

A Perilous Game

By Jeff Slade

Part 1

Chapter 1

Yusef Haded waited in the customs line of the airport. There were about five more people in front of him. He went over and over in his head the routine he had practiced thousands of times back home in Iraq. "My name is Jean-Claude Renan. I am from Marseille, France. I am on a business trip," Haded said to himself. He looked over his passport one more time just to make sure everything was correct. His affiliates at home had assured him that the passport would work at almost any airport in the country, let alone at Buffalo Niagara International Airport, which their research had shown was one of the least secure airports in the country.

The security in Paris was mediocre at best. He was able to go through with no problem, nobody questioning the finely dressed Mediterranean businessman. This was one of his main assets. With his dark skin and long face shape, he could pass for just about any Mediterranean nationality in addition to Arab. Fluent in six languages Haded had the power to take the form of many different aliases. He chose French for this mission in particular, because he felt that his French accent was most believable when speaking English.

The flight across the Atlantic Ocean was smooth as could be and now all that stood in the way of Yusef Haded and the United States was a customs booth. As the people one by one successfully went through the gateway to America, he was able to further scout out the customs officer that would ultimately decide his fate. He was well-built man Haded estimated to be about 30 years in age. He had dark brown hair, wore glasses, and seemed to be in a very good mood today.

He was now next in line. As the man before him proceeded to the counter he looked at his phone to avoid making eye contact with the officer. He watched the interaction of the apparent US citizen and the customs officer whose name he could now see was Brad. The two had a very brief conversation before Brad looked over the man's passport and ran it through the computer.

"Welcome home," Brad said to the man in jeans before he walked through the gate and into the main terminal. He called Haded over to the booth with a simple wave of his hand, but seemed somewhat more serious now that the man approaching him was clearly not American.

"How ya doin?" Brad asked in a rich southern accent. Haded had learned that many people talk differently in America. He remembered that somebody had once told him that there were as many as 50 different accents within the country.

"I am fine, thank you. And you?" Haded asked in his perfect French accent.

"I'm all right, long day," Brad responded. "Passport please?" Yusef Haded handed Brad the customs officer his professionally made French passport and appeared as cool and collected as Jean-Claude Renan would be.

"Business or pleasure?" asked a seemingly skeptical Brad.

"Business."

"What kind of business ya in?"

"I am in the finance industry," Haded said.

"Hmm. Well I guess those fellas on Wall Street could use all the help they can get right about now," Brad said with a small smile on his face.

"I will try," said a still calm as could be Haded. Brad ran the passport through the scanner and studied what came up on the computer for a considerably longer time than he had done for the previous individuals. He looked at the passport one more time before finally stamping it with approval.

"Enjoy your visit Mr. Renan," Brad said with a smile on his face.

"Thank you. I will."

Yusef Haded returned the smile before traveling through the gate. He walked about two minutes and went outside into the beautiful Buffalo summer day. The weather was possibly the only thing he liked about the hated nation. Yusef Haded was now in the United States of America. He had told Brad that he would enjoy his visit and he knew with full certainty that he would. It was the Americans who he was not so sure would appreciate his company.

Chapter 2

“Good morning!”

Uh-oh. I looked over to my right and saw a women in my bed that I was fairly certain wasn't my girlfriend. At least she was attractive. Very attractive in fact. Huh, maybe not so bad after all. She appeared to be about 5'6 with dark hair, blue eyes, and a great body to go along with it.

“Um... Good morning...” I said in a somewhat confused tone.

“Yeah if you wanted to call it that I guess,” she replied while putting her clothes on.

This was not good. My name is Curtis Graham by the way. I'm 35 years old living by myself and work for a little company called the CIA. I have a small apartment in the heart of Washington D.C. on DuPont Circle. Last night, after getting into a fight with my girlfriend Lauren, I went out to grab a drink at my favorite bar St. Arnolds. Apparently one drink turned into a lot of drinks and somewhere along the road I became acquainted with my new brunette friend here. I checked my watch. It was 11:30. Lauren would probably be here any minute now for lunch. On second thought – did we break up last night? Yeah, let's go with that. I've got it – we were on a break! This wasn't going to end well.

I tried to think of something good but all I could seem to think of was, “Hey, mornin’,” in a confused and extremely awkward tone. Dammit. I finally mustered up a pair of balls and continued, “Fuck I'm really sorry but I just realized I'm late for work so I got to get going.”

“I thought you said you have today off.”

“Yeah...I...uh...was just called in.” Smooth right?

“Oh...alright I guess... I'll see you around then?”

“Yeah, for sure,” I said. “I had a great time last night.”

She finished putting her clothes on and went out the front door. Before she left though she was able to deliver me a nice “Fuck you.” I seem to get that a lot these days. I'm a pig.

Anyway, a mere two minutes later Lauren walked in. Lauren is 26, 5'4, with blonde-flowing hair. She works as a secretary to a law firm with hopes of eventually becoming a lawyer. With what just walked out of the door minutes before, I thought this might be the last conversation of our short relationship. Relationships are almost impossible to have in my line of work. With the travel, unexpected hours, and the secrecy to go along with it, I really can't share any part of my life with a person. So, I'll have the occasional 2-3 month fling here and there, but anything

more than that and I have to end it. Lauren and I have been goin' for about 10 weeks now, so I knew it was starting to about be that time. Might as well get a good lay out if it right? Anyway, she walked in on her lunch break and had one of those looks on her face that just signals she wanted to have that classic girlfriend "lets talk about our feelings" conversation. I hate those.

"Hey, I think we should talk," she said as soon as she saw me.

Called it.

"Talk about what?" I asked as cool as a spy. Get it?

"I'm really sorry about last night. I didn't mean for things to get out of control the way they did. I just keep feeling like there's something that you're hiding from me. You know how much I like you, but I'm just not sure I can keep going on like this. What do you – "

I have never been more happy to hear my phone ring in my life. It was Langley. Lauren obviously doesn't know that I work for the CIA but I'm pretty sure she has a clue that I'm not a traveling knife salesman like I told her. Last time I was a piano retailer and the time before that a professional botchy ball player – top five in the world actually.

"This is Graham," I answered.

"Graham, get your ass over here," said the director. "He's here."

I knew immediately whom he was talking about.

"Got it. 20 minutes," I said as I turned to Lauren.

"Another knife emergency?" she asked somewhat sarcastically.

"Yeah. I gotta go. Lets talk later," I told her before quickly grabbing my stuff and heading out the door. Though I fully understood the severance of the threat that awaited us, I had no idea this was the start to the longest day of my life.

Chapter 3

Yusef Hadad felt a strange combination of nervousness and excitement. He stood only about 45 minutes away from the biggest city in the country, the city that was the perceived number one terrorist target in the United States. Although that was not where he was going. Haded walked outside and hailed a taxi. The man driving the taxi appeared to be Arab, most likely from Lebanon Haded guessed based on the skin color and accent of the man.

"Hello sir, and where are you going today?" he asked.

"Prior Aviation Service please. Do you know where that is?"

"I'm sorry sir I do not. Do you have the address?"

"Yes I do," Haded said as he pulled out the slip of paper that had been given to him. "50 North Airport Drive, Buffalo, NY. Now do you know where that is?"

"Yes, sir. About 20 minutes," said the driver.

Haded always felt strange talking to people when he knew he would kill them shortly after. It was not that he felt bad about killing people, but that they did not know that they were having the last conversation they would ever have.

"Where are you from?" asked Haded.

"I have an apartment in Buffalo about 10 minutes away from the airport sir."

"No. I mean where are you *from*?"

Just the way the man spoke sent a chill down the taxi driver's spine and definitely made him want to be as polite as possible.

"I was born in Lebanon. Beirut."

"What is your name?" Haded asked with a somewhat judging tone.

"My name is Jibril Imad."

"Ah, Jibril," Haded said. "The angel who delivered Allah's words to the prophets. Do you consider yourself a religious man Jibril?"

"Yes sir, I say my prayers and go to mosque every day," Jibril said, clearly nervous now.

"That is good Jibril. Allah will grant you great happiness in the afterlife."

In truth, Haded thought men like this were cowards. They left their homeland and families to pursue monetary rewards in a nation that contradicted all of their primary beliefs. He hated the United States of America with a passion. He hated everything the nation stood for. Freedom, capitalism, and individualism: these were the ways of evil. He also saw the United States as a source of Muslims, like Jibril, that were trying to modernize Islam. All Americans, Muslims or not, were infidels in the mind of Yusef Haded. And before he could call his mission complete, a large number of them would die.

Haded and Jibril sat the remaining 15 minutes of the cab in silence. As he pulled up to the private airport, Haded told Jibril to pull the cab around to the back of the airport, where he said someone was meeting him. As the cab stopped in the empty parking lot, Haded pulled out a case of dental floss that did not contain dental floss. He made sure nobody was in the parking lot, pulled the garrote out of the case and made his move towards Jibril. Jibril in his last second of life

saw his attacker move towards him, but of course was no match for the trained Al Qaeda killer. Jibril died somewhat quickly with only a moderate amount of pain. Nobody was close enough to hear him scream. "A clean kill," Haded thought to himself. He made sure there was no evidence remaining, grabbed his bag, and walked to the front of the airport to catch his flight to Washington D.C.

Chapter 4

After the 20 minute ride over to Langley, I walked through those huge front doors and went through security like I still always have to do every time I walk in. You would think that after working here for 8 years they would finally have faith I wouldn't run in and try to blow everybody up. Fucking paranoid asswipes. I still get goose bumps sometimes walking into that building though, as I know that the people working in here are protecting every citizen of the country. Or maybe it just makes me feel really awesome and important. One of the two.

"Mornin' Mr. Graham," the security guard said as I walked through the scanner.

"What's up Charlie. You catch that skins game yesterday?"

