. Jacobs punched some numbers into a combination box, causing more electronic buzzing and clinking.

“Step back,” Jacobs ordered.

The steel door swung out slowly, revealing a long, dark hallway.

“Let’s go.”

Jacobs stepped in first. Hasan’s bodyguards pushed him in next.

The long hall felt humid and had a musty smell. The floor was concrete. The cinder-block walls had no windows or doors. Lightbulbs hung from the ceiling every ten feet or so. Sweat beaded on his face. He felt short of breath.

They walked under a sign that said, “Welcome to the Corridor of Freedom,” and just past that sign they came to another hallway off to the left.

“This way,” Jacobs barked.

They turned, and about twenty feet beyond the turn was a set of yellow steel double doors.

And another sign:

High Security Area
Solitary Confinement

Jacobs punched a security code, and the doors slid open like elevator doors.

“Let’s go.” Jacobs motioned for his men to enter the secure area with Hasan.

Inside, three US Marines in camouflage uniforms manned a guard station. One of the Marines looked up as the TSA group entered. “May I help you, sir?”

Jacobs flashed an identification badge.

DON BROWN

“I’m Special Agent Jacobs, TSA ELITE Forces. Who’s in charge, Sergeant?”

“Right now, that would be First Lieutenant Elliot, sir.”

“Where is Lieutenant Elliot right now?” Jacobs snarled.

The duty sergeant cocked his head with a quizzical look. “He’s out making rounds at the moment, Mr. Jacobs. He should be back in about ten minutes.”

“That’s Special Agent Jacobs to you, Sergeant. And I don’t have ten minutes.”

“I’m sorry sir, that’s what he said.”

“What about ‘I don’t have ten minutes’ do you not understand, Sergeant? Do you know who this man is?” He pointed at Hasan.

The sergeant shot a glance at Hasan, then turned to Jacobs. “Sorry, sir. I don’t recognize him.”

“Well, this happens to be Hasan Makari, one of the most sought-after terrorists in the world. He’s the guy who murdered our United States ambassador eleven years ago in Lebanon. What do you expect me to do? Stand in the hallway with the world’s most notorious terrorist while I wait on your lieutenant to return?”

The sergeant looked at Jacobs. “With respect, Agent Jacobs, we—”

“That’s *Special* Agent Jacobs.”

“Excuse me. But with respect, sir, we have a bunch of the world’s most sought-after terrorists in this wing. The CIA has been bringing these guys in here for years. They don’t snap their fingers and demand that we change our military procedures when they show up.”

“Well, that’s not good enough, Sergeant!” Jacobs snapped. “From here on, you’re going to be dealing with me. And TSA ELITE is not CIA. We have our own unique procedures. We don’t tolerate the inefficiencies tolerated by the CIA or the military. Am I clear?”

The Marine hesitated. “I hear you, sir.”

“Well, hear this! Call your lieutenant to the guard station. Now.”

The sergeant studied Jacob’s face for a second, then picked up his walkie-talkie. “Lieutenant Elliot. You have a visitor at the guard station.”

A second later. “Elliot here. What’s up, Sergeant?”

DETAINED

“Sir. Sorry to interrupt. There’s a Special Agent Jacobs, an ELITE TSA special agent, with a new prisoner. The prisoner is a Mr. Makari.”

“Oh yeah. Captain Kohlman warned me about this guy. I’ll be right there.”

“Aye, sir.”

Jacobs stepped closer to the Marine. “What did the lieutenant mean by that remark?” he snarled.

“What remark, sir?” the sergeant asked.

“About Captain Kohlman warning him about me?”

“I have no idea, sir. You’ll have to ask him when he gets here.”

“I intend to do that.”

Seconds later, a Marine wearing fatigues walked around the corner. “I’m First Lieutenant Elliot,” the officer said.

“I’m Special Agent Jacobs, Lieutenant. TSA ELITE Forces. I overheard your comment on your sergeant’s walkie-talkie. What’s this about Captain Kohlman warning you about me?”

“Sir, I’m not in a position to discuss any conversation with anyone in my chain of command.”

“We’ll see about that, Lieutenant,” Jacobs said. “I work for the director of TSA, who works closely with the secretary of Homeland Security. Rest assured, your remarks will be passed on to the highest echelons of power in DC.”

“Report whatever you’d like, Special Agent Jacobs,” the lieutenant said. “If you are ready, you may move your prisoner to cell 4. Down the passageway here to your right. The sergeant here and the corporal will accompany you.

“Once the prisoner is contained, you will have to clear these immediate spaces. As you know, there are other spaces in the prison that you may occupy for whatever you have planned. But these are military-only spaces.”

“I don’t think I like your attitude, Lieutenant.”

“That’s your privilege, sir,” Elliot said. “Sergeant? Corporal? Please accompany Mr. Jacobs and his crew with the prisoner to cell 4.”

“Aye, sir.”

DON BROWN

“Aye, aye, Lieutenant,” the sergeant said. “This way, sir.”

They walked down the hall to an area marked “Isolation Inmates.” They passed three steel doors on the right, then the sergeant held up his hand. “This is it.”

He inserted a large key into a dead-bolt lock and turned the key to the left.

