

TERROR ON THE RUN

By Robert Gately
(24K words)

PREFACE

When 911 happened, a friend of mine was stuck in New York City because of the city shutting down its borders. When the city opened back up, which was a couple of days later, I got a phone call from him asking me if I would pick him up at the Hoboken Path Station. Of course, I said yes, but I was not counting on what happened next.

I lived in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, so it took me about an hour to reach the turnpike. Keep in mind, for those days after 911, I listened to CNN, and all the other news channels, which gave me enough fodder to hate the culprits who did this even though I didn't know who they were. Surely, it was a mid-easterner. At least, that was what all the pundits said. So, when I reached the turnpike, instead of the Twin Towers, I saw a plume of smoke still puffing up two days after the travesty, and the sight of that smolder inflamed my spirit more than ever.

The Turnpike was still closed because of the event, and I asked the guards how to get to the Hoboken Path using another direction. He told me the best route to take, but it was not long before I forgot the directions and I got lost. So, I stopped into this donut shop and, as I reached the door, these racist remarks were coming from inside the belly of the shop, and I stood frozen at the door wondering if I should go in or not. While I hesitated, two Indian people opened the door, and came out and stood in front of me. I knew they were East Asian Indians because the man had a dot in the middle of his head and the woman was dressed in a Turban Hijab fashion. I put my hands out about 12 inches apart as if to say, 'What's up'. He grabbed a hold me and hugged me, as if to thank me for this kind gesture, which was just another way of saying 'Hey, what's up'.

In that instant, all the anger and hurt left my soul. I got the directions I needed and I proceeded on to pick up my friend, and when I began to tell him what took place at the donut shop, something very unusual happened to me. I cried to the point where I couldn't finish the story. I had a lot of hate and disdain for people in general based on hearsay evidence and pundits' sound bites, and in an instant all that anger and frustration was removed from my soul. Thank you, wherever you both are, for removing that ungodly spirit in me.

Anyway, 911 produced a lot of emotions in people. This is my response to what happened on that day.

CHAPTER ONE

CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia was where George Adams worked. In the reception area, when someone walked into the building, after 911, that person was greeted by a large US Flag in the southwest corner of the room. A CIA emblem hung on the wall next to the flag with the words "LANGLEY, VIRGINIA" stenciled on the wooden platform it was resting on.

Not far away on a different floor, CIA Agents worked at the open PC stations, and most were dressed from the same page of the SEARS catalogue - dark suits, white or blue shirts – that kind of dress.

The agents' cryptic chatter, and the clatter of PC keyboards, set the ambiance in the room. The middle of the room had a maze of removable partitions so that each 'work station', or the agents who occupied it, had line-of-sight privacy, but had to whisper if they wanted any kind of confidentiality. The senior-ranking people occupied rooms along the perimeter of the office. They had more privacy and could close the door if they wanted to.

Before the Iraq war started, John Blatnik's hair was graying, and he was just itching to retire. A fake Oscar statue sat conspicuously on his desk. A Star of David hung around the statue's neck like a medallion.

John was one of a few people who were trusted to use the Satellite photos at this time. In fact, he was inspecting a satellite photo using a ruler to calculate distances between targets when the phone rang. He answered it, and while he talked on the phone, George Adams, who sat at the desk next to John, came into his cubicle and used a magnifying glass on the Satellite photo John was just looking at. George could actually see men in uniforms were hoisting a crate into a truck parked behind a palace if he inspected the photo with the magnifying glass. George looked up and saw the inscription stenciled on one the photos. It said, 'IRAQI PALACE #3'

"Sausage and Cheese," George said to no one in particular.

Right outside the US Embassy in Ottawa, Canada, a US flag on a pole flapped in the breeze as if it was competing with the Canadian Flag, which was also flapping the the breeze on a pole two yards away. A US Embassy symbol was displayed on the outside wall.

Several security guards on the first floor of the US Embassy observed the personal IDs of employees entering the building. George's daughter entered and showed her pass. She worked on the third floor of the US Embassy in Canada for the summers. Ellie Adams just graduated from St. Paul University and this was her last summer at the US Embassy at Ottawa. She was smartly dressed with a Dual Pockets Button Front Tweed Blazer with a dress-like skirt. She was on the phone with her blue-tooth resting in her ear and talking to her father. George asked for crackers and cheese.

"It's Father's Day," she said but no one could see the blue-tooth in her ear. "Don't you need anything besides food?"

Susanna Blatnik sat across the aisle from Ellie. She was also a young woman, business-type, except for biting her fingernails. She ripped off a chunk of nail and spit it out.

Ellie took off her blue-tooth and rested her cell phone on her shoulder. While talking she shot a rubber band and hit a picture on the desk in front of her. The nameplate on that desk read 'PETER CLINE', Thomas' son who was their supervisor who occupied one of the offices on the perimeter of the room.

A Maintenance Worker of mid-Eastern decent, an Arab, with cold, penetrating eyes,

swept a broom in the same spot repeatedly while he listened to Ellie.

In the meantime, the phone conversation with George, who was at the CIA office in Langley, and Ellie, who was at the US Embassy in Ottawa, was interrupted by Susanna who told Ellie to tell for George to say hi to her father and to give her dad, John, a kiss for her. Of course, George heard this, and there was no reason for Ellie to repeat it, so he looked at John while he was talking on the phone.

“There’s no way I’m going to give that derelict a kiss.” George said, and shuddered at the thought of doing it.

“Listen, Sweetie,” George said. “I like those little Hickory Farm sausage and cheese things. That’s what I want for Father’s Day. A bunch of those if you can get them. They hold me over in the afternoon.”

Ellie turned and faced the window and saw an airplane that looked like it was headed right at the Embassy. The airport was not far away so all the incoming flights looked like it was headed for the building. Alarmed, she stood and was fixated on the airplane while she slowly walked to the window.

“I already got you something for Father’s Day,” she said to George. “It’s in the mail.”

Ellie was not listening to what her father was saying, but her face showed a growing concern at the SOUND of the plane which got louder and louder as it got closer. The airplane took a sharp turn and headed away, and Ellie let out a tiny sigh of relief.

She then looked out the window, down by the entrance area, and saw Peter Cline walking up the path to the gate. He flashed his ID, as he did every day, and walked into the compound. He looked up and spotted Ellie. He raised his arms and does a 'Rocky' dance, as he did most days.

“Ellie. Speak,” George said while on the phone. “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing. Peter is late again, is all. Tell Mr. Cline he raised a bum.”

“Speak of the devil,” George said over the phone as Thomas Cline appeared resting at door of one of the perimeter offices. His job title, Director of Satellite Communication, was inscribed on a name tag on his door. Thomas saw George look at him, and Thomas threw him a 'five minute' sign.

“Peter’s dad is waving us to a meeting,” George said. “Gotta go, honey. Father’s Day’s this Sunday, you know.”

“Duh! We already have our airline tickets.”

Ellie continued looking out the window, and caught a glimpse of Peter walking into the building and out of view.

“I’ll see you Friday night,” she said. “And I love you too, Dad.”

She said her goodbyes and placed the cell phone on the windowsill. She continued looking out the window and saw a security guard checking in a car at the gate. Also, a handful of people walked by the gate to the building next door. There was nothing suspicious, so she turned around to go back to her desk. She noticed the Arab maintenance man was still sweeping the floor. Their eyes met. He whispered something in Arabic, but it couldn’t be good, she thought.

“I think he just called you a lazy bitch, Ellie,” Susanna said as Ellie walked back to her cubicle.

At the CIA office in Virginia, George was watching the TV, which sat in the corner of the room high on a bracket so everyone could see. George was alternately looking at the CNN broadcast and the satellite photos in front of him on the desk. John was still on the phone and

was trying to get George's attention.

“Ambassador Hussammi spoke at the UN yesterday,” the TV host read from a briefing, “and he said that Iraq begins a new era of cooperation pointing to the voluntary decimation of twelve Weapons of Mass Destruction.”

John snapped his fingers at George who kept his attention on the TV.

“He also said the incineration and dismantling of Iraq's entire arsenal of chemical weapons should make the UN leaders realize that Iraq negotiates in good faith ...”

John reaches for the remote and hit the mute button, which finally got George’s attention.

“Who are you talking to,” George whispered.

“Ari,” John said, “And he wants you conferenced on.

George waved his hand. He did NOT want to talk to Ari. Ari, in Jerusalem, Israel, had the gift of gab George though. “We have to go to a meeting,” George said.

“Yes, Ari,” John said. “He's right here.” John waited a second and when George didn’t reach for the phone,

“George. Line three. It's Ari,” John said, loud enough for Ari to hear through the phone set.

George made a fist at John, as if to say he was in deep trouble. George then picked up on line three and, at the same time, took the remote and turned the sound back on.

“Hello, Ari,” George said. “How's the tourism business in downtown Jerusalem these days?”

As CNN depicted the riot that was taking place in East Jerusalem, where Ari Adler lived, Ari maneuvered in his modestly equipped kitchen with quick decisive motions chopping onions. His eyes watered from the onion fumes. He wiped his tears.

Ari multitasked with great ease as he talked into a speakerphone, chopped the onions, and watched CNN on the TV, which played in the adjacent living room.

“Don't be a smart ass, George. I know you are watching CNN and you see what is going on in Jerusalem, here.

“Yeah. So?” George said into the phone.

Before Ari answered George, Ari spotted a cockroach on the counter, which was motionless except for its waving antennae. Ari slams his fist on it. It wiggles. Wounded.

“GEVALT!” He swiped it off the counter to the floor and stomped on it. The crunch noise sounded like he was stepping on a potato chip. He kicked it into the corner where it landed next to four or five other cockroaches that had met with similar fates.

On the TV in Ari’s living room, CNN showed the contemporary horror in a CNN news report about a suicide attack in Israel – the ambulances, the broken bodies, etcetera.

“Listen, George. John just told me you and he are planning to retire soon.”

George pointed to his mouth then made puppet motions with his hand to John. His message is clear. John has a big mouth. “That's right,” George said. “I'm going to teach at Virginia next Spring. John wants to be an actor. Did he tell you that?”

John slammed his hand to his face. “Now who has a big mouth,” He whispered to himself.

“Yes. I know,” Ari said. “I saw him in NOISES OFF at your community theatre last time I came out. He was very good, I thought.”

“Oh, so you thought he stunk in Noises Off too,” George said loud enough for John to hear. “And you saw better acting from a stuffed sock? Interesting,” George added.

John, hearing this, appears hurt, and just shook his head.

George smiled, satisfied. They are even now.

“Listen, George. I'm pleading with both of you. Don't retire. It'll take months, maybe even a year to get your replacements up to snuff.”

“Ari, we'll break in the new guys ourselves. Don't worry. Listen, I'm sorry we have to cut you short. We got a big meeting to go to.”

In a CIA meeting room, Thomas and his co-worker, Paul Dennehy, walked in as if they owned the place. They sit and wait like all the others. Paul hands Thomas a stack of photos. “We won't be reviewing the satellite photos this morning,” Thomas said while Paul pointed to the letter on top of the stack. “There were just intercepted,” he added.

Just then, John and George walk in with satellite photos in their hands.

“John, George,” Paul said. “Sit. Read this.” Paul placed the letter in front of them.

George tossed his satellite photos on the table and then started reading the letter.

“It was intercepted in Germany,” Paul said. “Israeli intelligence picked up the exact wording from another source. Tell me what you make of it?”

“Well boss,” Thomas said to Paul, “it says here that two goalies hit 50 home runs 24 hours before celebrating. That's baseball lingo yet they were referring to 'goalies' which is a hockey term.”

“So,” Paul said. “What do you make of that?”

“What countries are good at soccer?” John asked

“Latin or European countries,” George said.

“The US and Canada have professional hockey teams,” Paul said. “Maybe Russia. They are all good in hockey, no?”

“But fifty home runs,” John said. “That's baseball. United States all the way.”

Omar Khaled burst into the room. He had a pencil behind his ears. and his tie was loose and flapping in the wind. And his shirt was disheveled, as if he had already put in a full day.

He took an extra long look at Thomas, then at George, and then at John. He talked with a mid-Eastern accent.

“Omar,” Paul said. “We're in a meeting here.”

“I know, sir. This is important. We debriefed a prisoner today and he says a strike is planned for this week at the US Embassy in Ottawa.”

“How good is this information?” Paul asked.

“We did a full court press,” Omar said. “I'd say at least fifty-fifty.”

“Thomas, isn't that where Peter is doing a summer internship?” Paul asked.

“Yes. So are Ellie and Susanna, Thomas said, referring to George's and John's daughters.

“Good, God!” Paul said. “Omar, sit. Help us out here.”

Paul handed Omar a copy of letter.

“Okay, guys,” Paul said. “Don't panic. We'll get to the bottom of this.”

He takes the letter from Omar and re-reads it. “Twenty-four hours. That's one day.”

“Shit!!! That's it,” Paul exclaimed. “Hours means days. It's 24 days before celebrating. That's 24 days before the fourth of July. Who's got a calendar?”

Thomas slides his calendar over, and Paul begins counting from July 4th and goes backwards. He stops at twenty-four.

“My God!” Paul said while gulping the air. “That's today.”

CHAPTER TWO

Ellie, at her desk at the US Embassy in Ottawa, Canada, opened her mail with a letter opener. Her cell phone rang, and the sound of the ring was soft as if the phone was some distance away. She followed the ringing sound and spotted her cell phone on the windowsill where she left it last.

Peter was sitting in front of Ellie and also spotted the phone on the sill.

“Want me to get it for you?” Peter asked Ellie.

Ellie shook her head,” she said, and with the letter opener in hand, she got up and walked to the window. As she picked up the phone and answered it, she looked out the window and saw a truck barreling down the road towards the Embassy.

“Sweetheart,” George said with an urgency, “I want you and Peter and Susanna to get out of the Embassy building right now. NOW, Sweetie. No questions. Just do it.”

The urgency in his voice startled her. However, before Elle could do anything, she noticed the truck's speed was abnormally fast. She stiffened up, turned and looked towards Susanna and Peter.

Peter looked at her and smiled. He saw her grave expression and instantly knew something was wrong. He whipped around and saw the Arab maintenance man walking towards them wearing a raincoat and holding it shut as if were hiding something. Ellie snapped back to the window and saw the truck smashing through the gates at top speed, and barreling towards the building.