"Yeah. 30-3 to the fuckin Chargers? Gonna be a long god-damn season."

"Gonna be long god-damn decade," I said laughing. "I'll catch you later Charlie."

"Hah. Let's hope not. Alright have a good day Mr. Graham," he said as I made my way towards the elevator. My office is on the 7th floor, but I was actually going down this time towards the high-clearance conference rooms in the basement. I swiped my id card and proceeded down 10 stories to the lowest level of Langley. I appeared to be one of the last people to arrive, but there was still some coffee and a couple donuts left. Just cinnamon. Fuck. I begrudgingly ate my stupid cinnamon donuts and coffee while the last couple of stragglers proceeded to arrive. I was sitting down next to one of my good buddies at the office, Dick Forester. He's an analyst, so I like to give him shit about not actually doing anything important with his life. And his name.

"How's it hanging, Dick?"

I really crack myself up sometimes.

"Fuck you Curt, how many times are you going to make that fucking joke?"

"As many times as I fucking see you."

He thought that was funny but got down to talking business quickly. "So apparently there's some young FBI hotshot coming in on this. Sam Moss or something like that. A middle-eastern specialist I think."

"Yeah? What's he about?"

"I'm not really sure. I hear he can be a real ballbreaker though."

"Perfect, more fucking kids in their twenties who think they know god-damn everything."

I didn't like those people if that wasn't understood. The director walked in and looked like he was about to address us. Real interesting fellow, the director. But I'll get to that later.

"Guys I'd like you to meet Agent Sam Moss, an FBI middle-eastern specialist whose going to be helping us out on this investigation."

Sam Moss walked into the room. Well fuck me. I think I spat out my coffee a little bit when Sam Moss came in. In fact was not *Samuel* Moss, but instead *Samantha* Moss. And this was most certainly not the first time that I had seen her. As a matter of fact, I just saw her 45 minutes ago when she was sleeping on the other side of my bed.

Chapter 5

The Americans had not been so smart when they designed their aviation system, Haded thought to himself. They had made it so easy for a person to fly privately without any real identification or credentials. All that was necessary was a prepaid reservation that covered the needed money for the airfare and a little bit of cash to tip the pilot. Haded made sure that the smell of Jibril's blood had not carried with him and made his way to the front desk.

"Hello and welcome to Prior Aviation!" exclaimed the overly perky receptionist. "How can I assist you on this beautiful day?"

Even if she posed no threat to him, Haded thought he might just have to kill her anyway as a favor to the human race.

"Reservation for Paulos please," Haded said in a faultless Greek accent.

"Lets see here...Yep! Dimitri Paulos going one way to Hanover Country Municipal Airport in Richmond, Virginia. Does that sound correct hun?"

"Um...yes that's correct." Haded could not fathom how a person could address a stranger so informally and condescendingly. This was part of the problem of America. There were no boundaries. Women could speak down to men, people could wear barely enough clothing to cover themselves, and could engage in as many sinful sexual escapades as they desired before marriage. This is why they needed to be eliminated. Even if it took a thousand years, Al Qaeda

and others on their holy mission will not rest until America is wiped out. They will never give in. Haded went on this whole tangent in his mind, still politely smiling at the receptionist.

"Perfect! Your pilots aren't quite ready yet, but you can help yourself to the complimentary coffee and pastries in the waiting area!"

"Thank you," Haded replied.

"And is there anything else I can help you with today?"

"No I am fine. Thank you."

Haded was doing all he could not to drive a knife through the woman's heart, but he thought a dead body could possibly raise a red flag to somebody walking in.

"Alright! Your pilots will come get you when they're ready. Have a wonderful day and a safe flight!"

"Thank you," Haded said for the fourth time.

His trainers in Sudan had taught him to always be polite and smile when talking to people. This, they said, would make them not perceive him as a threat. They had also warned him about the informal tone in which people talked in America, but that did not make it annoy him any less. After waiting for about 25 minutes the two pilots finally walked in.

"Mr. Paulos?" one of them asked. Haded rose and nodded.

"Bret Ward, good to meet you," the tall and lean man said as he stuck his hand out and exchanged a firm handshake with Yusef Haded. "We're all set for you, so if you follow us we'll try our best to get you out to Richmond in one piece."

Although he didn't love the word *try* in that sentence, Haded followed the men out the doors to the runway.

"So where you from pal?" asked Bret. Haded did not understand why Americans were always so eager to make small talk with people whom they have never met before.

"I am from Iraq. I am a terrorist. I am here to kill millions of people." No, Haded didn't say that, but he would have loved to see the look on Bret's face if he did. "Athens, Greece," he responded.

"Ah, love Greece! Spent two years down in Santorini when I was in my twenties."

"Santorini is a beautiful place," Haded said in his accent, although he had in truth never been to the island before.

"Sure is. Got some hot women down there too," he said with a small chuckle. Haded returned the smile and followed Bret up the staircase to the small four-seater aircraft.

“Should be a smooth ride to Richmond today, about an hour and a half probably. You need anything? Something to drink or read or anything?”

“I am fine, thank you. I am just going to sleep I think,” Haded said.

“Alright then, we won’t bother you. We’ll see you in Richmond.”

The pilots closed the partition between the cockpit and cabin and soon were racing into the sky. Haded closed his eyes and slept wonderfully. He dreamt of his mission. Soon everyone in the world would know his name. He saw fire and smoke, heard the screams of American women and children in a place filled with death. Soon they would realize that the fight against America was very real, and that they were loosing. It was a great dream.

Chapter 6

I don’t know what was more amusing, seeing my one-night stand walk into the high-level CIA clearance room I was sitting in, or seeing her reaction to seeing me.

“Hello, everyone, I just want to start off by saying that – “ her eyes then met my jaw-gaped stare. After it took her about half a second to recognize me, her eyes proceeded to widen to a point I didn’t know was possible. But, unlike the nervous, uncomfortable reaction that I would expect from a woman in her situation, she...she actually laughed. It took her about 10 seconds before she realized that everyone in the room was looking at her like she was crazy. “Sorry... I would just like to start out by saying that I know I may not seem like the most qualified person to be standing before you right now, but trust me when I say that I know more about this man than most of you here combined. Anyway, getting down to business, lets talk about the reason why we’re all in this room. As I am sure most of you know, Yusef Haded was seen entering the country this morning at Buffalo Niagara International Airport at around 9:15 AM....”

Ms. Moss continued to speak about how Yusef Haded was able to get into the country, but I wasn’t able to focus at all. All I could do was stare at her and wonder how the hell I got myself into this fucked-up situation. Have I ever seen her before yesterday? Would we get into trouble if somebody found out that we slept together? Did she know who I was when we met last night? No, probably not. I have never told a stranger my true identity and I was sure that I wouldn’t have revealed myself to her. So I guess this is just one big crazy fucking coincidence. I thought stuff like this usually only happens in the movies, but I guess life really is just insane sometimes. I

continued to look at Sam Moss. She was just as gorgeous as I had assessed this morning. Although she was wearing a pants-suit, she was still sexy enough so that I guessed half of the men in the room weren't paying any attention at all to what she was saying. She had long, dark, flowing black hair, remarkable glowing blue eyes, and a body that could put a Sports Illustrated Swimsuit model to shame. Because this was one chick I couldn't really brag about to my friends, I gave myself an internal pat-on-the-back.

"So, in conclusion," Sam went on to say, "Yusef Haded is definitely not in the country to go sight-seeing and our absolute number one priority is to see what he's planning and stop it."

Here is what I knew about Yusef Haded before that day: this was one evil mother-fucker. Though everyone always knew Usama Bin-Laden as the mastermind of Al Qaeda, this guy was their true biggest weapon. This was not the behind-the-scenes guy like Bin Laden. This was the guy who actually *carries out* their biggest attacks. He has been linked to terrorist attacks in Germany, Israel, and France just to name a few. His reputation is one of a stone-cold killer with the skills to snap your neck in close combat or snipe you through the head from 1,000 yards away. He was Al-Qaeda's version of, well...me. One thing for sure, if this guy was in the country, we certainly had a tough challenge ahead of us.

"Thank you Agent Moss," said the Director. "Anyone have any questions?"

"Yeah, I have a question," said another high-level agent Tom Doak turning to Ms. Moss. "So, I just lost my phone number. Can I have yours?" That got a laugh from the majority of the room, actually including me unfortunately. The director just shook his head.

"Yeah, for sure!" Sam responded, "It's 202 – not a chance in hell." This produced an even bigger roar than before, with everyone mocking Doak's failed attempt. She didn't appear to be phased at all by the lousy pick-up attempt, as I'm sure she'd heard hundreds of times already in the male-dominated business. I think everyone in the room was starting to see that this woman was most certainly not just a piece of eye candy.

"Alright, alright, that's enough," said the director. "This is going to be a joint CIA-FBI-NSA investigation. We need to use every resource we have to make sure whatever this bastard is planning doesn't happen. Graham, I want you to take the lead on this with Agent Moss."

Wait, what's that now?

"Sir, can I just speak with you for a – "

"That's an order."

Although I think she had very deliberately avoided looking at me since she entered the room, we exchanged some brief very awkward eye contact after our order to work together. Well, this should be fun...

Chapter 7

"Mr. Paulos? Sorry to wake you, but I just wanted to let you know that we're about to go through some unexpected turbulence. Everything should be fine, but I just wanted to tell you that you might want to buckle up for a bit. Should be on the ground in about 30-40 minutes. Over and out."

Again, Haded did not appreciate the word *should* when talking about his life. He was prepared to die for his cause, but going down in a plane crash was certainly not the way he wanted to go. Growing up in the deserts of the Middle East, Haded had never been on a plane before this mission and he was still getting used to the concept of flying. He could kill a lion with his bare hands and snipe a person from 1500 yards away, but felt completely helpless in the air. There would be nothing he could do to prevent a plane from plummeting to the ground if a malfunction occurred. Trying to put these negative thoughts out of his mind, Haded thought back to his life back home and why he began his holy mission. And just like that he was there again. A 16 year old boy summoned to the tent of his tribe's leader.