The door swung open with an eerie creaking, like something from a haunted house. “Okay, Makari, inside,” Jacobs said.

Hasan stepped into the small cinder-block cell. There was no bed, no furniture, no chair. Only a toilet. In the back of the cell, he noticed another door, which had no window, only a small trapdoor cut into the bottom of the back door, about a foot wide by six inches high. Perhaps a feeding door to slip him food? “How odd,” he thought. “A cell with two doors.” The one linking to the guard station had a square Plexiglas window covering the vertical bars that were at head height in the door.

A video camera was mounted next to the ceiling in the back-right corner.

“Aren’t you going to uncuff him?” Lieutenant Elliot had followed the group down the passageway.

“We’ll decide how we deal with our prisoners,” the TSA chief said. “He’s lucky we haven’t amputated his hands after what he did.”

“I suggest you uncuff him,” Elliot said. “What you or the CIA do with him one-on-one might be your business. But here in our presence, until he gives a reason to act otherwise, I’m instructing you to uncuff him before we close the door.”

“How dare you!” Jacobs fumed. “This is a TSA ELITE operation. Not CIA.”

Elliot said, “US Marines don’t violate the Geneva Conventions. Now either carry out my instructions or we’ll take matters into our own hands.”

Jacobs cursed under his breath. “Gentlemen, draw your weapons on the prisoner. Unless the lieutenant here objects to that too.”

“Just don’t get trigger-happy,” Elliot said.

DETAINED

Three TSA ELITE guards jammed their pistol barrels against Hasan's head. "Fuchs, step into the cell. Uncuff him. If he makes a break for it, kill him."

"Yes, sir," Fuchs said as he walked into the small cell. "Turn around, Makari. Put your face against the back wall until the cuffs are removed and you hear us close the door behind you. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

Hasan turned around, walked to the back wall, and put his nose against it.

Fuchs gripped the cuffs and unlocked them. The cuffs dropped to the concrete floor, freeing Hasan's hands, but he didn't move. He heard shuffling behind him, and a moment later he heard the cell door slam.

Hasan turned around. He stood there. Alone.

Someone slid a metal blind down over the Plexiglas iron-barred window, blocking his view of the hall area. Now he could see no one and nothing.

The trapdoor at the bottom of the back door opened. A paper was pushed onto the floor.

A voice over a loudspeaker said, "Hasan Makari. We are special agents of the United States Transportation Security Administration—ELITE Forces. If you wish to save your life and your son's life, you will cooperate . . . sooner rather than later.

"What we are seeking from you is simple. Tell the truth. Confess to your crimes. Acknowledge your fault, and you may live. If you fail to do that, you shall die.

"On the floor before you is a simple statement for you to sign, acknowledging your guilt. Acknowledgment of guilt is the first step toward restoration.

"Pick it up, read it, and let us know when you are ready to sign it."

Silence.

Hasan reached down and picked the document up off the floor.

DON BROWN

I, Hasan Makari, a citizen and resident of the Republic of Lebanon, do hereby acknowledge my involvement in the following acts, and I make this acknowledgment to United States Transportation Security Agency ELITE Forces, to whom I confess the following acts:

I did conspire to and participated in the criminal operation causing the assassination of the United States ambassador, the Honorable George Madison.

My involvement consisted of, but was not necessarily limited to, the following acts:

- Communicating with unnamed coconspirators armed with rocket-propelled grenades, knowing that my coconspirators would launch an attack against Ambassador George Madison's motorcade in the city of El-Mina, Lebanon, at the corner of Al Istiklal and Mar Elias, in the North Governorate, Tripoli District.
- Assisting in this operation by serving as an active "lookout," where I provided manual hand signals as the ambassador's motorcade rolled by my position to initiate the fatal rocket attack against the ambassador's motorcade.

I now confess, without reservation or hesitation, that I aided and abetted the assassination by giving hand signals to fire the rocket that killed the ambassador.

I further confess that my son, Najib Makari, assisted in the planning and execution of this operation to assassinate the ambassador.

Moreover, my son, Najib Makari, procured a fraudulent enlistment into the United States Navy for purposes of perpetrating acts of terror against United States forces, and I have entered the United States to conspire with Najib Makari to perform further acts of terror against the United States.

I make this confession freely, voluntarily, and not under any undue influence or force of coercion.

Signed,
Hasan Makari

DETAINED

Hasan looked into the camera mounted up in the corner of the cell. “This statement is not true. There is nothing true about it. I cannot sign it.”

The cell went dark.

He waited for his eyes to adjust.

A voice in the dark.

“That’s a foolish choice, Muhammad.”

The cell had been sealed from the outside, leaving him in total darkness.

What to do? Hasan reached out into dark space, trying, against a swelling sense of panic, to feel for something to touch. The darkness wrapped his body like a suffocating blanket, with a claustrophobic noose around his neck.

He took a step, both hands out in front of him.

Then another step.

Another.

The coarse surface of the cinder-block wall felt damp, almost cold.

He could not understand the sense of relief he felt, but he was grateful that somehow the panic had drained from his hands and into the concrete walls.

With both hands against the walls, he slid to the floor. He turned and sat, resting his back against the wall.

He closed his eyes, and when he did, there seemed to be more light against the back of his eyelids than in the darkness of the room.