Peter noticed the maintenance man had something dangling from his neck like a stethoscope or worse ... a detonator wire.

Ellie whipped around and saw the Arab man at the end of the aisle.

“Dad,” she said into the phone. “I love you.”

“Of course, Sweetheart. Now, get out of there.”

“It’s too late, Dad,” Ellie said. “Bye.”

Then she yelled over to Peter, “Stop him,” and pointed to the Arab man who opened his raincoat which revealed a body suit of explosives. He cackled in Arabic, “Whore!”

Peter grabbed him from behind and as they struggle for control of the detonator, Ellie ran towards them with the letter opener held high. When she reached the Arab, she impaled him in his eye socket.

An explosion from below rocked the building and sent Ellie flying. Smoke billowed everywhere. Chaos ensued. Terror reigned.

Within seconds, part of the third floor collapsed to the floor below. Peter, the Arab Man, and Susanna disappeared along with sliding chairs and tables. Ellie struggled to stay where she was as debris fell on her, pinning her down.

Days later, Ellie was lying unconscious in a hospital bed with a respirator mask on. George and his wife, Martha, sat next to her. The predominant sound the room was Ellie's breathing.

Martha fiddled with the wires that led to the machines that monitored Elle's vitals. Martha was trying to unentangle them to make Ellie more comfortable while talking with George. She moved Ellie's arm, fluffed the pillow and tucked in the blankets.

“They recovered pieces of their bodies. They identified them by comparing Lucy's and Abby's DNA with their parents ...”

“George! I don't want to know that.”

“I'm sorry. I'm ... sorry.” George did not know what to say. He was just trying to make conversation actually. Therefore, on a lower key he mentioned that Tom was having something at his place after the services tomorrow.

“I can't go,” Martha said. “I can't face them, George. Peter and Susanna were like our own children, for crying out loud. They went to the same school. They belong to the same ... I can't go ... I just can't.”

George tried to assure her everything would be okay. However, what could he say, really? So, he just left.

At Mahoney's funeral home, Thomas and his wife, Lucy, and John and his wife, Abby, sat in the front row of the viewing room. A few yards away were two closed caskets. On top of the caskets were pictures of Peter and Susanna.

John leaned into Thomas and said, “If you were God, how would you dispense justice?”

“I think God helps those who help themselves,” Thomas said, but added, “but ... God help you if you get caught.”

Omar sat in the back among dozens of people. Some were co-workers and others were family and friends who knew either Peter and Susanna, or their parents. He spotted George who appeared by the entrance. Omar got up and went over to greet him.

Of course, George wanted to know how Thomas and John were doing, but Omar didn't know. All he knew was their children's remains, or what was left of them, had been cremated.

“I think they decided to have a casket display to help everyone come to closure,” Omar added.

Thomas saw George and Omar talking, so he got up and went over to them and asked George how Elle was.

“She's still paralyzed. Unconscious. I'm so sorry for you and Lucy ...”

“Yeah. Me, too,” Thomas said and then turned to Omar. “Have you found out who did it?”

“Hashim claimed responsibility,” was all Omar could say.

“That's the Hamas splinter group, right?”

Omar nodded then told Thomas and George their children were heroes. They stopped the inside bomber from doing his deed. Saved two, three hundred lives, they say.”

The mean fell silent for a beat, then George finally broke the ice by excusing himself to pay his respects.

George pumped into John on his way over to the caskets. They hugged and offered each other condolences. George continued towards the front row to the wives where he gave more hugs and condolences.

When John met up with Omar and Thomas, Omar excused himself, and went back to his seat leaving John and Thomas to themselves.

“We have to talk to Ari,” Thomas said.

“We don't say anything to George about this for now. Nothing to anyone.”

John nodded, and then told Thomas that he and George have been asked to go to Israel and help wipe out the Hasim group in the hills. “In fact, I volunteered to be the one of the people who steals the WMD,” John said, “and I'm the one who will detonate the bomb once we reach the site. George wants no part of the plan, probably because Elle is still alive.”

Ari was shooting a machine gun in his back yard in East Jerusalem. Benjamin, a tall, lanky, but physically fit man in his forties, loaded another gun as Ari's machine gun jams.

"This is crap," Ari said. "We get all the rejects." Ari's cell phone rang. He removed it from his pocket and answered it.

It was Thomas and John huddled by the speakerphone at Thomas' desk at the CIA building in Langley. The door to Thomas' room was opened slightly so Thomas could see George. After their customary greetings, Ari cupped the phone and told Benjamin who he was talking to,

"I was going to call you," Ari said to Thomas and John. I talked to the Commander. He doesn't particularly like the idea.

"What part doesn't he like?" Thomas asked.

"Well, the cargo, for one thing. It's not exactly something you'd buy at Home Depot, you know.

"Cargo?" John whispered to Thomas. "He's talking about the WMD."

"It's your intelligence that says the cargo's in one of the palaces," Thomas said. "What's really bothering him, Ari?"

"Well, he says, if we're going to supply the truck, and chopper, guns and munitions, then Commander Bergman wants more involvement from you guys."

"John has already volunteered to Detnoate the ... cargo, and I have already volunteered to fly over ..."

"Not from you, Thomas. We need you there. You're the only one who has the authority to reposition the satellite if we need more pictures."

Benjamin hands Ari another gun.

Ari puts the phone down, then shoots. The gun is good. He nods to Benjamin then picks up the cell phone.

"Sorry about that. Where were we? Oh, yeah. He wants George over here to help us."

"That's to protect his ass in case we get caught."

"Is that John?" Ari asked.

"Yes. Tell your Commander that Thomas will stay here and do his thing, and I'll get George to go."

"Okay, John. Just know the commander wants to diffuse blame if we get caught. If it's just you from the States, and something goes wrong, it would be seen as a personal thing and Israel still takes the fall. If you and George are here, it would be seen more like a collaboration between countries. You see what I mean?"

George was at his desk talking on the phone with his wife. He looked tired, disheveled. He saw John leave Thomas' office and swiveled around for more privacy. He whispered into the phone, "Martha, don't cry. Please. Be thankful she's alive."

"But she still might die," Martha said, holding back the tears. "She's still not out of the woods."

"I know that, but she's going to be okay. She's got a strong will. She has your will."

Martha cried some more, which prompted George to tell her he had a meeting to go to, and he had to hang up.

George, John and Thomas were walking on a bicycle path that circled the CIA building. There was no one else in sight. They were alone.

“So let me get this straight,” George said to Thomas. “You're going to stay here and collect satellite photos of the Hashim camp while John and I gallivant around Iraq, steal a WMD as they move it from one palace to the other ...”

“We call it cargo,” John said. “Call it cargo.”

“Okay. So, we're going to truck this cargo some 300 miles or so, then I'll high-tail in one of their motor-cycles another 100 miles to one of those Israeli choppers they stole from us in the Afghan war. And you, John, will set off the ... cargo off at the Hashim camp somewhere in Iraq, and not only kill yourself, but most of the militants there in one big bang, and contaminate the planet with anthrax or something?”

“Silence prevailed. John gave George a high brow, as if to say, ‘yes’. “That’s basically it,” John said.

“And the Iraqi battalion will just stand by and watch it happen?” George added.

“CNN is all over the palace,” Thomas said. “You'll get very little resistance.”

“It's a good plan, George,” John said.

“You're not the only one who can reposition the satellite. They'll be taking satellite photos every few seconds. They'll see us, won't they?”

“I'll order the satellite to be repositioned at the proper times,” Thomas said. “Don't worry about that. That's the least of our worries.”

“It'll only take us a few minutes,” John added. “You'll be in and out of there before you know it.”

“Those crates are decoys. We all know that, for chrissakes,” George said. “We'll just find a statue of an Arabian Knight or an ivory carving from Nimrud, or something.”

“Not all of them are decoys, George,” John said. “Not the one we'll be taking.”

Silence befalls the group. Both John and Thomas wait for George to speak.

“So, this is where your bereavement counseling has led you?” George asked.

“That was uncalled for, George,” John said.

“You're right,” George said. “I'm sorry.”

“Actually, the group meetings have been very good,” Thomas said. “I don't internalize my anger anymore.”

“Is that the class,” George asked, “or the fact that you'll wipe out hundreds of the enemy?”

“Acting class is very good therapy,” John said. “I'm able to channel my emotions now. I don't have the range like some of them. Do you know the women students cry at the drop of a hat. I'm trying to summon that emotion, but it's not easy. Casting directors love that. When a man cries, I mean.”

“Stop!” George commanded. “I'm not going to risk my pension. I've got responsibilities beyond saving the world. So, you do this without me.”

George stopped walking, and Thomas and John followed suit.

“Listen,” George said. “I am so sorry that these pricks killed Susanna and Peter. And I thank you for the compassion you're showing Ellie. But ... I'm not doing it. Please, just leave me alone.”

As he walked in the opposite direction, George looked back and saw Thomas and John watching him. As George left, he yelled back “Don't worry. I'm not going to say anything to anyone.”

“Omar is a Christian, you know,” John said to Thomas, “and Hamas killed his parents years ago, and he still has issues there.”

“Yes. I know, John.”

“He's well versed on their infrastructure,” John said. “Their language.”

“Please. Ari won't accept an Arab as part of the operation, and Omar might not even want to go on the operation.”

“They're starting the palace inspections soon and we're running out of time. At least talk to Omar.”

At Langley, Omar looked through a one-way window in an Observation Room watching an interrogator work on an Arab prisoner in the Interrogation Room. Omar showed no emotion as he listened to sounds of physical abuse.

Agent Leary poked his head in and told Omar that he was wanted in Thomas Cline's office right away.

John looked up from his desk and saw Omar leave Thomas' office. After a beat, Thomas appeared at his office door and jiggled his hand at John indicating 'not good and not bad'. John got up and walked over to the water cooler, which was a few feet away from Thomas. As John took a drink, Thomas said, “He said he'd help any way he can, but he won't go to the Middle-East. They don't interrogate over there, or if they do, their methods are a lot different than ours.”

While working at his desk, George made room for a mail messenger who wheeled his cart up to him and tossed a package on the desk. The sender of the package was from his daughter at the US Embassy in Ottawa. George opened the package and, as promised, its contents were a Hickory brand of sausage and cheese.

Meanwhile, John was still at the water cooler. “Time is running out,” John said. “We've got to get George to agree else Jerusalem is going to cancel on us.”

Later that night, Ellie lied in her hospital bed half-asleep and half-awake. Her head was the only part of her body she could move. The oxygen mask covered half her face, and she took slow, laborious breaths through it.

A solitary tear ran down her face as she jerked her head back and forth in quick motions. With unusual dexterity, Ellie managed to get the mask to slip off her mouth and nose. She had a much harder time breathing now. Her breaths were slow and evenly spaced as she gathered in less air with each breath.

She looked peaceful as her breathing became more shallow. The cadence got shorter, slower, until she stopped breathing altogether and the monitor emitted a continuous tone.

At the funeral site a few days later, a group of mourners surrounded Ellie's casket while a priest gave a eulogy over her. Lucy and Thomas were sitting directly behind George and Martha in the second row. Lucy wiped her tears. Thomas was less emotional.

At the firing range that night, George and several other agents were at the Langley Pistol Range. They stood frozen, like statues, with their arms extended forward and pistols tightly gripped. A target was some distance away while the agents shot with furious looks on their faces as if they were really shooting at enemies.

A voice emanated from the loud speaker. “GO!” it blared.

And when the agents heard the command, they began firing. George emptied his pistol quickly while the other agents discharged their guns at a slower rate. After the last man was

done, the targets raced forward on a electronic pulley so the agents could view their efforts up close and personal. Each target was the same - a silhouetted figure and a bull's-eye over the heart.

The center of the targets had varying degrees of 'hits', but George's target had no 'hits' at all in the heart area. Instead, all the bullets landed on the shadow's head. The figure's eyes were ripped off the page.

CHAPTER THREE

A few days later, at the meeting room in the CIA building, a meeting was just ending. Most of the agents gathered their notes and left. Omar, John, and Thomas were taking their time and, after everyone else had left, Thomas asked Omar and John if they had talked to George today.

"Yeah, I have," John said. "He doesn't sound good."

"He didn't look good at the funeral," Omar added.

"For what it's worth," Thomas said, "Martha told Lucy he's boozing it pretty bad the past couple of days."

Just as Thomas said this, George appeared at the door. With just the four of them in the room now, George closed the door behind him and said, "For what it's work it's wine and I stopped drinking it because I became too dependent on it."

George glared at Omar, trying hard not to blame every Arab for Peter's, Susanna and his daughter's death. Omar sensed this and he put his notes down and took a seat ready to discuss the issue with George if he brought it up.

The other men in the room sensed that George had something to say, so they remained quiet as well.

Although George was glaring at Omar, Omar glared right back, letting him know he was ready for a showdown if necessary.

"I'm an American, George," Omar said. "But I can't change my skin color."

"George ..." Thomas started to say, but George held out his hand as if he was a pedestrian cop.

"This Hashim group," George said, "Why did they break off from Hamas?"

"They didn't like the way A'mar Shubik was running things," Omar said. "They wanted to expand their influence by attacking international territories."

"Everyone here feels your pain ..." John started to say.

"No. Don't go there, John," George pleaded. Everyone fell silent, then George simply said, "I'm in." Then George turned to Omar and said, "Just give me a little time, ok?"

Omar nodded. He understood.

It was well past George's bedtime. He just sat at a desk in his den at his house, and stared, misty-eyed, at the words on his PC monitor. It read: *Love is pure. like the innocence of a child. My daughter! I thought of you today, and I just smiled.*

Martha appeared at the door. "You sure you don't mind me going to my sister's for a couple of days?" she asked.

George couldn't speak. He just shook his head.

"You coming to bed?"

"Soon," he said.

At the airport, George, carrying an attaché case, and John, walked ahead of Thomas and Omar.

"What did you tell Martha?" John asked George.

"I told her I was seeing a guru in the mountains to get in touch with my inner self. You?"

"I told Abby I was going to the lake to do some fishing. She wanted to come but I told her I needed the time alone. She was a little upset."

"With luck we'll be home in 2 days," Thomas said from behind.