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"Yusef, my dear boy," the old man with a long white flowing beard said in Arabic. "I must speak with you for a second. Please sit down."

Even at 16 years old, Yusef Haded had a gift for intuition. He could sense danger from a mile away and seemed to have the gift of reading people's emotions simply through their facial expressions. At this moment, he had a hunch what the old man was talking about, but he did not want to believe it. He knew that his father had left a week before to assist the nation in their annexation of Kuwait. He had heard rumors that the Americans were getting involved, but he did not understand why a nation 7,000 miles away would become entangled in a conflict between two Middle Eastern nations. His father was a great and respected man. When his mother died at the age of three and without any siblings, Yusef's father was his only true family. He had

singularly raised him and in the process the two formed a bond like no other. He could not imagine life without him.

"Yusef, as you know," said the old man, "your father has been assisting in the war in Kuwait." The old man looked like he was trying to say something very difficult, which Haded picked up on almost immediately. "My boy," he said while taking a strong grasp on Yusef's arm, "I don't quite know how to tell you this, but I have received news that your father was killed two days ago by an American air strike."

Yusef Haded, at the age of 16, sat paralyzed. In his young eyes, the world had just ended. He did not have anyone to turn to or anywhere to go. He was alone. Soon however, what was initially grief very quickly became anger. His father was assisting his nation in a seizure of Kuwait, but was somehow killed by *Americans*. This was not their war. He felt as if his father had been killed for no reason.

"My boy, I know the pain you must be feeling right now. Your father was a true hero and I know he was very proud of the man you are starting to become." The old man saw a single tear running down the boy's face as he continued to sit in silence. "The only thing you can do is not forget his memory. You must avenge his death. There is a group located in Afghanistan started by a wealthy Saudi man that has vowed to take action against the West and America. They are looking for young men about your age to begin training. They go by the name Al Qaeda."

Yusef Haded simply nodded his head, the first motion he had made in fifteen minutes. He would join the war against America, and before his time was done, his father's death would be avenged. He was not *born* a killer, he was made one.

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Haded kicked forward in his seat as the wheels of the plane touched down onto the earth's crust.

"Sorry about that rough landing there, Mr. Paulos," spoke Bret the pilot through the partition. "That wind was really a bitch up there. Welcome to Richmond. Thank you for your business and we hope you'll fly with us again soon."

Haded knew by this time the Americans probably discovered he was in the country. What they would not be able to figure out, however, is *where* he was, as they probably still believed him

to be in the New York area. His mission was getting closer and closer to fruition, and Yusef Haded knew he would soon be in the last city he would ever see.

Chapter 8

"Lunch, now," I said to Sam in the first words that'd I spoken to her since she left my bedroom this morning.

"Are you serious? Lunch? The most dangerous terrorist in the world is roaming around America right now and I don't know if you were listening at all but we are the ones in charge of tracking him down. We have absolutely no idea where he is or where to start and you want to get lunch?"

"Sushi?"

"We can go to the cafeteria I guess. Quickly," she replied somewhat angrily.

"The last time I had sushi from the cafeteria my bathroom smelled like the inside of a dumpster for a week." Not a fun week for Curt

"Who are you?" she reasonably asked.

I replied, "Curtis Graham, nice to meet you. Wait a second, you kind of familiar. Have we met before?"

That one should go over well.

"Yeah, about that. I don't want this to be awkward or anything. We're two adults. Let's just be grown ups about this."

That would be making the false assumption that I'm a grown up.

"I think we already did the whole grown-up thing last night if I recall."

She blushed a little before shaking her head in disgust. I'll take that to mean she enjoyed herself. We made the walk up to the cafeteria talking a little bit about the case. The layout of Langley is, as you would expect, extremely complicated. Even after working here as long as I have, I still get lost walking to the cafeteria a quarter of the time. With everyone in the complex trying to stop terrorists from blowing up the country, you would think they would save everyone the time and just put the damn cafeteria in the middle or something. Sam seemed to know a great deal about Yusef Haded. From what she told me, this was going to be an extremely difficult guy to

track down. He liked to work alone, so she guessed that he wouldn't be in contact with any of the known Al-Qaeda satellites within the country. He frequently varied his methods, never killing two people the same way twice in a row. Last of all, he always moved around, not spending time in the same place for over 24 hours. In essence, this dude was a ghost.

"I think he's got to still be in New York," Sam started to say again, "Al-Qaeda has been trying to make a huge attack in NYC for years now. I think we –"

"He's not in New York," I interrupted.

She didn't seem to like being disagreed with and said, "How can you –"

"He's not in New York."

"Listen, you can't just – "

"He's not in New York because that's exactly what he wants us to think. He flew into Buffalo probably knowing that we'd eventually see him coming into the country on security cameras. He picked a location that wasn't exactly in the city, but that was close enough so that we'd infer that was where he was going. His dream is for us to focus all of our attention on finding him in New York when he's actually nowhere near there. You're falling right into his trap."

"Or maybe you're giving this guy too much credit and he didn't know that we'd see him coming into the country."

"Aren't you the one who just talked about how smart this guy is? This isn't his first go-around. He knows how to divert the authorities when he wants to."

I think Ms. Moss finally started to realize that I might actually have some brains and wasn't just some hunk she shackled up with the night before. Yes, I just referred to myself as a hunk. Confidence is everything right?

"Or maybe he knew that we would think he was trying to trick us and he actually *is* in New York."

I actually hadn't thought of that. I hate it when women are smart. Nevertheless, I smartly replied, "Or maybe he knew that we would know that he knows we know he knows we know. Don't think too far ahead. Twenty bucks says he's nowhere near New York City right now."

"You're on," she responded with a smile on her face. I think she was starting to like me again. "So if Haded's not in New York, where is he and how the hell did he get there?"

"My guess is that he took some sort of private transportation. Either a bus or a private plane or something like that. The security for private travel in this country is abysmal and Al-

Qaeda is fully aware of it. As for *where* good old Yusef is probably headed, I'd say more than likely he's going to that city about a half an hour away from here."

"You really think so? We have to get on this."

"Lunch first. I'm feeling a burger."

Chapter 9

The Richmond airport where Yusef Haded stood was very small. In fact, Bret the pilot had told him earlier that they was probably one of only two or three planes who would fly into the private sector of the airport the whole day. After exiting the plane, he made his way over to the rental car facility that was located about a half mile away from the airport. He walked through the front doors as if he was just a regular man renting a car, carrying one single bag and with a bright smile on his face. As he entered, Haded noticed that he was the only man in the complex. Two people, a man and a woman, stood behind the counter.

As the bells from the door rung, the man from behind the counter spoke, "How are you doing sir? Would you be interested in renting a car today?"

Why else would he be there, Haded thought to himself. But, without giving away his condemnation of the man's intelligence, he simply replied, "Yes, thank you very much," this time in his British accent. He did not feel his British accent was his strongest, but it was definitely passable enough for two idiotic rental car salesmen.

"Ah, you're from England! What are you doing over hear across the pond?" the salesman said in an awful attempt at a Birtish accent. If there was any chance at him feeling remorse for his actions it quickly vanished after meeting just several Americans. They all infuriated him.

Haded replied, "just helping the lads out in Washington with a quick thing."

"Well I think they could use all the help they can get right about now!"

Haded noticed that this seemed to be a popular joke throughout the nation. Where he came from, people could not go around talking negatively about the government. Haded thought that all this did was create tension between the people and the government, and found it ironic that political freedom was one of the things Americans were most proud of about their country.

"What kind of car are you looking for today?"

"Just a small compact car, please. Preferably black." He chose the color black, because it was one of the most common car colors in the country and also was hard to spot out from a distance.

"Alright...lets see here...we have a black Subaru Impreza in right now. And that would be about \$125 a day sir."

"I will take it, thank you," Haded said.

"Perfect! Now I'll just need to see a drivers' license and we'll get you out of here as soon as possible."

He was not prepared for this. He did not know that identification was necessary to rent a car in America and the only identification he had was for his French alias. He did however have business cards in all the names he used. "I'm sorry," Haded said coolly, "but as I said before I am from Britain and all I have with me is my passport, which my wife has all the way across town. I do have a business card though. Will that suffice?"

The woman behind the counter turned to talk to the man next to her and then replied, "Oh, I'm sorry sir but we need to see a valid driver's license in order to rent out a car. There is a bus stop about 20 minutes from here that could probably take you where you want to go."

"Very well," Haded sighed. He looked around, and made sure that there was nobody in sight before he pulled the cult .45 out of his holster with the speed of a lion pouncing on its prey. Haded put two bullets through each of the salesmen's heads before they even had the time to open their mouths in shock. With the silencer at the end of the gun, the only sound made was that of their bodies hitting the floor behind the counter. He put two more bullets through the hearts of each of them to make sure that they were indeed dead and shoved them under the counter in the back room. A fairly clean kill, there was little blood for Haded to clean up off the floor. After turning off the lights of the store and turning the sign to say "closed," he found the keys to the Subaru Impreza and walked outside towards his rental car. It was amusing, Haded supposed, that apparently you don't need a driver's license after all to rent a car in America. All you need is a gun.

Chapter 10

"These burgers suck. We should have gotten sushi."

"Why don't you try a salad?" Sam asked.

"You calling me fat?"

"Maybe," Sam said trying and failing to hide a smirk on her face. I reasoned Sam Moss would not be the best interrogator in the world. Or maybe she would just have to offer the terrorist a blowjob or something and they would tell her every intricate detail on Al Qaeda operations. Guys like blowjobs.

"Tell me a little about yourself," I said as I continued through my cheeseburger.

"What is this a first date?"

"I know romantic am I right?," I said grinning. "I'm just curious. Where you from?"

"You know everything about me right now that you need to."

"Fine, let me take a shot at it. You're somewhere from the Midwest. I'm gonna say Kansas or Missouri. Dad had some sort of job in detective work, possibly working for the local sheriff department? Mom stayed at home and took care of the kids, but you got along more with dad, who always wanted a boy but didn't get one so he took you along to all of his manly adventures. You excelled in high school academically and athletically, but didn't have much success with the boys because they were all too scared of your father and intimidated by you. After high school you received a scholarship to some Ivy League school. I'm gonna go with Yale? Got a 4.0 with an international studies major while also experimenting with college life in a vast variety of ways if you catch what I'm getting at. The FBI recruited you straight out of college where you took a job that bored you. Top of your class at Quantico, you wanted to do something that really motivated you so you asked if you could help out at the ATTF. You quickly worked your way up to where you were one of the leading experts on one of the baddest terrorists in the world and now you find yourself on the biggest case of your life sitting across the table from me. How does that sound?"

"How did you – "

"I work for the CIA, remember?"

Actually, I looked up her file on my phone during the debriefing, but she had no reason to know that.

"Well, you were wrong about one thing."

"What's that?"

"I went to Princeton."

"Ah, the La Quinta Community College of the East."

"What?"

You win some, you lose some. As the Curtis Graham joke philosophy goes, a wise man once said you miss every shot you don't take. I take a lot of shots.

"Alright, now let me take shot at you," she said.

"Let's see what you got."

I couldn't wait to hear what cooked-up story she came up with.

"You've always been the prototypical alpha male. Played sports in high school, popular with all the girls, and always cared about everyone liking you. You went to college, were the typical frat boy, but desperately tried to hide the fact that you were actually extremely intelligent. Joined the CIA out of college, where you trained for a couple of years before going into the field. After getting lucky on a couple of cases, you earned a rep as one of the top agents and that gives you a ridiculous sense of self-confidence. You haven't been able to hold a steady relationship for over 10 years because of "travel problems" and you go around sleeping with as many girls as you can to cover up the fact that you actually want something more than that. You don't like it when women challenge you and you're a little intimidated by me sitting across the table from you at the moment while you're eating that crappy burger."

"None of that is true." Fuck, it all was. Except for one thing – I never get lucky.

"You're lying."

"Prove it." Just before one of us was about to kill the other, or sleep with each other, whoever knows, I got that annoying little buzz that meant that someone was paging me. It was from the director. He wanted to see us in his office ASAP.

"Director dickface wants to see us in his lair," I said to Sam.

"You mean Director Winston Cafferty? Head of the CIA and one of the most important people in the United States?"

"That's not what I said?"

She rolled her eyes in annoyance and ordered us to leave. This chick's not even my girlfriend and she's already bossing me around. I hate women.

Chapter 11

As Yusef Haded drove towards his destination in his newly acquired rental car, he wondered about the man that was probably trying to find him right now. For all intents and purposes, it would likely be the best America had to offer, as he himself had built up quite a

reputation for his skills across the world. He found it stimulating that as badly as he wanted to complete his mission, there was another man that just as badly wanted his not to – and would do everything in his power to make sure that his plans would not come into fruition. No, Haded quickly changed his mind, this other man did not have the same motivation that he himself did. It would not be possible. He could not have gone through the trials of losing a father to an empty cause. He could not have gone through the pain and suffering that came with it. He could not possibly have the same hate in his heart for a nation that Yusef Haded has. This, he theorized to himself, gave him an advantage. He had no family back home, no allegiances to live for other to bring pain to as many Americans as he could before his time was done. Although it was not in his plan to die, he had a gut feeling that he would not ever be returning home to his homeland and had made amends with this fact as he kissed the ground goodbye as he left. Yes – he would certainly be more motivated than whoever the man was trying to find him – and he would be victorious.

Chapter 12

On the elevator up to Director Dumbo's office, we ran into good ol' Dick. I love this guy but I swear to god every time I fucking see him he says something stupid.

"How's it hanging, Dick?" I said in tradition.

"Hilarious asshole. Where you two headed?" he asked.

"Off to see the wizard of oz."

Dick thought that was really hilarious and laughed for a minute before he responded, "Yeah that dude still scares me every time I talk to him. I think he has a permanent stick up his ass or something."

Dick looked over at Sam and watched her for way too long to be discrete at all about what he was doing. He gave a wink and me a quick thumbs up. How long is this damn elevator going to last?

Not able to keep his mouth shut for over a second, Dick asked me, "So Curt, how's Lauren doing? You guys still going strong?"

Dammit, Dick. "No, actually that's over now," I said.

"Really? I thought you said yesterday things were going great."

I swear to god I'm going to kill him. I looked over and saw that Sam was now giving me the evil eye. Somehow, I've managed to piss off two women in less than 24 hours. I think I'm really getting good at this stuff.

"Hi, I'm Dick Forester by the way," he said to Sam, "I don't know if we've formally met before."

"Samantha Moss, pleasure to meet you," she politely returned.

"Pleasure's all mine. Been one of our head analysts for a couple of years now," Dick now started to flaunt. Quite the ladies man, Dick Forester. You know what they say, ladies always love the analysts. He went on, "I don't know if you've heard of me but I was the one who tracked down Irihim Al-Bubhazi back a couple years ago."

"No I haven't. But good for you," Sam responded looking as uninterested as a supermodel talking to a 400 pound homeless man.

I might actually like this girl. The flirting session of the century ended, as Dick finally reached his floor.

"Alright, this is my stop, I'll see you guys soon I'm sure," he proclaimed.

Sam smiled and waved, while I just stared at him like I wanted to drive a knife through his jugular. I think he realized he fucked up somehow, as I saw him look confused as the elevator doors were closing. When the doors closed, what I knew was coming quickly did.

"Whose Lauren?" she asked.

I pretended not to hear her as I looked over the blank screen on my phone.

"Who is Lauren?" she inquired again.

I didn't think I could claim deafness again, so I thought I should give her a response this time. "

Who?" I said.

"I said –"

The doors to the top floor where the King's office was at last opened. I don't think I've ever been happier in my life to be headed to a meeting with Director Cockmuffin. The elevator ride from hell was finally over, but I had a feeling we would get back to this topic pretty quickly after we left. At least now I had a chance to think of a response that didn't make me sound like a complete ass whole. Dammit, Dick. We made the short walk down the hallway to his office that was closed like it always is. I knocked, but entered without him telling me to come in. Small victories like this keep me going I guess.

"I didn't say *come in*," he said with his chair still turned away from us.

"You didn't? My bad there Win."

He surprisingly let that one go, as he turned around in his chair to face us. Director Ballsack, otherwise known as Director Winston Cafferty, is an imposing figure to say the least. He stands at about 6'6, has poster-boy looks and is extremely well built to around 240 pounds. I don't know when he gets the time to work out, but he still appears to be in very good shape. Winston and I have a decently complicated relationship. Back about 10 years ago we were on the same special-ops team and were very good friends at one point. Him being about 15 years older than me, he took me under his wing a little bit and taught me a lot about what he knew. After getting a bullet in the leg one day on a black ops mission in Serbia, Winnie decided to call it quits and take one of those behind-a-desk jobs that both of us said we'd never be caught dead in. Ever since he took that job he stopped being carefree, witty Caff and started being boring, follow-the-rules Winston. He's now settled down with a wife, two kids, and a dog while I still go out there and kill bad guys. With my tendency to play by my own rules and create some as I go along, we've had our share of disagreements since he was promoted to director a couple of years ago. He knows everyone thinks of me as the best in the business though, so he can't really fire me until I decide it's time to give it up. Or I really fuck one up good.

He motioned for us to sit down while he looked over what appeared to be a case file.

"How're Kate and the kids?" I asked.

"Kate's good. Little Claire just said her first words and Ben's about to start first grade if you can believe it. How's, what's her name...right how's Lau – "

"So how can we help you," I quickly interrupted. I didn't look over to check but I'm pretty sure Sam was giving me the evil eye again. I also had the sense that there was something about this case that we didn't know yet and that we were about to find out.

"Alright, down to business," the director said, "there's something about this case that you don't know about."

I hate it when I'm right.

Chapter 13

He was about halfway on I-95 North towards Washington when Yusef Haded saw lights flashing behind him. This, along with the loud siren in the background, he knew from his studies

of America meant that the car belonged to a police officer. He had been told sometimes if cars are going too fast police could stop them. He had been trying to not go above the speed limit, but his mind had been wandering thinking about his upcoming mission. He pulled the car over to the side of the highway and saw the police car pull up behind him. The situation could possibly present a problem, Haded thought, as he did not have a valid drivers license and his rental car agreement had been in the form of four bullets. He watched through the rearview mirror of the car as a man got out and started slowly walking over to his window. Before he rolled down his window, Haded pulled out his pistol directly under his coat on the passenger's seat in case the situation required it. In his brief stay in America, Haded had already killed three people and did not want more bodies unless it was absolutely necessary. The time for Americans to die would come later. The officer motioned Haded to roll down the window so that he could speak to him and he proceeded accordingly.

"You know how fast you were going there?" asked the police officer whose tag titled him as officer Womack. Officer Tray Womack was a not exactly a menacing figure, standing at about 5'8 and looking like he was certainly not in the best shape of his life. He wore a police hat and had dark sunglasses on, but Haded was still not intimidated in the least.

"No, sir. I do not," he responded.

"I had you goin' 90 miles per hour. That's 25 over the speed limit."

"I am sorry I am visiting from outside the country. I must have gotten confused with the highway signs. Please if you let me go I promise I will slow down."

"Do you have any registration for this vehicle here?" asked officer Womack.