Omar stopped short and pointed to the overhead camera. “We stop here, guys. No sense getting all of our pictures taken.”

Omar handed George and John a folder. “Some common words in Arabic,” Omar said. “The phonetic pronunciation is on the far left. Try a couple?”

“Most of these words are vulgar.”

“Vulgarity gives the impression you've been there for a while. It could save your life, actually.”

“Could get you killed, too,” Thomas said. “You don't want to say 'up yours' to someone strapped with dynamite.”

John mumbled a word and Omar knew exactly what he was saying

“You don't say that word unless you're looking for a fight. There's practical phrases too.. Om – that means mother.”

George chants, “Oooommm!”

“I think I can remember that word,” John said.

“Your wallets,” Thomas said. “Did you check them?”

“We took out all the compromising stuff,” John said. “Charge cards. Pictures, etcetera.”

“Okay. Now listen to me. This is important. If you get caught, you need to tell them a lie, a good lie, or else ...” Omar looked to Thomas for help.

“You know the drill,” Thomas said. “You need to make them believe you got something they want. You just can't blurt it out, else they won't believe you.”

“You mean we have to get our heads crushed first?” George said trying to add a little humor into the conversation.

“Unfortunately, you have to be tortured a bit. The real point is, don't get caught,” Omar added. “If you do, have a good lie ready. It keeps them busy. You live a day or two longer that way. And who knows ... maybe you'll get rescued in that time.”

“They could use us as hostages,” John said.

“Hey, numbnuts! We're not getting caught.”

“Have a good lie ready just in case,” Omar said.

“Now, go make the world safe,” Thomas said.

John and George continued on and showed their tickets to the attendant while Thomas and Omar stayed behind.

John and George sit together while traveling to Jerusalem in a plane. John looked out the window to a range of wispy clouds. Peaceful. Calm.

“Are we doing the right thing?” John asked.

“I don't know. Every time I try to think it through, I think of Ellie. And that gives me strength.”

“Yeah. Me, too.”

“Tell me something. Aren't the Arabs and Jews brothers, genetically speaking? I mean, you could be related to the Arab dictator or something, right?”

“We are all descendants from Abraham, if that's what you mean? Don't start with that shit, George.”

“Why do you hate each other so much, then? It's not just the past fifty years. It's been forever.”

“Hate is part of human nature,” John said. “Why do you hate a cousin, or an Uncle?”

“Because they're dip-shits. Wasn't Abraham messing around with a slave girl ... Haber or something like that?”

“His wife was barren,” John said

“So?”

“So, Sarah allowed Abraham to mess around with their slave, Hagar. That's how Abraham got his first son, Ishmael. He's pertinent to the Arabs somehow. Rituals, eating habits, maybe. Now his other wife, Keturah ...”

“My God! How many wives did he have?” George asked

“He had a few.” “It was two- thousand BC, don't forget. They didn't even have pre-nuptials back then.”

“Yeah. Right. Okay, so Ishmael ... what's his connection?” George asked.

“Connection? What do you mean?”

“I mean, you know, someone begets Abraham, Abraham begets Ishmael, Ishmael begets the Arabs. That sort of thing.”

John laughed then told George that it was Keturah, primarily. She bore Abraham six sons. Many Arabs trace their genealogies to them.

“What about his first wife, Sarah?”

“She finally conceived Isaac who is the Jewish line,” John said.

“Ahh. That's right. So, like I said, the Jews and Arabs are brothers.”

“George! Please.”

“Well, far be it for me to comment on the sexual behaviors of biblical patriarchs. That's not my point.”

“What is your point?”

“Who the hell knows? I've been angry at my brother all my life. He's fifty years old and he's still a druggie.”

John opened up his folder and studied the words Omar gave them. George does the same.

“Om,” George said.

“Mother,” John said, and then read the word, ‘Shokran’.

“Thank you,” George read, then said, “Waj ab zib!”

“That's not on the list.”

“It's number forty-seven.”

John read, “An infection in your penis!” He slapped the paper down and said, “That's Funny, Omar. Real funny. I'll remember to tell that to my interrogators.”

Ari spotted John and George at the Custom's Gate at the Israeli International Airport in Tel Aviv. John and Ari hug. Ari shakes George's hand. As they leave, John asked Ari why he looked upset.

“Hamas moved towards the heart of Tel Aviv. Three bombings in the past five hours. Fifty dead.”

I'm sorry to hear that. I'm surprised the pilot didn't turn the plane around. Is this going to affect our plan?”

“The military are up to their yarmulkes with maneuvers today. The UN Inspectors are moving on Palace Four tomorrow. So are we. We have strong evidence that our cargo will be exiting at the palace. It's buried under a mess of garbage. We'll get their early in the morning, at daylight. I guess we're going to get dirty tomorrow.”

The men exit the airport building. Ari's car was parked in front with flashers on. All the bags except Georg's attaché case were thrown into the trunk.

“Jump in,” Ari said. “I live in a small town between Jerusalem and Bet Shemesh. It'll be a

little over an hour drive.”

George jumped in before John and sat in the middle with his attaché case on his lap.

“You got the photos of the camp, George?”

George patted his attaché case, opened it and took out maps and photos that Ari wanted to see. He looked at one map of an Iraqi Palace. The next map was of southeastern Iraq.

”You got a map of Iraq here. Looks like New Jersey.”

“Yeah, it does, doesn't it?” Stopped at a light, Ari took out a pen from his pocket and wrote a big ‘O’ and an ‘X’.

“The circle is where we think Hashim is, and the big X is where the PLO has Israeli prisoners. That is our secret mission. By the way, that's what Commander Rush thinks we're doing, trying to get our soldiers back. He doesn't know your going to steal the WMD and then set it off at the Hashim camp. It was the only way the Commander could get us the equipment on such short notice. By the way, those other smaller X's that you guys wrote are where secret PLO camps are, most of them, at least.”

“The X's are all over the damn place. Jordan. Syria.”

“What a world we live in, huh? By the way, we're making a pit stop in the heart of the unrest in East Jerusalem. I need to take care of some business with the Commander. It might be a little hectic.”

“Can we stop somewhere, then,” George said. “I'm hungry and I want to eat before I die.”

“Very funny,” Ari said as he pulled into the restaurant's parking lot somewhere outside of Tel Aviv.

The men took their last bites as the waitress walks into view, laid down the check, and left.”

“So, have you thought what you would say if you get captured?”

“Why is everyone talking about getting captured? No one is getting captured.”

“The possibility exists. Hey! Iraq's not a friendly place to Americans.”

“We're not getting caught.”

“Jihad groups, al Queda, the Fedayeen, Muhammad's Army, Ansar Al-Islam,” Ari said, “you could fall into the hands of any of these terrorist groups. And if you did get captured, what will you tell them? How will you explain the cargo? You need to be prepared, guys.”

“We're gonna tell them a big lie,” John said.

“Good,” Ari said. “What's the lie?”

“We haven't thought of one, yet. Got one for us?”

Ari laughs loudly, then quickly turns serious. “If you get captured, you tell them an Israeli commando group overran the Hashim camp that night. You tell them you were taking the cargo to the Israeli commandos who are now training at that site. Cell phones don't work there, so they'll have to physically check out your story. It might keep you alive for a day or two more.”

“That's a little out there,” George said. “They'll shoot us for being insane.

”Suit yourself,” Ari said.

“Ari, it's a good suggestion. It's a lot better than what we got, George.”

“Let me see your wallets,” Ari said changing the topic of conversation. Ari inspected their wallets. He didn't find anything damaging, so he gives them their wallets back.

Then he asked them for their cell phones. John handed Ari his phone, first. Ari scrolls

down the list of the phone numbers in memory, then hands the phone back.

“The numbers in your memory,” Ari said, “They're all US area codes. Memorize them, then erase them. Not that it matters. You have 'American' written on your foreheads, and as soon as you talk, they'll know. Okay, let's go. Same goes for you, George. Delete all your United States numbers. Better yet, take the Sims card out. I have a couple in my bedroom.” Ari threw some money on the table and went to the register to pay the bill.

On the way to Ari's house, he had to take George and John to East Jerusalem, which was a hotbed of contention between the government and Hamas. It wasn't so unusual to see smoke from bombs and the SOUNDS of gun fire, but the amount of what they saw and heard was a cause for alarm. Ari pulled off the road and got out.

“Stay,” Ari said. I'm going to see if I can get a better view on foot.”

George and John watched Ari run to the corner. After a beat, a large explosion sent debris flying onto Ari's car front windows. In a panic, George and John bolt from the car to a safe spot in the alleyway. Ari bolted to that area as well.

They all peer down the street and see an Israeli tank moving towards them. Ari looked behind him and saw armed Palestinians running for cover. An Israeli soldier popped his head out of the tank and pointed the machine gun at Ari. Ari waved a badge and the soldier pointed the gun somewhere else.

Bullets ricocheted off the building.

“Shit,” Ari said. “We're right in the middle of a battle. Get behind the tank.”

The tank sent a torpedo down the street, which was cause for alarm to a dozen Arabs who started running.

The tank stopped, and George saw a little Palestinian girl caught in the crossfire and was crying, fearful to move at all.

Just then ‘shock and awe’ explosion rocked the neighborhood, and a soldier burst into view and aimed a gun at Ari. Ari held out his badge.

“We're after A'mar Shubik,” the soldier said – which was really more of a question.

Ari shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

“Stay put,” the Soldier said, then continued on his way.

George, still fixated on the little girl, heard her yell out that she was stuck, and was crying in the middle of the street afraid to move. Everyone seemed to be ignoring the girl - even the Palestinians who fired shots and the pinging sounds meant the bullets could've ricocheted anywhere.

The mother of the little girl was across the street in a portico, crying because her little daughter was stuck in the middle of the gunfire. The mother started to run into the street for the girl but an Arab man pulled her back. Instead, he started to run for the girl, but bullets hit the turf in front of him, and pinged off the buildings pinning him in the portico.

George jumped to his feet and rushed to the little girl. He scooped her up and tried to return, but an Arab on a rooftop sprays bullets in his path forcing him to freeze. George tried to continue, but each time he did the bullets got closer to him causing him to turn and seek safety in the portico among the Palestinians.

George rushed to safety in the sunken portico where several Arabs were firing into the fray. A car exploded, and the little girl held onto George's neck for dear life.

Frantic to find a safe spot, George took the girl and ran toward the tank while Ari waved his badge again. They managed to get behind the tank. For the time being, he and the girl were

out of harm's way. George and the little girl clutched each other. It was hard to tell who was seeking solace from whom.

The crying woman came over with outstretched arms as the father, immediately shoved her to the side, pushing her hard to the floor.

A'mar Shubik, The Palestinian leader who the Israelis were looking for, entered from the the portico, and he bent down to the crying women to see if she was okay.

George looked at the woman and said, "You the mother? Om? Om?"

The woman spoke in English and replied, "Yes, I'm the mother."

The Arab man, Yusuf, the father of the scared child, appeared through the portico door that led to inside the building, pointed a pistol at George's head while A'mar Shubik stood and told George to let Yusuf's daughter go. Yusuf pointed his gun at George's temple while trying to release the girl's hands. Then A'mar Shubik smacked the Arabs gun away. He then released the girl's hands and gave her to the mother.

"He's an American," Yusuf said.

"He saved your daughter, so back off," A'mar replied.

Yusuf backed off as commanded and, in a huff, he dragged his wife and child into the darkness of the building and was gone. An eerie quiet prevailed as A'mar motioned for George to sit. A'mar then poked his head out into the street.

Ari was talking to the Commander by the side of a building, and for the time being it was quiet on both sides.

Ari was telling the commander that George was a CIA agent but he didn't want to lose the opportunity, so he told the Commander most of the rifles he received the commander didn't work right. jammed. The commander had to explain that his men came first so they had first pick of the munitions. To the commander, it didn't matter if Ari didn't like it and explained to him he was luck to get any rifles at all. Ari said. "Never mind about him. We need to talk. I need munitions. The Thompsons you gave me jams. Works like shit."

"Well, Ari. As you can see, I'm a trifle busy right now. Have a war to contend to."

"Yeah. I heard.

A'mar and George were pinned in the back at the portico,

A'mar saw Ari and the Commander talking. He turned to an Arab Sentry in the portico and motions him to keep a look out. He turned to George and said, "They have stopped shooting ... because of you, maybe?"

George laughed. "My side is trying to figure out if you're an important asset. I mean, you're talking to me, so you must be a somebody. And your side knows you're an American and is wondering the same thing."

"You speak good English," George said.

"A lot of us went to college in your country," he replied. Yusuf's wife opened the door halfway. She said something in Arabic then made a sudden switch to English. "How could Yusuf, that son-of-a-bitch, put our daughter in jeopardy?" she said. Just then Yusuf appeared and she stopped talking.

"She has to learn better curse words in English," George said to Yusuf. "She'd never last in an interrogation room."

"Stop talking English," Yusuf said to his wife. "And don't talk to me like that, bitch." And with that he ducked back into the building again.

A'mar, resting on opposite side of George, ignored the sound of a smack in the face.

"She deserves more," A'mar whispered to himself.

“The parents of the child you saved went to American school too,” A’mar said to George. Another slap, and George looked towards the doorway and saw the mother of the child he just saved holding her face, crying. The child whimpered in the corner.

A’mar yelled at Yusuf to close the door, but just before the door shut, the mother's eyes met George's. A plea for help. She wanted George to step in and send her to America. And George instantly knew what she she wanted, but there was nothing he could do. He could not meddle with local customs and that was that. She would have to find another way.

”Yusuf's wife found freedom in America,” A’mar said. “He can't control her now. However ... Yusuf is my trusted commander. A little unstable, perhaps, when it comes to his wife but ... when it comes to matters of the heart aren't we all a bit unstable?”

George doesn't respond.xx

“He's a good worker, though. He tortures who I tell him to torture. He hates American's by the way. He'd rather spit in your face than step on a cockroach. So, watch out.”

Down the street, John scanned the compound. Everyone in the Commander's battalion seemed alert while they carefully surveyed the buildings. Gunfire suddenly erupted and John ducked behind the tanks with Ari.

The Commander issued instructions for everyone to cease fire. He then turned his attention to Ari. ”Damn you, Ari,” the Commander said, “I will not negotiate for him. Not here. Not now.”