This was the question Haded was afraid he would be asked. This mission had already gone off the road too much, but as he knew from his past missions, things rarely go exactly according to plan. He was here to kill millions of people, he thought, so what would one more police officer be?

"Yes, I think so. I have it right here..."

As he appeared to reach into the passenger seat glove compartment, Haded pulled out his pistol from under his coat. He handed officer Womack a piece of paper he found in the glove compartment that described how to use the cd player.

Officer Womack looked over the paper briefly and said, "Sir, this is not – "

As he looked up, Tray Womack stared directly into the barrel of a colt .45 pistol that he knew would be the last thing he ever saw. In the last moments of his life, he tried to think of how

this had happened. Why would somebody kill him over a simple speeding ticket that he probably would have written off as a warning anyway. Then it hit him. This was about far more than a speeding ticket. This was a man who was either running from the law or about to break it. He feared about who he had just pulled over and who he was about to let get away. A loud bang went off. Blackness followed.

Chapter 14

"Let me guess," I said to the director, "Yusef Haded is secretly an alien from the planet Pluto that has a flourishing civilization that is about to invade earth?"

"Hilarious. Can you just shut the fuck up for once and take this a little bit seriously? The most dangerous terrorist in the world is inside our country and you're the one in charge of catching him if that wasn't clear to you."

"So I was wrong then?"

He ignored my response as he took out the case file and looked it over for a minute while I think he regained his composure enough not to shoot me in the head. See what I mean? This guy was just no fun anymore.

"What I am about to tell you is top secret information and is not to be shared with anybody unless cleared with me first. Got it?"

We both nodded. Either my alien theory was correct, or there was something else big we were about to learn. Winnie seemed even more tight and wound up than usual.

"It appears we have somebody inside the company working against us."

"A mole?"

"If you wanted to call it that, yes. We have a mole."

Moles were very bad for a case, especially if you had no idea where it was coming from. When you have a mole on the team, it makes it almost impossible to catch whoever you're trying to, as it seems every time you're close they are able to sneak away. The enemy is always one step ahead of the game.

"How do we know there's a mole?" Sam asked.

"Well, that's because of the other thing you don't know about the case. We also have someone on the inside of the Al-Qaeda ring Haded is believed to be working with here in the United States."

Great, more surprises. This case was starting to sound like an action-packed hour of Jack Bauer and 24.

"So let me get this straight," I said, "There's a CIA agent working undercover in Al-Qaeda *and* a terrorist working undercover in the CIA? Are you fucking kidding me?"

"I'm afraid not. This is a very complex case and I do not think we have a lot of time either."

Sam thought it was about time for her to weigh in and said, "Wait, so if we have a person in with Al-Qaeda and Haded, why can't he just tell us where they are and we can go in and take him out?"

"I'm afraid it's not that simple," Said the director. "The man we have on the inside is not very high up in the organization. He does not receive priority information and at this time only knows that he is assisting in an attack against America. We are only assuming that he will be on the team helping Haded with whatever his mission is. He hasn't actually met or seen Haded yet and doesn't know anything about the plan."

"Sounds about as useful of an informant as the shit I took this morning," Sam said. No, just kidding. That was me.

The director rolled his eyes but continued, "He is trying as hard as he can at the moment to gain a more prominent role so that he can be a bigger use to us. But, he recently told us that he overheard someone above him speaking about an informant they had inside the CIA. He said they were laughing about it because we had no idea. I don't know if your feces could have delivered us that information Graham."

There's that good ol' Cafferty humor I used to know and love.

"You might be surprised," I responded. Sam and the director went on for about 10 minutes more small details about the case while I tried to put all these pieces together in my head.

After I thought it was about time to return to the conversation, I interjected, "So, the real question is, how can we catch this guy without tipping off whoever they have working for them?"

"The first thing we have to do is figure out who this mole is," Sam said. "Once we get past that, everything will become much simpler. Most high-level informants in terrorist organizations are high-up in terms of rank, so we can assume that whoever this person is knows a pretty good deal about their plan of their attack. Additionally, we could feed the mole false information that we would give to them that could potentially throw them off-track."

“Correct,” said the director, “finding out who the mole is right now is priority number one. We will meet back here in one hour to go over strategy.”

“Why one hour?”

“I have a conference call in five minutes with the President and Joint Chiefs to update them on the situation. In the meantime, I suggest both of you study up as much as you can on Yusef Haded and the Al-Qaeda ring working in America. I will see both of you back here in exactly one hour.”

Both of us nodded and left the lion’s den and made our way towards the elevator.

“You ready for this?” I asked Sam.

“Let’s kill this mother fucker.”

Chapter 15

Three men stood watch outside the warehouse in Frederick, Maryland. They had been instructed to wait there until the leader of their mission arrived, a man who had been rumored to be able to kill a man with his stare alone. The warehouse stood about four stories tall, wide enough to cover a football field and made of stone brick. The building had previously been the manufacturing place for a pharmaceutical company, but had not been in use for nearly a decade. The men on watch had never actually been inside the building they were assigned to protect and in truth had no idea what was inside it. They were sure though that it was most certainly not drugs and toothpaste for pharmacies. They had not had any problems in the couple of days they had been there. Nobody had come by to inspect the sudden new owners of the remote Frederick location. No news was always good news for them. In the distance, they saw a small black car that appeared to be making its way towards the building. Either this was their man or it was someone else’s, in which case things would probably get very ugly very quickly. They radioed to someone inside of the approaching car and waited in silence. The car slowed up towards the doors the men stood watch and pulled up. A well-dressed business-man looking person got out of the car wearing sunglasses.

“This is the leader of our mission?” Kadeem thought to himself, one of the three security men who had arisen as the leader. He thought the man in the car looked more like an American CIA agent than a top Al-Qaeda operative. The man came up to the door and took his sunglasses off. His eyes were the image of pure determination; absolute focus. This must be him.

"Password please?" Kadeem spoke in Arabic.

"*irrahee*," responded the man, meaning *faith* in Arabic.

"Welcome, sir," Kadeem said to the man as he signaled behind him for the doors to be opened. The man in business attire walked quickly behind him and disappeared through the large metal door that only showed blackness through it. It was crazy, Kadeem thought, that he had just met the man who would soon change the world.

Chapter 16

This case was starting to sound more and more like a movie script. I definitely wish I hadn't been right about that secret. One double agent makes an investigation difficult enough, but I don't think I have ever been involved with one with two. And we had probably less than 48 hours to figure out whatever was going down. Needless to say, this definitely wouldn't be an easy one. I went down to my desk and opened up the database on my computer.

"I'm going to see if I can find any recent murders or suspicious crimes in the Buffalo area," Sam said. She had been set up with a station right across from mine so we would be able to communicate with each other as easily as possible. Wonderful.

I went to the case file section of the database and typed *Yusef Haded* into the search engine. About 15 files came up. Looked like I had some homework to do. I hate homework. I got by in grade school pretty much off my natural intelligence alone. I saved papers until the last night and didn't really study unless I had to memorize something. Worked out for me pretty well I guess. Funny thing happened though when I tried to click on the first case file. *Classified*. Classified? I have a level 4 clearance. I'm one level away from finding out who really killed fucking JFK. Why the hell is a case file about one of the most highly-known terrorists in the world classified? I tried to open up the rest of them, but sure enough every one of them read "classified, level 5 clearance needed."

"Are you seeing any of this?" I asked Sam. "Everything on Haded is fucking classified."

"I know I'm running into the same problem. It's kind of weird isn't it? Maybe I should give the director a call. I mean he is the one who just told us to do research on this guy right?"

"Yeah, you go head and do that. I'll see if Dick knows anything about any of this."

"Okay. I think he was hitting on me by the way."

"Dick? He's harmless. I don't think he gets to use his name that much if you catch my drift." She smiled and then picked up the phone to call the director. I was about to pick up the phone to call Dick when I almost fell over in my seat from a scream from Sam.

"Curt! Look at this! A taxi driver was found dead in his seat at Prior Aviation Services in Buffalo about two hours ago. It appears to be some sort of private jet company that flies people across the east coast. They estimated time of death to be about 6 hours ago. If Haded took a taxi directly from the airport to Prior that would almost line up perfectly."

"Cause of death?"

"It says his throat was slashed. Appeared to be a garrote." Interesting, I didn't think people still used garrotes anymore. The kills were usually very messy and painful if the assailant didn't know what he was doing. I, myself, have never killed anyone with a garrote before. Maybe I could get some quick tips from Yusef when I finally track him down. Before I kill him obviously.

"Give them a call real quick," I said, "see if there have been any Middle-eastern looking men on a flight today."

She picked up the phone and dialed the number she found from the company's website. He would have been smart to take private planes to travel through the country, as the security for private airfare in the nation is abysmal and there's not a damn thing the government can do about it.

"Hello this is Agent Sam Moss from the FBI," I heard her say, "I was wondering if I could speak with you quickly about the events transpired earlier today."

"Thank you." I hate only being able to hear one side of a conversation. I heard some person on CNN talking about how only hearing one end, called a half-a-log or something like that, is actually more distracting to a bystander than hearing an entire conversation between two people. Fun fact.

"How many people have taken flights from you company today?" She listened quickly before asking, "and were and any of these passengers foreign-looking? From Arab descent possibly?" I watched closely and suddenly she appeared to get very interested in the conversation.

"Okay...this Dimiti Paulos...did he provide valid identification?"

"I see...and what was your impression of this man?" I quickly did a check of the name Dimitri Paulos through the database. As expected, nothing. If this was Haded, we knew he would have used a fresh alias anyway.

"Thank you very much for your time. We will be in contact if we have any other questions and will get a sketch artist out to you as soon as possible to get a physical appearance of this man. Oh, one more question, ma'am. Where was Mr. Paulos traveling to?" A blank look came over Sam's face as she stared down into the phone.