“We can't blow our cover, either,” Ari said.

Down the alleyway, George waved to John to let him know he was okay. All of sudden Yusuf appeared in the portico and peeked out into the street. He moved close to George and points his gun him.

“Bang. Bang. Arrogant American,” Yusuf said. “Your country commits 20 years of sanctions against our starving children, and every day, for those years, they starve. How is it you don't care for a million Iraqi children who died under siege? But when 3000 of your citizens die, the whole world mourns.

Yusuf sticks the gun in George's ear. George looks Yusuf in the eyes, unflinching. Stubborn.

“Yusuf,” A’mar said. “You need to cool off. Go inside. Collect your wife and child and get them out of here.”

Yusuf left in a huff, and after a few seconds A’mar said, “What am I to do with you? Should I take the advice of my trusted friend and kill you? Bang. Bang.”

“He's got a chip on his shoulder. He'll still have it after he kills me.”

“Chip on the shoulder?”

“Yeah, a big one. Something's obviously bothering him. And I don't think it's his hate for Americans.”

“Well, let me see. His parents were killed a few years ago in an Israeli raid. That's one chip. His home was bombed, that's another chip. His son's head ... blown apart because he threw a rock at a Jew. That's another chip. His daughter, who you saved, doesn't sleep at night, because she cries. So, I look after them now, and I forgive him when he blames the Jews and Americans for all the bad in the world. I'd call it normal behavior, wouldn't you? Oh, no. That's right. You call it 'a chip'”.

A’mar peeks into the streets and sees some of his men running on the rooftops from one building to the next.

“Why aren't the Israelis firing at them?”

A’mar motions to the sentry to keep vigilant and then turned to George. They have a

moment to size each other up.

“My conscience has several voices,” A’mar said. “And each voice has several stories. And each story paints me as a villain.”

“Shakespeare? Wow, the soldier is a scholar.”

“Like I said, you have good schools.” A’mar sits back and becomes stoic in demeanor.

When you're a child and see the father's hate, and the mother's hate, and are told day after day after day who your enemies are, your bones become rich with that truth. No single word, or event, can sway such a heart when the marrow is formed in this way. We now teach our young about Americans, how you feed and equip our enemies who kill our mothers, fathers and children. So, if I'm a villain, then we all are villains. That's a truth, no?"

The sentry came running in and faced A'mar. “A girl named Amala across the street wants to come over here and talk to you. She wants to meet the great ...”

A'mar points to his lips and then nods George's way.

“I tell her to stay put, but she's insistent. She wants to see you.”

A'mar peeks out in the street while George peers over his shoulder. Both can see the little girl.

“My God, she's not even a teenager,” George said. “By the way, there's no reason for secrecy. I know who you are.

The girl makes a dash for it.

An Arab sentry of the roof spots an Israeli who raises his gun at the girl. The sentry fires his gun at the Israeli, which only causes massive gunfire in return. Bullets ricochet everywhere. There's yelling and screaming. Chaos.

The sounds of war fades quickly as 'cease fire' shouts come from both sides.

The little girl's body is sprawled on the ground just short of reaching the portico. Her body lies in the dirt, motionless. Her lifeless face was just a few feet from George.

A'mar grieved at the sight of the girl's broken body, then he turned and saw George's face swelled with emotion. He stared at George while George stared at the dead girl with tears streaming down his face.

Down the alleyway, the Israeli Commander picked up a set of binoculars and looked through them at the girl. “I hate this fuckin' war,” he said.

He also saw. George's face popped into view, and then A'mar's face suddenly appeared and vanished just as quickly.

“A'mar is in the portico,” the Commander said to Ari. “I hope your friend knows how to duck.”

“Where's your family?” A'mar asked Yusuf.

“Safe,” Yusuf said. “They're coming. You must go now.” Then he pointed to George.

“If you want him dead so bad,” A'mar said, “You kill him.”

A'mar ran to the door, looked back at George one last time, and shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "Sorry". Alone with George now, Yusuf pointed the gun at George's head while George just stared at the dead girl's face.

“You risked your life to save my daughter,” Yusuf said. “Why? I must know.”

George stared at the girl, then looked to the sky as Yusuf cocked his gun.

”Why,” he asked again.

“A love is pure, like innocence is a child; My daughter! I thought of you today. And I just smiled.”

Yusuf looked disturbed and confused all at once. “Pray we don't meet again.” Then Yusuf vanished into the building.

A resurgence of the sounds of war emanated all around George. He slid down the wall and sat on the floor and appeared to be in shock.

Out of nowhere, George heard a welcomed voice. It was Ari. “Welcome to East Jerusalem, George.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Ari lived right outside of East Jerusalem in a modest house on a substantial piece of barren, desert-like land.

He had a common table with four chairs in the kitchen. When Ari arrived with George and John, he led them right into the kitchen and they all sat.

“You're one lucky son-of-a-bitch, George,” Ari said. “You looked into the eyes of the devil and you're living to talk about it. That's a miracle.”

“It's all just a blur,” George said. “It feels like it never really happened.”

“It happened, all right. Moreover, you're one lucky SOB. A'mar Shubik is not known for his mercy. And Yusuf, his first in command, hates Jews and Americans equally. We have pictures of him pissing on a fallen Israeli soldier while eating a beef jerky. He's a nasty one. But you saved his daughter and that's the only reason you're still breathing.”

George and John follow Ari into the bedroom. Two beds occupy an otherwise abandoned-looking room. They toss their bags on the floor beside the beds.

“You'll sleep here tonight,” Ari said.

George falls on the bed and lets out a large sigh.

“Don't get too comfortable,” Ari said. “The day's not over yet. We must eat, be strong for tomorrow.”

Having finished eating, Ari removed the dirty plates from the kitchen table and put them into the sink. George removed the satellite photos from his attaché case and John helped him spread two large photos across the table.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door and Ari answered it. Two men walk in: Marvin, a short, stocky non-threatening sort of man in his thirties, and Benjamin, a military aid to Ari's commander friend.

“Meet our American friends: John and George,” Ari said. “This is Marvin, our resident scientist who will be installing the timer on the cargo. And this is Benjamin, the ex-military officer who will be our navigator, pilot, protector, sharpshooter ...” After sharing their greetings, the two men took seats at the table.

“We have a lot to talk about,” Ari said. “Does anyone have any questions before we begin?”

“What if plan 'A' doesn't work?” John said.

“We retreat and you go home,” Ari said. “We don't have a plan 'B'.”

Everyone fell silent before Ari spoke up again. “George,” he said, “You got lucky out there today, and we were this far away from getting A'mar Shubik. He was in our crosshairs.”

“And you're alive to talk about it?” Benjamin said. “Wow! I'm impressed.”

“Can we change the subject, please?” George asked politely. “There was a lot of people who died out there today. Talk about death makes me depressed.”

Ari chuckles while he brings a pitcher of water to the table. Marvin and Benjamin inspect the photos.

“John and George brought them,” Ari said. “They're yesterday's photos of the Hashim camp taken by the American satellite. As far as their location is concerned, it looks like we were pretty good with our estimates. A typical Hashim site. Although there is only a single sentry at the gate, they have ground radar and are protected by three helicopters, three Eurocopter Tigers seized in a previous encounter in Afghanistan war.”

A closer look revealed a wider view the camp as well as a close-up. Benjamin examines both photos at once. “Yup. Typical. Pretty close to where we thought it was. Good!”

“Let go over tomorrow's agenda,” Ari said.

Later that evening, they all were still inspecting the maps on the table. The content of the pitcher of water was almost gone.

“We have a volunteer to take it in,” Ari said. “Our own suicide bomber! He has cancer. He figures he will go out in a blaze of glory. xxAnyway, Marvin installs the timer, and Benjamin, you leave the truck ... (he points on the map) ...here and a chopper will pick you up in a clearing a hundred yards away over here.”

“We're not going to take it in?” John asked.

“No. Change of plans. Less complicated when someone can take it in all the way and stay. Why risk your ...”

“But before, at the restaurant, you were talking s if l...” John didn't get a chance to finish the statement.

“The commander found this other person,” Ari said. “It's less risky. It's better, actually, politically speaking.

“Then, why are we here?” George asked.

“I thought that was made clear. We're sharing culpability in case you or John get caught.”

George and John shared a look. Marvin appeared confused. Benjamin had a ‘I don't care look plastered on his face.

“Listen,” Ari said, “it was never implied that you must take the cargo in.” Ari waited a few seconds for rebuttals, but he received none. “Come on. Let's not get into any bad moods, here. We're going to work as a team. We found someone else. It's better this way. Our object is take Hashim out. That hasn't changed. How it's done is not important, is it?”

Both John and George were too tired to argue, so they just nodded. Besides, John didn't didn't want to die. Besides, he agreed to do it just a couple of weeks after loosing Susanna, and now, has enough time passed for him to have second thoughts? The truth be told, he would fight to the finish today, but he wouldn't volunteer to die. So, he figure he'd play the role he was dealt and just be quiet about it.

“Call Thomas,” Ari said. “We need to verify that the inspection on Palace Four is still on for tomorrow.” He waited a couple of seconds and then added, “It's been a long day for you two. Why don't you both get some sleep. Ben, Marv and I have a couple of details we need to work out. You don't need to be part of it.”

A few minutes later George and John finished getting ready for bed. George decided to call Thomas. Forgetting that Jerusalem was seven hours ahead of the Eastern Standard Time's clock, George woke Thomas from a sound sleep.

“They'll be starting the inspection on Palace Four around noon your time. Is everything ready?”

Everything was ready and George explained to Thomas the change of plans in the suicide bombing plans. Thomas was relieved. “I'm glad that John will not die. Besides we have to respect their decision. After all it's their operation.”

George wanted to know if there was anything unusual on today's photos, and according to Thomas, everything was normal. Thomas told them to get some rest and said that he would call call at six AM, Jeusalem's time.

George hangs up and seeks a comfortable spot on the bed. He and John decided to quickly take a gander at the CNN news on the TV in their bedroom before they turned in. They found the CNN channel labeled on the remote, so both George and John hopped into bed and watched the before going to sleep.

“Jack Coe will lead the UN Inspector team tomorrow at one of the palaces,” the CNN reporter said. “When asked if this was a critical site, he had this to say:”

“I think we should be spending more time at hospitals,” Coe said, “And the incinerator sites also, to ensure all the bombs they said were disabled were, in fact, disabled.”

“That guy in the background, Bennet. He’s the CIA chief, you know.”

George knew, of course, and continued listening to the newscast. Before long George pointed the remote to the TV and shut it off and gave his goodnight gestures and went to sleep. So did John.

In Paul’s office Mr. Bennet, sat at Paul's desk, and they were planning the day’s events. Paul looked very serious as two secret service men appear at the door with Omar and Thomas.

”You called for us, boss?” Thomas said.

“I did,” Paul said. “Come in. “You know the director, Mr. Bennet, this is Thomas Cline and Omar Khaled.”

Bennet got up and shook their hands.

“Let me get right to the point, Gentlemen,” Bennet said. “We know your friends George Adams and John Blatnik went to Tel Aviv yesterday. We were informed that they interfered with an Israeli military operation and, according to intercepted cellphone calls, they are planning on doing something tomorrow in connection with the inspections. What the hell is going on, Mr. Cline?”

“I don't know what you're talking about,” Thomas said.

Bennet and Paul give Thomas a stern, deadpan stare as if they knew what was going on.

“Gentlemen, the President sympathizes with your losses ...:”

“The President knows about this?”

“Knows about what, Mr. Cline?” Mr. Bennet asked. “Are are going to try to steal a weapon of mass destruction?” In a much calmer tone he said, “Listen. We all sympathize with your losses. The world is not in good shape right now. I know you know all this. The short of it is, the President will not have the United States' efforts to rid the world of a genocidal maniac, and a dozen terrorist groups, diluted by two agents who are trying to steal, and detonate, a WMD in an Arab country. It's insane. We won't have it.”

“Sir,” Omar said. “you're not saying their lives are in jeopardy, are you?”

“Mr. Khaled, your task from this day forward will be to get them to turn themselves in to the Embassy or to the Israeli military. You have my assurance no harm or discipline will come to them if they do that now before they ... do something stupid.” Everyone remained silent and digested what Mr. Bennet just said. “Listen,” Mr. Bennet continued, “the Hashim is on our radar screen. Tell your friends, first we dismantle this insane regime, then we go after Hashim. That’s our plan at least, okay?” He then turned to Paul and added,

“Do you have anything to add?”

“Only what we were talking about before.”

Bennet backs off and allows Paul to have his say, as if this moment was rehearsed. ”A plan could've been less risky if ... or ...” Paul collects his thoughts then continues. “What I’m

trying to say is, they have choices. Other places are available. I mean, it wouldn't be like they were stealing a bomb that's hidden under of a pile of cinders, for example.”

“What you mean to say is where the Iraqi's might be hiding a bomb they haven't declared?”

“Exactly,” Paul said.

Thomas' and Omar's eyes meet. Omar was slightly confused.

“Well, it might be too late in the game for something like that,” Mr. Bennet said. He then looked at Thomas and Omar. “Is there anything I need to know, gentlemen? Are there any surprises in store for us?”

“No, sir,” Omar and Thomas said in unison.

“Do I have the right spin on this?”

“Yes, sir,” Thomas said.

“Good. Go talk to your friends. Tell them we're coming to bring them home.”

And with that, Thomas and Omar left Paul's office. While they walk backed to the Omar wanted to know what just happened, and Thomas just replied, “A pile of cinders.”

“If I didn't know any better, I'd say the director of the CIA was trying to give us a Plan B,’ Omar said.

“Don't expect to get too much sleep tonight,” Thomas warned.

Outside of Ari's hose in the back yard, Ari was directing an old jalopy-kind of helicopter to land. It was put together by the Israeli army. Benjamin was the pilot and Marvin was sitting in the back. After the chopper landed Ari ran into his house and popped his head into the bedroom where George and John were.

“Let's roll,” Ari said.

John's cell phone rang and George answered it. He had a hard time hearing over the chopper noise. George held the cell phone out to Ari and yelled ... “It's Tom. He wants to talk to you.” Ari took the phone, but told both George and John to leave and to tell Benjamin that he would be right there. George and John left and Ari turned his attention to the phone. Ari must also yell above the chopper noise. “We're a little busy here, Tom,” Ari yelled.