"I see...have a good day." She hung up the phone and turned to me.

"You were right..." she said, "He's here."

Chapter 17

The complex was massive. Haded did not understand why such a large property was needed, but he figured it could be a good thing that if the Americans ever did enter the building it would take them a long time to find what they were looking for. The remnants of the pharmaceutical company that used to occupy the building still remained in the main part of the warehouse. Inside, it did not seem like anything suspicious was going on, other than the fact that there were people in this worn-down building. The men walking with Haded appeared to be nervous and afraid of him, which made him very happy. He liked the feeling of being feared; it made him feel in control of the world around him.

"Where is it?" he said softly in Arabic.

"This way, sir. In the back of the building," one of the men responded.

"Take me."

They made their way towards the back of the building and went through a door that read "*employees only*". They walked down a small hallway that appeared to be where the offices of the workers used to be. Finally, they went through one of the doors that stood about three-quarters of the way down the hallway. They entered a room with tables set up and a couple of old vending machines. Haded did not see what he was expecting to however, so he waited for further direction. Sure enough, he watched as one of the two men pushed one of the vending machines to the side, after which Haded could see a small passageway revealed. They motioned him to follow and he ducked his head to fit under the top of the passage. This was a very tight and enclosed space that he had guessed would have taken at least several months to assemble. He could not help but cough from the dust, as he was not accustomed to the environment. But, as they reached the end of the passage it appeared to end, a wall at the back. One of his guides bent over and put his mouth to the wall.

"Al-Hamdu Lillah," he said, meaning "praise be to God" in Arabic.

Haded looked on as the back of the wall appeared to give in and move to the side. The men motioned Haded to go before them and he crawled through the narrow opening in the wall. He now entered a room of about medium-sized. He saw the door close behind him and noticed that the men previously accompanying him did not follow. Haded now realized that the door leading to this room only opened from this side of the wall, meaning that somebody must have been inside of here at all times. The room had walls made of dirt and only lit my lamps that must be powered by batteries, as there were surely no outlets in this room. A man came out of the shadows and bowed before Haded.

"Leader, it is an honor to meet you," he said while still bowing. "I am Wazir. I have been watching over this room for a long time waiting for your arrival. Words cannot express my excitement that this day is finally here."

"Thank you, Wazir," Haded said as he motioned for Wazir to stand upright. "Now where is what I have come so very far to see?"

"Yes, sir. Right this way," he said as he walked over to a large object covered by some sort of tarp. "It has been here for nearly a month now and I can assure you is fully functional."

Wazir pulled the tarp off to reveal a large square-shaped box that was locked shut with chains.

"Let me see it," Haded said.

Wazir took out a pair of metal cutters and broke the chain on the box. He looked somewhat weary of what he was doing, but did not dare to question the commands of his leader. He opened the box and stepped to the side to allow Haded to gain a look at the contents. Haded had anticipated this moment for a long time, the moment when his mission would truly begin. He looked inside the box and saw a large quantity of wires connecting to a large tube-shaped object in the middle. A smile came across his face. He thought of how funny it was that such a small and normal object could cause so much destruction and death to millions. He finally had the tool of his dreams. He had his fusion bomb.

Part 2

Chapter 18

A dim light gleamed over the horizon. Ali Saeed stood outside a warehouse of which he did not know the contains. There were two cars parked outside the complex that had only left a couple of time in the months that he had been working there. He had tried so many times to gain a higher position in the organization, but his inexperience did not bode well for him in that regard. It usually took a long time for people to gain respect in organizations such as Al-Qaeda and he had only been there for about two years. His best chance, he thought, was to find a way in with and gain trust from the leader, who he knew he was not supposed to know by name but of coarse knew was the infamous Yusef Haded. The man just came into the building about an hour before. Just standing a couple of feet away from him, he could sense the determination and confidence of the man. This was certainly somebody who could help him. Ali Saeed always felt anxious,, he constantly felt eyes were watching him other than his own; he turned left and right before he rounded any street corner. This was because Ali Saeed lived the most dangerous of any life: the life of a spy.

Chapter 19

Yusef Haded looked over his prized weapon with amazement. He had built up this moment for so long in his head that he almost could not believe it was finally here. The bomb was not as big as he had envisioned, which slightly disappointed him. But, just seeing an object that could wipe out millions with one blast excited him nearly to a point of arousal.

“We have been extremely careful with it sir,” said Wazir, who Haded had completely forgotten was still in the room.

“What is the power of this?” he asked.

“This is a 1.6 megaton thermonuclear bomb, sir,” Wazir responded. “It has the power to nearly wipe out the city of Washington D.C. and would be the largest bomb ever exploded on earth. As we had suspected, the Russians have not disclosed the information that one of their bombs has gone missing. They do not want to appear weak,” I believe.

In reality, Haded knew the truth of the situation. The Russians had given Al-Qaeda their bomb, fully knowing their intentions of using it on American soil. It appeared they still had not gotten over the cold war and wanted to see America suffer as much as Al-Qaeda did. Essentially,

they would send a devastating blow to America and would get none of the blame for it. It was a dream scenario for them.

“So where do we go from here, sir?” Wazir asked, “what is the plan?”

“We will move the weapon to our urban location shortly. Then we must wait for the first part of the mission to be complete.”

“The first part of the mission, sir? I do not believe I know what you are referring to.”

“You will see, Wazir. You will see.”

Chapter 20

“Let’s go,” I said to Sam, after she told me that Haded recently took a private flight from Buffalo to Richmond that by my calculations would have landed about 3 and a half hours ago.

“You want to leave now?” she asked me. “We have a meeting with the director of the CIA in 30 minutes if you had forgotten. We can’t just go running around America without orders.”

I laughed in my head a little, as clearly this was a person who hadn’t worked with me before. Like I said before, I like to play by my own rules sometimes. In my view, as long as the job ends up getting done, the means of accomplishing the task are irrelevant. Like somebody once told me, you don’t have to paint a picture. Wait that might have been a saying for golf actually. I picked up my files, got out of my chair, and started making my way towards the door.

“Wait,” I heard a voice say in the background, “I’m coming with you.”

In the world of counter-terrorism, 30 minutes can be the difference between stopping an attack and seeing a new bulletin about 400 people getting blown up in an office building. That’s why whenever I get a lead on a case; I see where it goes as fast as possible. If it leads somewhere else, you can get a jump-start on the enemy; and also if it ends up being a dead end you can figure it out 30 minutes before you would have otherwise. There is nothing worse for a case than when you spend too much time investigating a dead end. That only means the other side is closer to accomplishing their goal while you aren’t any closer to finding them. Though we were playing hooky from the boss’s meeting, I thought it still might be nice to fill him in on where we went. So, took out a piece of paper and wrote, “Went to get a sandwich, be back in three hours. Love Curt.” I might have also told him to give me a call on my cell when he gets the message, but that’s not important. I gave the note to my neighbor to deliver and we set off for the parking lot.

“Why do you always have to do everything like the entire world is a giant joke?” Sam questioned somewhat angrily.

“Why do you always have to do everything like penalty for smiling is death?” I said laughing, of course. “When you’ve been in this line of work as long as I have, sometimes you have to make a little comedy and fun to forget all the awful shit you’ve gone through. Or maybe you just haven’t seen my serious side yet.”

She didn’t respond. We reached the car and Sam hopped in the passenger seat as I took the wheel.

“Hope you don’t mind going fast,” I said.

And just like that, we were off to Richmond.

Chapter 21

“Sir, there may be a problem,” Wazir said to Haded.

“What do you mean a problem?” Haded said angrily.

“It is something with the bomb, sir,” Wazir explained, “Out of nowhere it just started to make a ticking noise and now one of the lights is on. I am merely here to watch over it, sir. I have no expertise whatsoever in the field of bomb making. But, I fear that somehow it may have been triggered to go off.”

They made their way over to the bomb, which was indeed making a very quiet ticking sound had a dim red light on in the background. Haded examined the bomb. He had very brief training in disarming a bomb, but in all honesty could not remember much of what he had learned. This would not be good. He did not care about dying in this moment, but he knew that the bomb exploding here would severely hurt their mission. The explosion in Frederick, though it would be devastating nonetheless, would not have nearly the destruction it would have in the heart of Washington D.C. The ticking of the bomb grew somewhat quicker.

“Does anyone here have extensive knowledge about bombs?” Haded asked calmly.

“I do not think so, sir,” replied Wazir, “the bomb was obviously not made here and we have only been watching over it. Nobody has touched or altered the bomb in any way since it has been at this location.”

Haded ran out of the room and through the tunnel leading to the main part of the complex. He yelled for all the men there to gather around him. Most these people had never seen him

before and had certainly not heard him yell like this before. They all sensed that it must be something extremely important for him to call for a meeting. Haded stood in the middle of the warehouse as he watched dozens of men run towards him with the highest urgency. Even in such a crisis moment like this, he still loved the power rush he received. The men stood, still, silent, awaiting the words of their leader.

"I am going to ask all of you one question. If the answer is yes, raise your hand. If the answer is no, do not move or speak. Do not discuss in any amount the contents of my question. Is that understood?"

The men nodded.

"Now, does anyone in this room have extensive knowledge in the field of bomb-making?"

No one moved nor dared to react to the question they had just received.

Haded waited a couple of more seconds and asked again, "Do any of you before me have any knowledge of how to build or disarm a bomb? I urge you to think carefully before raising your hand."

Again, nobody moved. They stood there in silence for what seemed like minutes. Haded did not change his glance. He remained, watching them like a king with total control over his army. Finally, one hand went up.

"Come with me," Haded said to the young man. "The rest of you, retake your positions. I do not need to remind you of what I had stated earlier."