“Bennet knows about the palace gig,” Thomas said. “So does your Prime Minister.”

Ari thought for a second that said, “Then we have to stop right now.”

“No,’ Thomas said. “There is another way ...”

George and John jump into the chopper. “Where's Ari?” Benjamin asked.

“On the phone with Thomas Cline,” George said. “He said to hold on a second while he talks with Tom.”

They watched Ari through the house window waving his hands as if he's having an argument and, in short order, Ari came running out of the house and jumped into chopper.

“What did Tom want?” John asked.

“To wish us luck, that's all.”

George gave John one of those, 'yeah, right!' looks, then Ari added, “We'll talk later. Okay gents, this is it. Your last chance to change your minds. Ari waits a beat. Looks at Marvin who is sweating from the heat. “Can't we reschedule this when it's not so hot?” he said.

Ari didn't even bother to answer that question and tossed the cell phone to John and pointed skyward to Benjamin. As the chopper rose, Marvin said, “I think I'm going to get sick.”

Ari tossed Marvin and vomit bag and picked up the navigation papers and began plotting.

“Baghdad's five-hundred and forty miles,” Ari said. “Our rendezvous point is forty miles south of that. So, sit back and relax. Sleep.”

Meanwhile at the Israeli General Rush's office, the Commander, Ari's friend, stood in front of the General's desk waiting for instructions.

“I just talked to our Prime Minister,” the General said. “The United States President just informed him that Ari Adler has two CIA agents running around Iraq trying to steal a weapon of mass destruction. Care to explain?”

“Ari is on his way right now to a rendezvous point,” the Commander said. “They will plan to pick up a truck and go to Palace Four where they intend to hijack a bomb.

“They?” the General said. “Who are 'they', Commander, besides the two Americans and Ari?”

“A pilot who was a combat officer, and a technician who is going to rig the bomb with a timing device.”

The General storms to his feet. “Are you freaquin' crazy? Why didn't you inform me?”

“You told me not to tell you about...”

“I told you to use your judgment about such things, Commander. Where are they taking the bomb?”

“To the Hashim camp in the hills east of Trebil. They plan on wiping the camp out.”

The General sits back down. Shivers! “With a WMD! Are you all crazy?”

The sighs a big one and rubs his face while he thinks of how to respond. “I remember Ari. Isn't he the one who's supposed to be on an intercept operation?”

“Yes,” the Commander said, careful not to give any more information than is necessary.

“Good, God! What doesn't someone just shoot me. He served under you at one time.

“He was one of the best ground officers I ever had,” the Commander said.

“What's his story?”

“Story, Sir?”

“Does he have a vendetta,” the General asked. “Does he take orders well?”

“He's a good man, sir. His wife and child went shopping at the wrong time and at the wrong mall. Suicide bomber. After that happened, Ari quit the army for psychological reasons.

“That's right,” the General said. “I forgot about him. So, he's become a vigilante now?”

There was no answer, so he asked, “Specifically, where are they right now?”

”They're flying over Jordan into Iraq.”

The helicopter was flying close to the ground through desolate areas. Marvin was a little flight sick, and Benjamin leaned back and yelled to whoever could hear, “This is really a beat-up Bell 214B used for heavy lift operations in movies. The company was bought out by Israel Movie Reel Corporation and they had this one put in storage. They were going to use it for spare parts, but we enlisted it. Fixed it up.”

“You stole it, you mean?” John said.

“They won't miss it?” Ari said.

“+Must've had good mechanics working on it,” George said. “The engine sounds real good.”

Benjamin winked at Ari, then turned to John and said, “Didn't do anything to it except change the oil.”

At the Israeli General's office, the General and the Commander were on the

speakerphone with the Israeli Prime Minister, while Commander Bergman was sprawling the maps of the area out on the General's desk.

"I don't suppose you know where they are headed," the Prime Minister said on the phone. The Commander points on the map so the General can answer. "Yes, Prime Minister. About forty miles southwest of Baghdad."

"My, God," he Prime Minister said, "Stop them, General."

"Yes, Sire," he General said.

In Paul's office at the Pentagon, both Paul and Thomas were on the phone with CIA Director. Bennet. "So where are they now?" Bennet asked.

"They're well into Iraq, Sir. Fifty miles or so outside Baghdad. And they've been trained to verify emergency phone calls to turn back, whatever they may be. Only the pilot and one other person knows.

NT. CHOPPER BUS

In what they call 'the Chopper Bus', George watched Marvin sleep. Marvin opened his eyes and George said, "How are you doing, trooper?"

"Much better, how."

"A good two-hour nap – I wonder how that feels."

Just then, Commander Bergman booms over the radio. "Commander One to Bell-Top-one."

"Bell-Top-One here. Go ahead Commander One."

"Put Ari on, will you, Ben?"

Benjamin hands the mic to Ari.

"Ari here," he said.

"You've been busted," the Commander said. "Our PM knows. It's over, Ari. Time to come home."

"I can't hear you, Commander. Too much static."

Ari motions for Benjamin to cut transmission. John and George look at each sharing the moment of confusion. "What's going on, Ari?" John said.

"Change of plans, that's all," Ari said.

"Shit! I didn't come here to die!" Marvin said.

"Spoken like a true scientist," Ari said.

"We're busted, so I guess we have to turn back. Right?" Marvin said.

"There's no way we can succeed now that our respective governments know what we're up to. We're trying to bust up Arab encampments, and we have to fight the United States and Israeli, the countries that have the two strongest armies. No way, Jose."

"Unless you have a plan B, I'm out too," George said.

"Actually, we do have a plan B," Ari said. "We make a right instead of a left."

"What's that suppose to mean."

"You'll see."

It was morning somewhere outside Baghdad. Benjamin landed the B214 close to a truck was by the side of the road camouflaged with a terrain canvas.

Everyone got out of the chopper while Benjamin ran to the vehicle and dragged the canvas off the trailer end of the truck. George jumped in and helped Benjamin put the canvas on

the back-end of the chopper to help it blend in with the terrain.

Everyone hopped into the truck, and Benjamin drove off.

The President of the United States sat at his desk in the Oval Office with General Blyer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and Bennet, the Head of the CIA. No one was talking. The President was thumping the desk with his fingers. Bennet's foot was tapping uncontrollably on the floor, a nervous condition he said he was trying to conquer but found some solace in doing the act. The others around the table wait patiently for the president to speak.

On his desk, flanking the President, is a picture of his wife on one side, and his daughter on the other. Alternately, he looks at both pictures and sighs.

"Funny how you spend a lifetime building a reputation, then someone, or a situation, comes along and everything you've done seems ... what's the word ... irrelevant." He waits for a comment. None came, so he continued. "Gentlemen, I've spent a long time building relationships with Heads-Of-State in the Middle-East ..."

"We'll find them, Sir," General Blyer said.

"But you said you lost communication with them," the President said.

"True, Mr. President, but we know they're headed for the Presidential Palaces. The security people there have all been apprised of the situation."

"Gentlemen, just find them. I don't care how you do it. But don't kill them."

"Yes, sir," General Blyer said. "Yes, sir. We will find them. But I have just one question. When we do find them, what if they resist? I need clarity on this point, Mr. President."

"You mean, if your men get shot at?" the President asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You have your men do what they're trained to do under the circumstances. Good God, Clyde, just stop them from getting one of those bombs. That's your number one objective. Your mission. In the end, I don't care how you do it. The Number two objective is do it without casualties. And the third objective is do it without getting Diane Sawyer involved. But never forget your number one objective."

The president thought for a second then added, "Listen, both of you. I don't want those men to die. I want to be able to ream their asses out personally in this very room eye to eye."

"Yes, Mr. President," General Blyer and Mr. Bennet said together.

At the incinerator site in Iraq, Ari, George, John, Marvin, and Benjamin hid in the brush watching an Iraqi soldier who was standing guard.

Ari nods to Benjamin and he sneaks down the embankment and onto the compound.

At the Presidential Palace #4 in Iraq, inspectors and security men entered the building as the security guard stopped, turned and stood at attention to stand guard.

The satellite high above the earth moved silently and was calmly watching what was unfolding. Through its viewfinder, the satellite's camera took close-up shots of the inspectors entering the palace. The sound of a camera's shutter indicated it took photo of the security guard waiting outside. Another sound means it took another shot, this time of the back of the palace where wooden crates were being moved.

The Security Man One was carefully inspecting the surrounding area at the presidential

palace number four in Iraq and he spoke into his hand-held communicator.

“It's quiet on the north side,” he said.

In a building close by the palace, a scout looked through a high powered scope, and another man, who was talking into a hand-communicator, was scouting on top of a tall building some distance from the palace. “Nothing here either. I don't see anyone.”

In the Secretary of Defense's Office, a name plaque on the desk read ‘Gloria Chapman’, Secretary Of Defense. A picture on her desk showed a woman on the beach with family members without a care in the world. The woman in the picture was sitting at her desk tending to some paperwork while a TV played the CNN news on the wall in front of her.

Her assistant poked his head in the room and said, “Nothing to report, Madam Secretary. No sight of them anywhere.”

Gloria nodded and the Assistant ducked out of the room. Gloria's attention became peaked by the current news on the TV which was playing file footage of the Iraqi incinerator site. She watched it intently. After a thoughtful pose, she picked up her phone and said, “Get me the President.”

Gloria turned up the volume of the TV a bit while she waited. The TV Host had just introduced a couple of guests. The first guest told the Host the initial twelve weapons of mass destruction were just a ploy to convince the Security Council that they were cooperating.

“The point I'm making,” he said, “is the UN inspectors brought them to an incinerator sight for dismantling and decimation. They removed the chemicals and destroyed the warheads by exploding conventional munitions over the top of them. Where did the chemicals go? Hmm? Who's keeping track of that ...”

Gloria cranked the volume down as a voice came over the phone.

“GLoria, how are you?” the president said. “What's up?”

“Mr. President, I'm fine. I'm calling because I have a hunch I know where our boys and the Israeli freedom fighters might be headed.”

A little later, at the Presidential Palace #4, the security man outside the Palace looked around while he walked the perimeter. His cell phone rang, so he answered it. The voice at the other end said, “Take a couple of men with you to inspection Site Number Eight.”

“That's the incinerator site,” the Security Guard said.

“Yes. Our suspects might be there.”

The security guard raced to the Palace Gate while yelling in his hand communicator – “Post 2 and 3. Front and center.”

At Inspection Site Number Eight, a security guard stood post while a hundred yard away Ari and the rest of the men were tucked out of sight on a hill watching Benjamin maneuver his way to the guard station.

“Let me get this straight,” George whispered when he didn't have to, “Someone in the CIA planted a chemical bomb under that pile of shit over there?”

“Actually,” Ari said, “it's one of the 12 bombs that was supposed to be dismantled but wasn't. They're keeping it very hush until the last palace is inspected in case they find nothing. The CIA was going to make it look like Iraqi National Guard stole it, so when they inspect this pile, and find a live one, they can point fingers at Iraq and claim violation and breach of UN

agreements.”

“That's what that phone call was about with Thomas?”

Ari nodded. then noticed another Guard was on the back-end of the complex. Ari motioned for everyone to duck and be quiet.

They watched Benjamin position himself at the west-end of the building around the corner from the first guard, who was pacing back and forth on the south side. Benjamin looked up at the camera and saw it sweeping past the south side.

Meanwhile, the second guard turned a corner, slowly making his way down the north side towards Benjamin. Benjamin waited for first guard to walk out of the camera's sight. When the guard walked left the footprint of the camera, Benjamin sneaked up and whacked him on the head. Guard One crashed hard, and the thump sound alerted the second guard who rushed to the west side. Benjamin found a small box, pulled it over to the camera, and stepped up on it and yanks a wire, dislodging it from the camera. He jumped off the box and waved to Ari indicating the coast is clear.

Benjamin saw Ari running down the hill towards the guard post. Startled, Benjamin took his gun off his shoulder but it was too late. The second guard turned the corner and faced Benjamin head-on. The guard squarely pointed his gun at Benjamin's head. For a brief moment, Benjamin froze and he and the Guard were locked in a gaze. Then a gunshot sounded and second guard fell.

Ari, forty yards away, held hi gun waist high with smoke coming out of the barrel while several several other guard scurried out of the building. Ari, Benjamin and these guards engage in a battle

George, Marvin and John were still tucked away back on top of the hill. Seeing the commotion down below, George rushed to the truck, jumped inside and came back out with a rifle. He rushed back and hit the dirt next to Marvin as if he were diving into a pool.

“In all my years, I haven't killed anyone.” George said. “Can you believe that?”

“Can you shoot that thing?” Marvin asked.

“Oh, yeah!” John said. “Watch this.”

Ari was pinned down behind a rock, and as several Iraqi Guards swarmed the post on the north side, George stood and began shooting. He hits one Iraqi guard and he fell off the post.

George sees Benjamin on the post platform looking around one corner. From the other corner an Iraqi popped into view. The Guard did have a chance. George shot him in the head and down he went.

Benjamin heard the 'thump' of the body falling, and turned around and saw the guard on the floor. He then looked to see where the shot came from and noticed George waving from the hill.

At the number eight inspection site, Marvin, Geroge, John and Benjamin digging with robust swings. Ari stood there watching as if he were the supervisor.

“It's not a pleasant feeling,” George said.

“No one ever said it was. Killing another human being always leaves a mark on you. A stain if you will...”

“You're quite sure there's no chemicals,” Marvin said, “or little nasty microbes crawling around here.”

“The bombs were neutralized before being brought to this site. Except for the live one, of course. The one we're after. In fact, That's what Thomas and I were arguing about on the phone

before. The safety issues. Anyway, keep digging until we find an asbestos sheath. The cargo should be beneath it.”

As the men keep digging, Ari said, “The satellite’s probably taking our pictures right now.

Marvin hands Ari his shovel. “Here. I didn't sign up for this.”

Just then everyone here’s a thud sound from one of the shovels.

“We found something here,” Benjamin said.

And with that Marvin takes the shovel back and he and Ari run down where Benjamin is.

At the Presidential Palace Number Four, an Iraqi Escort stood aside and allowed the inspectors free reign to inspect whatever they wanted.

One inspector looked to the Escort and pointed to a door. The Escort opened the door, and the inspectors go in.

Right outside Baghdad, a car sped up to the incinerator site and came to a screeching halt. A Security Man two other large men barge out of the car and run to the post. They see the fallen sentries, then look towards the field and see the disturbed pile of rubble.

Benjamin was driving a truck and was heading Southwest of Baghdad while everyone else were in the back with the bomb. They looked filthy from the dig. In fact, Marvin spits out soot and frantically wiped his mouth. “I'm going to die,” he said.

“No you’re not,” Ari said.

“How do you know,” Marvin said.]

“Because got a lot of work to do before you die.”

Ari reaches for the tool box and slides it Marvin's way. Marvin picks it up and starts to work on the bomb.

Benjamin hits the cab wall. THUMP ... THUMP,

Ari opens the window in the cap so he could see Benjamin. “We better gas up now,” Benjamin said.

In a desolated area somewhere on Iraq, Benjamin pulled over. Everyone except Marvin got out. They removed three canisters and placed them on the ground. George started gassing up the truck with the cannisters.

Benjamin and Ari were inspecting a map as George asked, how far away was the destination.

“About a hundred and fifty miles,” Benjamin said. George leans over while Benjamin pointed on the MAP. “Here's where we are now,” Benjamin said, “And here's the target. And here's the rendezvous point with the chopper.”

Then George leaned over to Ari and said, “We don't have enough gas. There's only three canisters. What happened?”

“I don't know. There's a town ten kilometers up ahead. We'll stop there.”

George empties the last gas canister into the truck and almost hit Marvin who removed the remote control very slowly from its casing and placed it carefully to the side. Marvin started the generator and plugged in the soldering iron to it.

“Sorry.” George said. And then Ari peeked in and asked Marvin what the hold up was.

“It'll only take a few seconds for the iron to heat up,” Marvin said. “Don't rush me.”

While Marvin inspected the bomb, he noticed two small bulges on the canister of the

bomb. He rubs it with his fingers. "What the hell is this?" He said to no one in particular.

He scratched his head, then grabbed the iron and carefully began wiring the remote to the bomb. His head bolted back up, and he touched the bulges again and said, "I hope it's not what I think it is."

Marvin went back to rewiring the remote.

In some town in Iraq, Benjamin pulls the truck up to a checkpoint. An Iraqi soldier waited as he pointed the gun directly at Benjamin. Marin heard a couple of thumps on the cab, and in a muffled tone everyone heard Benjamin. "Get ready," he said.

Ari, John, and George try and disguise the bomb with their bodies. They looked at Marvin who appeared very concerned. "Ari," Marvin said in a dramatic tone. "I need to talk to you about something."

"Not now, Marvin. Wait till we get gassed and past this checkpoint."

"But I ..."

Benjamin stopped the truck, and the Arab voices outside caused Marvin to retreat under the veil of silence.

Meanwhile, outside the truck, Benjamin spoke to the armed sentries.

"We need gas," Benjamin said in Arabic.

The soldier waved Benjamin on but then reconsidered.

"WAIT!" the Iraqi Soldier yelled.

The truck stopped and the Iraqi soldier took the tip of his gun, lifted the canvas at the back of the truck, and peeked in.

George and John had their legs draped over the 'cargo' trying to disguise it. The soldier assessed the situation.

Ari, not waiting for the Iraqi soldier to digest what he is seeing, grabbed the gun out of the soldier's hand. The soldier yelled and other Iraqi soldiers appeared from all sides.

Ari started shooting which prompted Benjamin to hop out of the truck and start spraying the area with bullets.

After several seconds of intense fighting, four Iraqi soldiers lie dead on the ground dead. Benjamin and Ari look around for more soldiers. There are none.

Moment later, Benjamin pulled into a Gas pump station. Benjamin held a gun on the Proprietor in the hut where he kept the cash register. While George finished pumping the gas, Benjamin rushed to the driver's side. George hopped in the back.

Meanwhile, in the hut the proprietor picked up a phone and dialed while he watched the truck pull away.

The phone rang where Yusuf, his wife and daughter lived. He answered it, and while listening, he walked over to a wall map.

At the Oval office of the White House, the President was in conference with Gloria, Secretary Of Defense, General Blyer, and CIA Director, Bennet.

"What do you mean, 'track'?" the president asked.

"When we confiscated the bombs we didn't know what to do with them," Gloria said. "So we installed tracking devices in case we lost control of them."

“Can’t it be removed.”

“If you know it’s there,” the General said. “But for the one in question, that would be tricky. The devices were fused to the chemical canister in the bomb. You can’t dismantle the device without great risk of puncturing the canister. And that would cause a leak of the material.”

“What you’re saying is that we can track this bomb wherever it goes?”

“Yes sir,” Bennet said.

“Who, exactly, can track this bomb?” Gloria asked.

“Anyone who has a receiver. Right now, it’s us, Israel, of course, the Saudis, and Egypt.”

“Then why on earth didn’t we, or they, find it when it was missing?”

“Because nobody knew it was missing.

There’s a long pause. The President seemed confused. “Am I missing something,” he finally said. “If we can track them, then let’s go get them. Destroy that bomb before ...”

It’s not that easy, Mr. President. They’re on their way to where Hashim, a splinter group of Hamas, is training. The camp’s 50 miles east of the Jordan border in Iraq near Trebil. It’s not Baghdad where we have presence. Intelligence, I mean. We don’t know the terrain. Too risky. I think we need to back off now and let Israel handle this from here on. It’s their truck. Their brains.”

“I see why they wanted us involved now. So, they could share the blame.”

“It hasn’t happened yet, Mr. President,” Gloria said, but wasn’t allowed to say anything else, because of the President laughing.

“I like your sense of humor, Gloria,” the President said. “It’s their football, so they get to define the rules? Is that it?”

“Mr. President,” she said, “at this point, it’s to our advantage to let our Israeli friends run with the ball.”

In a building in East Jerusalem, a Hamas Radio Operator, listening on his headset, tweaked the frequency knob. He received a lot of static while he turned the knob, but finally he heard a voice. “... Trebil ... twelve hundred ...,” it said.

As the Radio Operator continued to listen, Yusuf rushed in and looked around for a map. He found one and left.

In an adjacent room, Yusuf entered with the map in hand. A’mar Shubik was sitting at a desk. The radio operator stormed right behind Yusuf.

“Hey boss,” the radio operator said in Arabic, “I just intercepted an Israeli dispatch. They are sending a chopper into Iraq. Near Trebil. Very unusual.”

“We got a phone call from Ar Ramadi earlier,” Yusuf said. “those truck renegades ... maybe there’s a connection.

A’mar thought quietly. No one dared interrupt his thinking. “Yusuf,” he finally said. “You go to the de Facto Boundary to our base in Jordan. Find out what’s going on.”

“That’s two hundred and fifty miles away,” Yusuf, said.

“Get Jibril to fly you there is his helicopter.”

“Okay. Fine,” Yusuf said, and they both left.

Later, Benjamin sped west into Iraq, and while George and John were trying to snooze in the back of the truck, Marvin leaned in to Ari and whispered “Can I talk to you now?”

“Of course,” Ari said.

Marvin pointed to the bubbles on the bomb and said, “I noticed these nubs on the bomb. I think it’s a tracking device, and there’s no way to remove it.”

"Oh. That's just great. You mean everyone knows where we are?"

"I wanted to tell you before, but you were too busy."

Ari knocks on Marvin's head as if he's knocking on a door. "Use your head ... agh, never mind."

Ari bangs on the cab for Benjamin to stop the truck.

A little later, the truck had stopped in between a ridge that has a rocky terrain on both sides of the road. Ari and crew were huddled on the side. Benjamin had a rifle slung around his shoulder.

"Marvin," Benjamin said. "how sure are you?"

"Pretty sure, Marvin said. "About ninety percent. Nothing else explains it."

"Listen," George said. "we got this far. We're just a farlick away from doing what we need to do. Right Ari?"

Ari nods then looks to Benjamin and gives a 'how far away are we' look.

"Eighty miles or so," Benjamin said.

"Aren't we forgetting something here?" John said. "I mean, who's tracking us? Do we know?"

"Your guys," Ari said. "My guys, maybe. And A"mar Shubik no doubt."

"What are they going to do to us when they find us?" John asked.

"Kill us, probably. I play the odds usually. Before, when we were hunted one of our countries and the bad guys, we had better than a sixty-percent chance of completing our mission with no casualties. Those odds have diminished greatly."

Marvin started to panic and cursed repeatedly as if they were doomed.

Close by a dozen a dozen Arabic snipers too took position along the ridge. They look down and from their point of view, they could see the truck and the men.

One of the snipers looks through his binoculars and communicates the coordinates through his hand-held communicator. From his point of view we see more snipers on the ground maneuvering behind rocks and getting closer and closer to the truck.

At the truck, while the men talk, Benjamin noticed a rock sliding from the ridge. He and while he inspects the terrain, George said, "Ari's right. We're expendable. We've had to make tough decisions over the years, John. Remember when one of our agents got involved with the ABSCAM fiasco posing as an Arab businessman in Kuwait?"

"Gentlemen," Benjamin interrupted, "all this is very informative, but I suggest we wrap this up pretty quick. We have company."

Gunfire erupted. A round pinged off the truck as they all duck for cover inside the trailer. Benjamin shot at the snipers on the ridge on his way to the cab while Ari, George, John, and Marvin hop into the back of the truck. Benjamin takes a panoramic view and notices snipers all over the place. They are surrounded.

Inside the truck, Ari grabs a gun, then bangs on the cab but the truck doesn't move. George opens up a large tool bin - a stash of arms. He tosses a rifle to Marvin who in turn tosses it to John.

"I don't know how to use one of those things," Marvin said.

Outside the truck, Benjamin's head is bent over the steering wheel. Dead!

Inside the truck, Ari looked to George. They nod to each other, then Ari opened the back canvas. He and George shoot at the ridge snipers when a Arab man suddenly appeared and shot

Ari, which made him fall out of the truck and onto the pavement. The canvas fell shut and John had his rifle aimed and ready to fire. He took a deep breath and waited for something to happen. Slowly, the butt of a gun opens the canvas and Arab Man had his machine gun aimed at the men inside the truck.

“Don't shoot,” Marvin yelled. “Bomb. Bomb.” And then he pointed. Arab Man Two appeared hesitant but looked as if he was ready to shoot when he heard a helicopter coming off the ridge. It was an Israeli copter which let loose with a steady stream of gunfire sending the Arab Man and several snipers on the ridge to the ground. They were all dead. The Arab ground forces retreated and the chopper landed.

George, John and Marvin jump out of the truck and inspect the damage. Ari and Benjamin were dead.

An Israeli officer hopped off the helicopter, inspects the perimeter, then walked over to George and John.

“George Adams and John Blatnik?” the Israeli officer asked.

“Yes,” George and John said.

“I have orders to take you back to Jerusalem,” Israeli officer said.

Just as he said this, another helicopter came into view. It fires a missile at the Israeli chopper and blew it up and then spread gunfire all over the place. Everyone ducked for cover. When the smoke subsided, George, John, Marvin, and the Israeli Officer were alive, laying on the ground.

The Israeli Officer went for his gun, but Yusuf appeared from the cargo door of the attacking chopper and shot several rounds at him before the officer had a chance to aim. He laid on the ground, dead.

Marvin tried to make a run for it, but Yusuf shot and killed him as well. Yusuf then hopped out of the chopper. He had bad news written all over him.

George and John remained on the ground while Yusuf strutted over to the Israeli officer. He unzipped his pants and urinated on the dead soldier.

George made a motion to get up, but Yusuf, in his own American way, said, “Go ahead. Make my day.”

Yusuf then zipped up his pants and walked over to the truck. He saw the bomb and immediately took out his cell phone and hit a couple of buttons, and waited.

At the Hamas hideout in East Jerusalem, looked at his cell phone and then answered it.

“You better have good news for me,” A'mar said. He listened for a couple of seconds and then said, “Okay. Keep the bomb there at our Jordan site. Hide it until we figure out what to do with it. Bring the Americans back here.”

At Bennet's office at Langley, the next day, the CIA Director was talking into the phone and said “All right. I understand”, then slammed down the phone in its cradle and stormed out of the room. As Bennet passed his secretary in the reception area, he told her he was going to the White House.

A half a world away, the George and John were held in different rooms at the Hamas training center in East Jerusalem. George was tied to a chair in a barren room. He was bruised and blood trickled out of his nose. His strength was gone and he hung his head while his torturer stood 'at ease' next to him. Brass knuckles and a sock filled with sand rested on the floor next to him.

John's hands were tied behind his back and was escorted by a Hamas militant into the room, John was shoved onto a couch and was forced to face George.

A'mar stormed in and faces John and said, "Your friend, George here, is stubborn. Watch carefully. If he chooses not to speak or passes out, we thank Allah we have you to take his place. Now, tell us. What were you going to do with the bomb? Where were you taking it?"

John shakes his head.

A'mar raised his voice an octave. "Inning two, my American friend," he yelled to George. "What were you doing with the bomb?"

"Cus!!!" George said, and if he remembered right, it meant "Up yours."

A'mar then told the torturer in Arabic to use the sock. Use the sock. The torturer grabbed the sock filled with sand and arrogantly swings it and hits George one blow after the other. With each thud, John showed growing concern and disgust.

"You can stop this," A'mar said to John. Your friend doesn't deserve this. Save him. Just tell us where you were going with the bomb."

John bolted to his feet and with great anguish told George that he had his permission to talk. "Stop. STOP!" John commanded. "He wants to talk. Look! He wants to speak. STOP! STOP! Can't you see he wants to talk?"

One eye on George's face was buried under swelling tissue. It was hard to even recognize him, he was so beat up.

"That's enough," A'mar yelled out, and the Torturer stopped beating George. A few seconds passed and George didn't. Finally, he said "We..." and then he gurgled his words, we were ... we ..." George stopped and A'mar appeared in front of George and motioned for the torturer to leave.

"Shh! He won't hit you again," A'mar said to John, "Unless I tell him to come back."

A'MAR

Shh! He won't hit you again. Unless I tell him to come back.

As the torturer left, and Arab came in and handed A'mar a wet and a dry towel. A'mar took the wet towel and began to clean George's face with delicate strokes.