Haded walked with great urgency towards the bomb room. The young man followed behind him, in silence. He watched as Haded went in the back room and revealed a tunnel, which he followed without a second thought. The young man did not know what awaited him on the other side of that door. Would he have to build a bomb? He had training with bombs, but certainly did not have the expertise to build one from scratch. Finally, they arrived in the room. The ticking sound was louder now.

"This is a high-grade nuclear fusion bomb," Haded said. "Fix it. Both yours and mine depend on it"

The young man examined the bomb thoroughly, studying it from all angles. He had learned about bombs in training, but certainly nothing to this degree of sophistication. He saw that at the center of the bomb there seemed to be some sort of computer device that controlled it.

"I need a computer," he said.

Haded sent Wazir out of the room to fetch one of the computers from the main room. He came back a minute later, as the young man continued to study the contents of the bomb. He hooked up a couple of wires from the bomb to the laptop and a clock appeared on the screen. 2:17 it read, continuing to count down every second. This clock did not need to be explained to any of the three men, as they all understood that this was the clock counting down until that nuclear-fusion bomb would wipe out the town of Frederick and around it. The young man looked closely at two wires now that connected the computer to the main part of the bomb. 1:34. The ticking was growing louder and the light was getting brighter. The two wires, one red one blue, he realized must trigger the bomb. If he pulled one from its socket, the bomb would likely explode. However, he had absolutely no idea which wire that was. 0:51. He looked over to the other two men. Wazir was sweating profusely and had now started to prey, while Haded just stood there as still as could be, as if he did not have a care in the world if he died today. 0:12. He knew that he had to make a decision. Without giving another thought to it, he closed his eyes and pulled the red wire out of its socket. Nothing happened. He looked at the computer screen, on which the clocked had stopped at 0:03. He then looked over at Yusef Haded, who looked at him and smiled.

"Well done, my son," Haded said to the man who had just saved their lives, "you from now on will travel with me."

He had finally done it, Ali Saeed had gotten his in with the leader.

Chapter 22

We arrived at the private Richmond airport in about an hour and a half, nearly 30 minutes less than the GPS said we would. I think I may have hit about 120 on the highway a couple of times. It was weird I felt like there was this little voice in the background yelling at me to slow down. Must have been imagining it. We pulled up to the airport that looked like it had rarely seen anybody today. We walked inside the building and found a receptionist sitting at the desk. She was young, probably in her mid-twenties, with long blonde hair and blue eyes. She was very attractive actually. No that I really pay attention to that kind of stuff.

She smiled when she saw us and gave us the standard "how can I help you today?"

Agent Curtis Graham of the CIA," I said as I pulled out my credentials, "we're here today to investigate a plane that arrived at this airport here earlier today, roughly five or six hours ago from

Buffalo. There was a man on the plane named Dimitri Paulos. Do you recall any of this information?"

"Yes, let me just see here...yes that's right there were only three planes that came into today so I definitely know the flight you are talking about. It arrived six and a half hours ago, carrying one passenger a Mr. Dimitri Paulos," she said. "What is the nature of your investigation?"

"I'm sorry I cannot divulge that information, ma'am."

Sam thought it was about time for her to come in and interjected, "Did you see Mr. Paulos at all after he landed? Could you give us a physical description of him?"

"No I unfortunately never caught a glimpse of him," she responded, looking thrilled to be part of a real federal investigation, "he never came into the terminal after his flight. I might want to check out the car rental facility though. It's just a couple minute walk from here. He definitely did not get a taxi after he came in, so that would be the only way he could go anywhere."

"Thank you," I said, "we'll be sure to head over there. I think that's all the questions we have at the moment. We will be sure to inform you if anything further comes up. One more thing actually, could you give the guys at the rental car place a quick ring to let them know that we're heading over there? It'd just make it go a little faster."

"Sure thing," she said, "good luck with your investigation!" She called the rental car facility as we left, but of coarse there was no answer.

We made the short walk over to the other building, but noticed that there didn't seem to be anyone there. The lights were off and the sign on the front of the door read *closed*, a little strange for 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Uh oh. I got that feeling I get sometimes when I feel like something bad is about to happen. Some call it luck, some call it bullshit, I call it instincts. I pulled out my gun and headed into the building. The door was unlocked and I proceeded to enter slowly. I quickly turned on the lights to get a better view of the space. Nothing appeared to be out of the ordinary. There were no bodies, no blood, it just looked like they closed up early today for whatever reason. But why would the door be unlocked? Possibly just a silly mistake or something, but it was suspicious nonetheless.

"Is anyone here?" I yelled into the building.

No response. I signaled Sam to check the front of the building and I would check the back. I slowly made my way through the small building and back behind the counter. Nothing.

"I don't think there's anything here," I said to Sam.

"Yeah I don't think so either," she said. "It's weird. I really had the feeling we were going to find something."

As did I. And my instincts were rarely wrong. That didn't change the fact however that there appeared to be no sort of evidence in this rental car facility. We checked one more time and agreed to leave. Right before we headed out, I caught the glimpse of a back room in the corner that I didn't see before.

"There's another room here in the back," I said, "I'm gonna check it out real quick before we head out."

Sam nodded and followed. I opened the door to the room. I turned on the lights, almost hoping that we would find something this time. Again, it appeared that nothing had happened here. We took a quick glance of the room before something caught my eye under the corner. It looked like there was a shoe or something under one of the counters. Probably nothing. Still, I headed over to see if there was anything there. And there it was.

"Son of a bitch," I called out.

Sam gasped a little bit when she came over and saw the scene. There, under the counter, were two dead bodies. They each appeared to have one initial shot in the head and then two subsequent shots in the heart for insurance policies. Sounds like something I would do actually. If we had any doubt before this moment they were immediately erased, Haded was here.

Chapter 23

"What is your name, son?" Haded asked the man who had just stopped a premature nuclear explosion.

"My name is Ali, sir. Ali Saeed."

"Tell me about yourself Ali," Haded said inquisitively. "What brought you to the jihad?"

It was almost as if Haded was testing Ali. Testing to see whether this young boy was worthy enough to become a part of the inner circle.

"I was born in Iraq, sir."

"Ah, me as well," Haded said with a small smile on his face. "Did you know this?"

"Yes, sir, I believe I did."

"Continue."

"I was just a very young boy when it happened, but my brother was killed by Americans in Afghanistan in 1979. He was assisting the Afghanis in preserving their land against the Muhajideen when an American missile struck him. I vowed ever since that day to avenge his death and to destroy the western rats."

"That is very noble of you, my son," Haded said. He liked this young man. He seemed to have many of the very qualities that he himself possessed. Most of all hatred, the strongest of all hatreds that could only be fueled by the unjust loss of a loved one. Haded completely understood the pain that Ali felt, as it permeated through his entire body.

"It is my only mission in life to destroy the infidels. They cannot continue to go on believing that they own the world, that their disgusting way of life is virtuous one. I believe it is the will of Allah that they all must die."

Ali was prepared for this question. He had thought over in his mind over and over again in his mind what he would say if he were ever given the opportunity. From what he could tell, Haded was buying every word he was saying, but he could not tell completely behind the cold eyes of the man.

"Indeed. It is the will of Allah that all infidels will be exterminated from the earth. Our mission is only a small part of the larger one. Our war will never end."

Haded did not completely know what to make of this man. He was always very cautious about trusting people. He had to be sure that they were loyal. Ali seemed to have all the right tools to be an effective part of the mission, but he was not sure if the young man was simply telling him what he thought he wanted to hear. A couple of more questions were needed.

"What city do you come from?"

"I was born Ramadi," responded Ali, "my mother and my sister still remain there."

"Family is a weakness," said declared, "You have no mother. You have no sister. People with families I have found are not always prepared to die for the cause. Your family must be only the cause. Are you prepared, Ali? Are you prepared to give your life for the jihad?"

"Of course, sir. There would be no greater honor for my life. There is no other way I would rather pass into paradise."

"Do you have combat skills?" Haded asked.

"Yes, sir. I am fully trained and ready for action."

"Good. You will need them. Come with me, my son. I have more to tell you."

The mole was in.

Chapter 24

A team arrived in about fifteen minutes after I called in the bodies. I think the whole scene of the thing freaked out Sam a little bit, who I doubt had seen too many dead corpses in person during her training in Quantico. I still actually remember the first time I saw a dead body live. It's one of those things in your career that you don't really forget. Anyway, I expected I would get a call any minute now from the big guy. And, at that very moment, my phone rang with that familiar caller ID saying "Winnie the Pooh." Wow, I must be getting really good at this detective stuff.

"Graham, here," I answered.

"I would have appreciated a little heads up about your trip over to Richmond," he started to lecture, "you can't just go around – "

"Did you hear what we found here?" I interrupted, "Couldn't you just for once start off with a 'good job' or a 'nice going there' or something? I'm starting to feel a little underappreciated to be honest here."

He was able to sense my sarcasm but replied, "nice job," nonetheless. Now that's more like it. We talked for a bit about specifics and reporting and other boring stuff of that nature before things got somewhat interesting.

"Now there must be a *reason* why he killed those two people," the director said.

"Yeah I've been thinking about that too," I responded, "Haded doesn't just go around killing people for no reason. There has to be a motive here."

"Well, what do you think that motive is?" he asked.

"I'm thinking he obviously went in to get a car. He would have been smart to fly into Richmond when the real destination isn't in that area. That's why he needed to get a car to get to wherever he's going. I'd doubt it's somewhere in the district, even if that's their main goal here. Probably some remote location in Virginia or Maryland. I'm guessing our two friends here asked Haded something he wasn't prepared for, most likely something to do with a form of identification he didn't have. They say no car, he shoots them. He takes car, goes bi-bi."

"That's certainly an interesting theory. Do you have any evidence at all to back that up?"

"Evidence? You said what do you *think* the motive is...that's just my best guess here."