"I'm not a brutal man," A'mar said to George. May I call you George?"

A'mar touched his jaw, and George flinched.

"I don't think it's broken," A'mar said. "Torn muscles, perhaps. Tendons. Clench your teeth and don't move your jaw while you talk." As A'mar continued to clean George's face he said, "If you die, George, I will kill your friend. So, just tell me the truth and I will let you both live one more day. I can't promise more than that. You understand, don't you?"

"We were ... taking the bomb," George said though clenched teeth, "to a secret Israeli training camp."

"See now. Was that difficult. Now tell me. Were those bastards going to use ..." George stopped and A'mar sensed he wasn't going to say anything more.

"Really now," A'mar said. "You were not going to use it on us?"

George shakes his head.

"No. I suppose not. A bomb like that in a populated area like East Jerusalem would kill what? Ten thousand, maybe. Some of them Jews."

A'mar got no response.

"I don't know of any Israeli training camp in Iraq.

"It's secret," George mumbled.

"Yes," A'mar replied. "you did say that, didn't you?"

A'mar paused for dramatic effect, then said, "The only group training anywhere near where we found you are the rebels between Ar Rutbah ..."

"And Trebil. The Hashim. We know more than you think we do."

"Why do you insult me when I hold all the knives?"

"Israeli military ... rebels ... overran the camp yesterday."

"What Israeli military rebels? I know of no such group."

"They ... work with ... Americans."

A'mar stopped cleaning George's face and snapped to his feet.

"We wee taking the bomb to them."

A'mar throws the towel at George.

"You better be telling me the truth." He turned and faced John. "I'm going to send Yusuf to check this out. If your friend ... George ... is telling the truth, you'll have a peaceful death. If he's lying, the vultures won't have anything to pick at."

A'mar bolts out of the room leaving John and George alone. The look of concern was replaced by a stone face. Success.

And somewhere on George's bruised face was a smile.

In a room at the Hamas hideout, Yusuf and A'mar were talking as Yusuf's wife set food on the table and looked at him and told him to eat. He waved her off and continued to talk.

"There's a lot of activity at the border," Yusuf said. "Something's going on. Hamas doesn't have the balls to train on Iraqi soil, do they?"

"Have we had any contact with the Hashim? Anyone, recently?"

"No," Yusuf said. "They're out of communication range. Why would we want to communicate with them, anyway? They left us. Let them rot."

"Because they are Arabs," A'mar said. "Most of them are Palestinians, and if the Israeli infidels wiped out two hundred of us, we must answer."

"You are right," Yusuf said. "As usual."

"I want you to go to the hills of Wadi and seek the truth."

"When?"

"Now," A'mar said. "Don't argue. Just go."

Yusuf didn't like this task at all, and A'mar left. He was in no mood for an argument.

Yusuf's wife came over and put her hand on Yusuf's shoulder. He violently pushes her hand away.

Just then Yusuf's daughter peeked into the room, and the wife puts her finger to her lips and motions for her daughter to go away.

At the White House, General Blyer sat alone in the Oval Office, waiting for the President. After a few seconds, the President came in wearing a bathrobe. "We must stop meeting like this," the President said, laughing at his own joke. "General. Please, sit."

The General sat.

"I hope you have good news," the President said.

"They were ambushed," the General said.

"Good, God! We're there any casualties?"

GENERAL BLYER

Our guys are okay. But everyone else were killed, including some of our Israeli friends. We think Hamas has them in East Jerusalem. Hamas has control of the bomb at a training site at the

Iraqi-Jordan border.”

“All right. We have to assume the worst. If Hamas has it, the bomb could be used against Israel.

The Secretary Of Defense entered. “Mr. President,” Gloria said. “I just heard.”

“It's nice to see you so early in the morning without your makeup,” the President said.

“Anyway. Good. So you do not need to be briefed?”

“No, Sir. I think I'm up to speed already.”

“Good. Do you have any suggestions, then?”

“Only to ping the satellite on the Jordan/Iraqi border and I'd stay glued on the tracking device. If the device shows any movement west, we put our bombers in the air to help the Israelis contain the ... problem.”

The President takes his time to respond. “Okay,” he said. “Let me ask a question of both of you, then. Does anyone suspect we had anything to do with taking the bomb?”

“Two of our own are involved, but to my knowledge the Israelis are taking the lead,” the General said.

“No one knows it's missing yet,” Gloria said. “Except those who are tracking it.”

“Okay. Gloria,” the President said. “This is what I want you to do. I want our mid-Eastern friends, Turkey, Egypt; I want Iran and Saudi Arabia, I want them all to have access to a tracking receiver if they don't have it already. Arab terrorists have a WMD, and I want the Arab world to see what they plan on doing with it. Clyde, tell your Israeli contacts we're helping them get our boys back. Let's be more actively involved. Situation has changed. We don't have the bomb any longer. I think that is good news.”

“I'll get on that right away, sir,” the General said.

A helicopter landed near the Jordan/Iraqi border and Yusuf jumped out and looked around the mountainside. A jeep was waiting for him and he jumped in. The driver took Yusuf up the mountain.

Meanwhile, at the Israeli base camp in West Jerusalem, in the Commander's office, the Commander pointed to a wall map inside a camp while SOLDIERS look on. He used the pointer and the map to illustrate his point. “We will meet the Americans here and travel by truck to here. Then we will proceed on foot to our final destination ... here.”

With hands on his hips, the Commander said, “Are there any questions.” The commander didn't give them enough time to even raise their hands. “Good,” he said. “The American soldiers are meeting us at thirteen hundred hours in Israeli uniforms. Visibly the media will see this as our operation, but make no mistake about it, this is our first joint military adventure with Americans against terrorism. And let's make it a successful one.”

On a dirt mountain road near the Hashim camp, Yusuf looks out at the camp site through binoculars while sitting in the back seat of a stopped vehicle. He sees the PLO flag inside the camp. He motions the driver to continue.

Second later Yusuf approached the Hashim camp. A Sentry stopped them and demanded to see identification. Yusuf showed him his ID.

“Have you seen any Israeli soldiers?” Yusuf asked.

“What kind of stupid question is that?” the Sentry said. “You may go in. Allah be praised.”

Yusuf came to a screeching halt in front of the Command Post at the Hashim camp, and jumped out of the truck and walked briskly into the command post to talk to the Commander. There were what seemed to be hundreds of men with black or white turbans, and some of the soldiers were in uniforms just walking around in the compound.

After a few beats Yusuf came briskly walking back out and turned to the driver, "Take me back to the helicopter."

At the East Jerusalem rendezvous site, the commander and several of his soldiers met with several American special task force soldiers. An American colonel extends his hand to the Israeli commander and said, "Brady White Brady White, Colonel in the United States Special Task Force."

They heartily shook and Commander fired back, "Commander Bergman ... Sayeret."

"I'm impressed. Your group is highly respected in the States," Commander Bergman said. "I've been instructed to take orders from you, Commander. Now I can see why."

"Good. Have your men split up evenly with my men," the Commander commanded. "You come with me. I'll explain the operation on the way. First, tell me what you know."

The American Colonel told the Commander the basics of what he knew, which was, basically, to help the Commander be successful in his mission.

Yusuf's truck came bursting into view and sped towards the waiting chopper. He got out and tried to make a cell phone call. The Pilot waved at him, yelling, "Don't bother," he said. "Won't work up here."

Yusuf hopped in and the chopper took off in a hurry.

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, the American and Israeli Special Forces forged forward in their jeeps into East Jerusalem. At the border between East and West Jerusalem, they meet up with two Israeli tanks. The Commander's jeep comes to a stop.

"We'll assemble here and discuss strategy and then we'll go on foot," the Commander informed the American Colonel.

Meanwhile, at the East Jerusalem Hamas hideout, A'mar was seated at a desk writing. His cell phone rang, so he answered it, but the STATIC overpowered the voice. He couldn't understand what the other person was saying, so he hung up.

In a Hamas make-shift prisoner's cell, George sat on a hard cement floor lamenting what had taken place. John sat on a crate at the opposite end of the room under a window which was high to the ceiling with steel bars. It provided the only light in the room.

John sighed as he watched George softly touch his face, his wounds.

The door to the room has a larger-than-normal space between the floor and the bottom of the door to pass food through.

"Does it still hurt to speak?" John stated the obvious to George.

"Of course. My jaw may be broken," George said, nevertheless. He waited for a few seconds, and then added. "You did good before. Did I see real tears?"

"I don't think so. I was too angry to cry, and hysterical with fear. Hell, George, I haven't even given Susanna a good cry, yet."

"Maybe you can use this experience in acting."

"The moment before, you mean. Yeah, maybe, if I ever need to piss in my pants, maybe."

"Don't make me laugh ... or talk, will ya."

“Okay. I’ll do all the talking. In a way, I’m glad we got caught, you know. I was having second thoughts real bad.”

George nodded. Pounded his chest with his finger indication ‘me too’.

“You know, when Yusuf comes back, we’re dead meat.” John walked over to the door, bent down and looked through the opening at the bottom. He looked to the side and saw Yusuf’s wife sitting at the end of the hallway. Her daughter, the little girl George saved, was sitting next to her.

“Psst!” the noise came from John. John saw Yusuf’s wife look around. So, John made the same sound again and she tried to follow it.

“Psst!” John let loose, then peeked out of the cell door. She noticed him and looked to see if anyone heard John. She was alone in her awareness of John.

“Help us get out,” John whispered loud enough so she could hear.

She shook her head, knowing full well if she got caught it would be curtains for her. So, she shook her head.

John pleaded with her, and shots were heard from outside. There was a pause, then more shots were heard until it sounds like a war was breaking out. John bolted to his feet and ran to the window.

“I hope this is what I think it is,” John said.

He steps up on the crate, looks out and sees a dozen troops bounding out of an Israeli helicopter shooting anything that moves. He also sees an Israeli tank bounding up the road.

On the East Jerusalem Hamas training site, Yusuf got out of the helicopter and immediately jumped into a jeep. He saw two Hamas Palestinians carrying a box of munitions. With gunfire sounds in the distance, he motioned them to put the box in the jeep, which they did. Yusuf took off and, while driving, he hit a couple of keys on his cell phone.

At the Hamas East Jerusalem Hideout, where John and George are, A’mar and another militant were shooting through the windows. On the desk, A’mar’s cell phone was ringing.

“Take some grenades. Go on the roof,” Amar said to the militant.

The militant ran to the cabinet, took some grenades, and left.

While driving in the jeep, Yusuf said into the phone, “A’mar. It’s Yusuf. If you get this message, kill the American’s. It was a lie. It was all a lie. No Israelis in the camp.” He put his cellphone away and continues driving.

At the Hamas Hamas’ prisoner’s cell, John fell to the floor by the door and peeked out. Yusuf’s wife was still sitting in the corner. She was holding her little girl on her lap now.

“Psst!” John tried to get her attention, but she shook her head again. The mother and child were too frightened to do anything.

In an East Jerusalem street nearby, Yusuf suddenly appeared and felt helpless as he just watched an Israeli tank shot a missile at a vehicle in front of the hideout. There was an explosion, and chaos ensued everywhere.

He stopped, put the vehicle in neutral and jumped out. He looked around and found a brick on the ground. He picked it up and places it on the accelerator pedal, which caused the engine to rev. He took one of the grenades in the the back, then jumped in the jeep and pointed the vehicle at tank and put it into drive. As the vehicle raced towards the tank, Yusuf pulled the pin of the grenade and jumps out, waited a beat and then tossed the grenade in the back of the jeep on the box of munitions as it was headed towards the tank.

The Israeli commander saw the jeep headed towards the tank, so he shot at the front right

tire and the jeep veered off to the right and blew up at it hit a non-strategic building.

In the make-shift prison, where John and George were obviously released from the dungeon room by Yusuf's wife, John was on the box looking out the window and saw Yusuf running towards the hideout. John jumped down and told George and the wife that Yusuf was coming. She vanished with the child into another part of the building while John and George bolted out of the room and vanished in a different direction.

Outside, the American Colonel, Brady White, saw Yusuf running to the hideout and shot at him. Bullets pinged all around but they missed as Yusuf ducked behind concrete partition.

In the hallway, George and John slide across the wall quietly, carefully. George looked down the other end of the hallway and saw an exit door. He tapped John on the shoulder, but before they had a chance to consider their options, an Arab soldier pops in front of them. George slammed his foot into the soldier's knee and he falls in pain. John put his elbow through the soldier's nose and George grabbed his rifle.

In front room of the hideout, Yusuf appears, stumbles and looks around for his wife, John and George. A'mar suddenly appears from the far side of the room, where he started shooting his rifle out the window at the oncoming Israelis and Americans. He turns and sees Yusuf.

Just as Yusuf goes to speak, a bullet hits him in the neck and he falls like a rock. A'mar looks to the hallway and sees George with a smoking rifle pointed at him. George has A'mar in his sights but doesn't shoot. Instead, he backs into the hallway and bolted with John to the exit door.

Yusuf's wife and daughter were huddled together in the corner of the hallway and had seen what just happened. A'mar stepped over them and caught a glimpse of George and John fleeing down the hallway. He shot at them. A bullet flew over George's shoulder and hit John. He collapsed to the floor.

"Stop or I'll shoot," A'mar said to George.

Since A'mar had George dead to rights, George stopped and A'mar briskly walked down the hallway, grabbed George, and escorted him back down the hallway to the cell.

In the hallway, Yusuf's wife whispered to their daughter, "Stay here. Don't move."

The wife crawled to Yusuf's fallen body. Yusuf was still alive and tried to talk. The wife leans in and whispered to him, "Die already." She went to tend to John who was still breathing.

Back at the makeshift cell, A'mar pushed George into the room. "You're my hostage," A'mar said as he locked the door behind him.

In the hallway, Yusuf's wife bent over Yusuf. He tried to talk to his wife, but instead, he gurgled his words. He was trying to say, "The camp ... Muslim ... big lie," but only Yusuf's wife heard this. He finally choked and stammered and she watched him die, like it was a bad movie she was watching. A'mar appeared behind her, and wanted to know what he said.

"He said, the post was overtaken by the Jews," she told him.

A'mar's cell phone beeped at the table not far away, so he rushed to the table and answered it.

On his phone display, the screen displayed an envelope indicating A'mar had a voice message. A'mar ignored the flash and dialed.

At the Jordanian border hideaway, two Arab sentries were playing cards. A cell phone at the playing table rang. One of the players answered it.

"Take the bomb to the Hashim camp," A'mar said.

"Are you crazy?"

"Do as you're told. There's no time to explain. The Israeli's have slaughtered all the

Muslim's there and have taken over the camp. Do it now.”

Sounds of fighting emanated from the Card Player's phone. “Take it to the camp,” A’mar said, “and detonate it. Praise Allah.”

Card Player One hangs up and left the cell phone on the table. He urgently summoned the other card player and they both exited.

Outside, one of the card players jumped in the back. The bomb in the back seat looked more like a worn garbage can than a sinister WMD.

At the Hamas hideaway, A'mar looked out the window where chaos reigned. He leaned against the wall and looked at his phone display window. He punched one button and puts the phone to his ear. While listening to Yusuf's voice message, he watched Yusuf's wife. A'mar's face tells all. A'mar immediately punched in a few numbers on the phone and waited.

At the Jordanian border hideaway, the cell phone on the card table rang, but there was no one to receive it. Finally, A’mar must leave a message.

“Praise Allah, I hope you get this message in time. Cancel my previous order. I repeat ... cancel my previous order.”

A stream of bullets bombard the window and A'mar falls to the ground. The cellphone flew out of his hand and slid across the floor. He walked to the center of the room where Yusuf's wife sat quietly. Emotionless. Slowly, he picked her up, and looked deep into her eyes.

After a beat, he picked up a pistol from the floor and walked her into the hallway to her daughter. He took the daughter's hand and led them both to the make-shift cell. He cocked his gun and unlocked the door. George stood before him.

Yusuf's wife looked alternately at A'mar and his gun.

“Don't,” she said. “Not in front of my daughter.”

Just then, American and Israeli soldiers barge through the door and maneuver with agility and swiftness through the hideaway, as if they are familiar with the place.

He brings the child and the mother into the cell and closes the door. A’mar lifts a few boards from the floor exposing a secret get-a-way. He brings the child to George.

“You saved the little girl once,” he said to George. “Save her from this. Cover her eyes.”

He hands the girl to George who covers her eyes. A’mar turned and shot the mother, then disappeared in the get-a-away in the floor.

CHAPTER FIVE

At the War Room at the Pentagon, General Blyer pointed at a board with a flashing light which represents the truck (bomb) moving east into Iraq.

“Yes, sir.” the General said into the phone. “It's moving into Iraq, not away from Iraq. I think it's headed towards that renegade group ... the Hashim. But that doesn't make sense.

In the Oval Office, the Secretary of Defense is in the room with the President. They are both glued to the phone.

“Most of the Mid-Eastern Countries are following the bomb just like we are,” Gloria said. “They know Hamas has it.”

“Just the same, Gloria, get on the horn to the mid-Eastern Ambassadors and let them know we're concerned.”

Just then the intercom buzzer went off. The President hit the button to answer it, and the secretary said, “The Saudi Prince is on the phone, sir,. He's on a conference call with Arab Heads Of State and he would like you to be a part of it.”

The President high browed Gloria and replied. “Put him through,”

When the Prince got on, he said, “Mr. President, do you know why we're calling you?”

“Because a Palestinian terrorist is running loose with a Weapon Of Mass Destruction?”

After a long pause, the said, “I'm not going to ask how you knew that. For now let's just say that was a lucky guess. Yes. We know Hamas is in possession of this bomb. And we noticed it is moving inland now, towards a terrorist group called Hashim. We believe Hamas is forging a new relationship with them.”

“You mean, the bomb is a peace offering between the two groups,” the President said.

“We think so. We know your intelligence is good and we would like your advice while we discuss what actions should be taken.”

A very high brow is now given to the Secretary.

“Certainly,” the President said. “Secretary Chapman is sitting across from me, and we would be more than happy to help.”

A littler later, the truck driven by the card player, was approaching the Hashim camp. The other card player was leaning over the bomb and set it the time for two minutes. The display counted down as the Hashim Guard at the gate pointed his gun at the truck as it was approaching. The other attendant stopped the looked at the driver with suspicion.

“Praise Allah!” the driver said.

“Praise Allah!” the gate attendant replied. “What do you have in the back?”

The attendant went around the truck to take a look. The driver decided to gun the accelerator and, as the truck entered the camp, the Gate Attendant shot several rounds into the back of the truck. Inside the truck, the other card player got shot and was dead.

The driver saw the Plestinian Flag on top of a makeshift pole to his right. To his left, a couple of Hashim militants pointed their guns at the truck and were yelling in Arabic for the driver to stop the truck so he did. He pounded the back of the cab and yelled in Arabic, “Stop the timer. Stop the timer.”

The bomb in the back of the truck was ticking down. The driver pounded on the cab with furious intent but there was no one to defuse the bomb. The clock ticked away. Ticktock. Ticktock 3...2...1...The bomb exploded and a blast infects the entire camp.

CHAPTER SIX

the Hashim camp was a terrible mess in the aftermath of the explosion. Anguish and death were all around. The blisters and skin lacerations were horrific, and the militants gasped with a raspy, horrendous sound. They were taking their last breaths.

In the war room at the White House, scattered voices and general chaos reigned. General Blyer was on the phone as the President stormed in. The general hung up without apologies and walked over to the President.

An eerie quiet hung over Blyer.

“What happened?” the President asked.

“They detonated a WMD on their own people. They set off an atomic war head their own, Mr. President. There is no other explanation. It doesn't make sense. Probably an accident, I my guess.

“I was with Arab princes and heads of state, Clyde. They had fear in their voices, as if they knew this was going to happen.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I must know before I talk to them again. Did we get our agents out?”

“Yes, sir. “Except one is wounded, and the other is beaten badly. One is dead, of course. But you knew that.”

“Yes. Any clues left behind.”

“No one knows anything, Mr. President.”

After a few seconds, the President just smiles and nodded his head.

Paul, Thomas, Bennet and Omar are watching a newscast on TV in the CIA chief's office. They all were watching pictures of Arab soldiers at the campsite that was bombed. Gruesome pictures of Palestinian soldiers abound. Some were dead, some had hideous skin lacerations. Some were rocking back and forth getting ready to die.

The announcer on Newscast said, “The latest developments of this accident has the entire Middle East in an uproar. Speaking on behalf of the Arab countries, the Saudi Government issued a statement ... The TV switched to the video taping in Saudi Arabia.

“The fact a Muslim group stole this bomb from Iraq weighs heavy on our souls,” the Saudi Prince said. “It bears a message which some of us need to hear. We pray to Allah for guidance. We also want to make a statement to the international community: this unfortunate affair has all of us realizing, fully, the importance for eliminating terrorist organizations from face of earth. We have been talking with United States of America, Great Britain, Soviet Union, Germany, France, and other countries to show our solidarity to end terrorism. Islamic people are citizens of humanity and as such we will find a way to settle differences between peoples of different cultures and beliefs. To this end we are sincerely committed. Praise Allah.”

At a military airport near Washington DC, News cameras stay focused on the exit door of the military plane. All of a sudden it opens and John appeared, his arm in a sling. He exited the airplane and is greeted by the Secret Service, as well as Abby and Martha. Abby ran to John and they embraced.

“Where's George?” Martha asked.

“He's coming,” John said. Martha hugged John and waited with bated breath. After a beat, George appeared at the plane door holding a little girl. Her face was buried in George's neck.

Martha walked over to them and she touches George's bruised face, as if she is inspecting a painting.

“The guru did this to you?” she said.

George just grunted.

“Maybe I can work on the other eye.”

They smiled at each other before Martha lovingly kissed him. She then peeked around to see the little, Palestinian girl's face.\

“Hey. We're here,” George said to the little girl. “This is Martha.”

“So, this is the little angel I was telling you about,” Martha said.

After a second, the little girl picks up her head and said with a heavy accent, “Hello, Martha Adams. She buried her head back into George's neck while Martha throws the tips of her fingers to her lips.

“She's more beautiful than you said,” Martha said.

George and John walked up to the West Wing door and was greeted by the Secretary of Defense, Gloria. “The President will be right with us,” she said.

Before Gloria has a chance to open the door to let them in, George asked if the President was happy or angry.

“I don't know,” She said. “I heard something like, 'If they're contrite, I won't cut off their testicles'. Or something like that. So...I don't think he's very happy.”

George and John were NOT smiling. George's face was still bruised, and John still had his arm in a sling.

The secretary opened the door into the office and were confronted by two rows of people: Thomas, Paul, Bennet, Omar, Gloria, and General Blyer. At the end of the rows was the President's desk and behind the desk was the President.

As George and John saunter down the aisle towards the President everyone voiced the words, “Hear! Hear!” as cheers for the two heroes.

The President extended his hand and greeted them and then they sit.

“You know, I can never publicly thank you for what you've done? The people here in this room are the only ones who know what went on except for a couple a dozen military. An Israeli Prime Minister, an Ambassador ...” The President laughed, and then turned very serious.

“Gentlemen, you almost created an international incident that would've put the US in a penitent position for the next hundred years.”

The President grunts and waved his hands. “Oh, I promised myself I wouldn't do that.”

“It's okay, Mr. President,” George said. “John and I had a long talk on the way home about how irresponsible we were.”

The President inspects George's face. “Those are mean bruises you got there, George. Does it hurt bad?”

“No, Mr. President. They hurt a lot more when I was getting them, thought.”

“Good! I mean, it's good they don't hurt. And John, look at you. You took one for the Gipper?”

“Yes, Sir. I guess I did.”

After a long pause, the President finally said, “As a father, I understand what you men

did. As a citizen of the world community, I thank you. Hamas did steal the bomb, albeit, not from the stock pile in Iraq, but steal it, they did. And they made a conscious decision to use it, and ... well, that's it. Let's just hope this is the last of such insane acts. From all corners of the earth.”

And with that, everyone in the room echoed the same sentiment. “Hear! Hear!” they all said.

Everyone gathered around John and George. Paul and Bennet gave a wink and a smile to Thomas and Omar as if a secret message was being passed between them. All four turn to George and John, rejoicing in their safe return.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In a classroom at the University of Virginia, INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS 101 are boldly printed on the black board. George walked into view filled with students and stood by the desk. His face had healed nicely. A book sat on the side of the desk and total silence existed as George looked out at his students.

One student spoke out. "Why do they hate us so, Mr. Adams? We gave millions of dollars to them and other countries in humanity efforts to improve their lot in life. We risk our lives for their security and freedom. Why do they hate us so?"

George picked up a Shakespeare book from his desk and read aloud, "Richard The Third: My conscience hath a thousand several tongues; And every tongue brings in a several tale; And every tale condemns me for a villain."

The students look confused, so George explained why he read that passage. "A Palestinian, an Arab man, quoted this one time to me. He was a leader of a terrorist group who killed a lot of people. He was educated in the United States. His hate was stronger than a rock. He says the hate in his heart was taught to him at a very early age. Born into it, so to speak. Do you believe that's where hate comes from? It's passed down to you?"

George looks around. There were no takers. He points to his heart and said, "This is where love comes from, in a poetic sense. It's a feeling, and isn't hate part of the same coin. A different side, perhaps."

He waited for an answer but none came. "A person who has great hate," he continued, "has the capacity for great love."

George looked away, drifting, perhaps, to a more peaceful time, to a Father's Day when it was a little easier to love.

A student finally spoke out. "We spout Orwellian ideas quite often. War is peace. Liberty is slavery. Ignorance is power, and so on. When we say hate is just the flip side of love, aren't we just being rhetorical? Romantic?"

George chuckled which almost lead to a laugh. "Yeah, I suppose so," he said. "But it doesn't make it any less true. I think we should concentrate on our similarities. For example, Palestinians, that is, Arab parents, love their children just as much as American parents do."

Another student pops in, "So what. Rats care for their offspring, too. That doesn't make them any more human."

George sat on his desk, thinking. He seemed lost for a reply. "I don't know if you've ever seen the movie, Ghandi," George finally said. "I suggest that you do, although it is a long one."

He paused for a dramatic effect. "There was a great conflict between Muslim and Hindu and there was a point in the movie when a Muslim comes up to Ghandi and tells him a Hindu had killed his son. 'What am I to do?' he asked. He could've just as easily said 'How do I get rid of this hate'. You could understand his hate and anger. His outrage was so justifiable. What could Ghandi possibly have said to remove that? Well ... he says this to the Muslim man: "Take a Hindu boy, one whose parents are no longer living because they have died in this conflict ... take this orphan and raise him as your own, only make sure he is a Hindu boy not a Muslim like you - and raise him as a Hindu."

George took a quiet moment to study the faces of the students. Each seemed to be musing over his words. The student who asked the question showed no emotion except for tears that fill his eyes.

"I forgot to tell you," George said, "that educated Arab man I mentioned before gave me

the hand of a little Palestinian girl who now is my adopted daughter. He hated me because I was an American. That's the only reason he had to hate me. But for the briefest of moments he flipped that metaphorical coin and showed his love. His love won out.

A student close to George covers her mouth. Her emotions are more visible than the rest of the students. George walked over to her and put his hand on her shoulder.

"All I can tell you is ... we must do the same. Make a conscious decision not to hate. I saw it done in the name of love, in the heat of war, and it works."

George stopped and smiled at the whole class at once. "If history has taught us anything," he continued, "If we don't make an effort to go the other way, we will transcend into a thousand years of darkness."

Another student speaks up, "Or worse."

"Yes," George said. "Or worse."

CHAPTER EIGHT

In a theater, somewhere in Washington DC, John was on stage about to recite his lines.

The President of the United States and his wife sat in box seats. Gloria, Mr. Bennet, and General Blyer sat in the front row along with Omar, George, Paul and Thomas. They all had their significant others sitting next to them watching the play.

On stage, John leaned over a WOMAN who was dying (acting).

“Oh, my sweet love,” John said in his best acting voice, “you have given my life, this world, so much meaning. I do not wish to live in it without you.” He clutched his chest and continued, “You and I have been like one person with one soul ... one heart ...”

John weeps for real as the curtain fell.

The curtain rose again to a standing ovation. John wiped his face and tried to enjoy the accolades through the tears.

THE END