“Alright. Go through the inventory and see if there are any cars missing that haven’t been recorded. We might be able to figure out what car he was driving in and try to find it on street cameras. It’s our only move right now I think.”

“That’s going to take hours. We have no idea where he went. We have to get a little more rushed here, because I sure as hell don’t think Yusef motherfucking Haded is going to sit around on his ass waiting for us to catch up.”

There was a decently long silence before the director replied, “Well do you have any fucking better ideas?”

Another long silence.

“I’ll get everyone on it.”

I hung up. I don’t know if he knew it, but we had absolutely no solid leads at this point. If this was a game, then right now we were definitely losing.

Chapter 25

There, in the middle of the most important intelligence building in the United States, in Langley, Virginia, stood a man. This man was no ordinary man. He had given his life and his job to his country for many years now, but never got anything in return. He felt that the glory days the country had once seen were now coming to an end. Somewhere, at some time back in the road, the nation took a misstep and were going in a direction that he just did not believe was good for the long-term. He thought the nation needed a wake-up call. And even if it took a little disaster in the short-term to get it done, he in the end would be considered a hero. America was facing a new enemy, an enemy that was a bigger threat to their way of life than anyone could even possibly comprehend.

What a sight it would be, the man thought, if the entire country united against one enemy. Democrats, Republicans, blacks, whites, Hispanics, all together in morning. It would be the true event that regained America what it had been lacking lately: unity. Yes, he thought, although nobody would ever know it beside himself, he would be America’s savior. He woke from his trance to the alarm he set on his phone. He looked at his watch and realized he had to go outside. He was expecting a call soon.

Chapter 26

Just about twenty-five minutes into after the search begun, someone called out in optimism.

"We might have something here," said Fred, the head of the search team. "The records show that only two cars have been rented out today. A red Chevy Malibu and a yellow Ford ranger. We found those two missing cars, but the interesting part is that we also found a third missing car. A black Subaru Impreza. There's no record of the car being gone, but we checked three times and it's not here."

"Does this place have any video recordings or anything of cars leaving the compound?" I asked.

"No I don't think so. This certainly isn't the most high tech place here. There aren't any cameras in the store itself or anywhere near the facility. Customer just get the keys from the salespeople and leave."

That didn't surprise me. Of coarse, the rental car companies at major airports have about five cameras per parking space to make sure none of their cars get stoles, but this wasn't that kind of place. And Haded probably knew it.

"Wait a second," Sam interjected, "aren't all rental cars now-a-days required to have tracking chips in them at all times?"

"I've never heard about that," I said.

"Me either," seconded Fred.

"I remember last year I was on vacation in California my dad couldn't remember where he parked his rental. He called the company and they said they have tracking devices on all of their cars now. They were able to give him the exact longitude and latitude of the car and we were able to go find it. Assuming this company does the same thing, we could just track the car he took and see where he went from here."

"Get on it."

This was possibly the big break we were waiting for. If these tracking chips really existed, Haded definitely would not have known about it. Finally, it looked like we might have an advantage. Did it bother me that I wasn't the person who came up with the idea? Maybe a little bit. But, hey, at that point I would have taken anything that led me to killing that son-of-a-bitch. If everything played out well this could be over in a couple hours. Find bad guy, catch bad guy, kill bad guy. Maybe the job wasn't so difficult after all. While Sam was figuring this all out I noticed

my stomach growling and thought it was about the right time in the day to finally eat. Hey, just because I'm trying to stop a terrorist attack doesn't mean a guy isn't allowed to eat right? I went over to the vending machine in the airport and got an energy bar. I had a feeling I would need it for the rest of the day. I came back to the crime scene to everyone freaking out. See what happens when I leave for a minute?

"Where the hell did you go?" Fred said, "We've been runnin over the whole fuckin place looking for you."

Apparently I wasn't actually allowed to eat.

"Did the world blow up yet?" I asked sarcastically? "Then calm the fuck down," I said emphatically. That shut everyone up. "Now what's going on?"

"I called the headquarters of the rental car company," Sam said, "and yes, they do keep a GPS tracking device in every rental car they have. But, they would refuse to give us any info on the specific car without substantial proof or a warrant."

"Are you fucking kidding me? A warrant? Did you tell them that by the time we got a warrant to them their headquarters might get blown halfway to Mars?"

"No, I decided in the end not to go the way of the asshole route," she said.

Ouch. I'll give her credit for that one actually. Not half-bad rookie.

"Then," she continued, "while you were off getting a snack based on that chocolate stain on your pants, I called the director without you and filled him in on the situation."

"You called Winston without me? What a shame."

"Anyway, he's going to handle the situation personally and get back to us within the next couple of minutes. I bet that fucking car-lady bitch will get a real surprise when she gets an angry phone call straight from the director of the CIA."

I think this lady really pissed off Sam, because I hadn't seen her that angry since that little scene in the elevator a couple hours back. She actually looked really sexy when she got angry, or more like it as a matter of fact she looked hot pretty much all the time. I guess it's a little sad (and scary) that in the middle of a national crisis these are the thoughts going through my mind right now. Yeah, definitely scary. Suddenly Sam's phone rang and she signaled to us that it was in fact the big guy. I think everyone at that moment was thinking the same thing that I was. Was this the moment that we were going to get our first real lead in this case?

"Moss here," Sam answered, "yeah...where?"

Again, I fucking hate being able to only hear one side of a conversation. I wish I could have some chip or something that would let me be able to listen to everything I wanted. I should talk to tech development about that."

"Alright, got it. We'll be right on it."

She looked at me.

"3113 Carpenter Rd, Frederick, Maryland."

Finally, we were in business.

Chapter 27

"It is a beautiful evening back home," said Haded, to the man who called him on the secure phone line they had made.

"Yes," the man responded, "I believe 73 degrees and sunny."

This was the correct response and Haded was able to confirm the identity of the American mole. Hade did not know too much about this man and wanted to keep it that way for security reasons. The less he knew about the mole, the less the mole knew about him, which always made him happy. Although he was told my numerous sources that this was a man with a fairly significant amount of power in the American government and that he could fully trust this anonyms person, who was one hundred percent committed to the cause.

"What is the update of your mission?" the man asked.

"Tell me first the progress of the American investigation."

"You first."

"That is not how this works."

"I tell you how this works."

These were two stubborn men who were both used to being in positions of power. Neither wanted to shoe the slightest sign of weakness, but Haded felt like this was wasting time so he told the man of how they were exactly on progress. He forgot to mention the part about the bomb almost going off though. There was no reason to bring about worry for a simple malfunction. Besides, Ali had assured that nothing resulted from whatever error there was.

"Now," Haded said calmly, "what is the progress of the American investigation? Surely they have figured out by now that I am in the country."

"Unfortunately, they know a lot more than that. They found a dead taxi driver in Buffalo and tracked your flight to Richmond. Last I heard they were going over to the Richmond airport to further investigate."

This was not good news. Haded did not expect the CIA to be able to track his location so quickly. He knew they would eventually find the bodies at the rental car building, but still was pretty sure that he did not leave any evidence as to his future location.

"Haded, was it really necessary to kill that taxi driver?"

"It was necessary," Haded said flatly.

"Why? All it did was – "

"It was necessary. I am the leader of this mission and do not forget that. Yes, you are helping us and may be an important member of the mission but you still are under me. I do not want to have a problem and do not anticipate one. Is that understood?"

There was a pause.

"Yes," the man responded, "is there anything else you would like to know?"

"Indeed there is. I want to know as much detail as possible about the lead investigator against me. What is his name?"

"His name is Curtis Graham. He's the best the CIA has. A little un-orthodox in his methods but he has a very good track record in these types of things. I think he was the man who was in charge of the 1933 Trade Center investigation. Do not underestimate him. He is very smart."

Haded had heard rumors of this man. He was said to be obnoxious, rude arrogant, all the qualities of Americans that Haded utterly despised. He was also though rumored to be smart and ruthless, never having lost a fight in close combat. If Curtis Graham was his opponent, he could very well be faced with a challenge after all.

"What do you mean un-orthodox?"

"He does not really act like a typical CIA agent. He does not follow any rules. He follows his gut and instincts, which are usually correct. He does not care about diplomatic stipulations. He will do whatever it takes to solve a case. Do not underestimate him."

"I never underestimate my enemy," Haded snapped back, "Let me know if any more details emerge. I will be available on the second line you were given."

Haded hung up without saying goodbye. Based on his first contact with this man, he did not like him. It seemed like he for some reason thought he was in charge of things. The fact was

that that he was not in charge, Haded was, a message, which he hoped, was carried through in the phone call. He did not trust this man.

"Sir," Ali said, "who was that on the phone?"

"A friend, Ali. A friend to the cause."

"May I ask who, sir?"

"In due time, my son, in due time," Haded said laughing, "for all I know, you might be a spy."

Chapter 28

We drove from Richmond about as fast as Dick runs when he sees a meatball sandwich. Fast. There were about five cars full of men behind us and another dozen on the way. We weren't leaving anything to chance on this one. If Haded was really at this place, we were going to get him.

My phone was vibrating in my pocket and I realized I was getting a call. I took the phone out to see who it was, but the screen that appeared said *classified*. That's weird.

"Hello?" I answered.

"They know," a voice I had never heard spoke.

"What in the hell are you talking about? Who in the hell is this?"

The phone hung up.

"That was odd," I said to Sam.

"Why? Who was that?"

"I have no idea. Probably just some punk ass kid making a prank call."

We continued down the road for a while still going as fast as a Nascar driver during the Daytona 500. I never understood the appeal of Nascar by the way. I don't get why people would just want to watch cars turning left over and over again for five hours. Sounds like the most broing sport in the world to me. Did you know that it's actually considered the most popular sport in the United States right now? Just a signal that the world has gone to shits. What ever happened to good ol' fashioned baseball and football? I actually saw a sign the other day that said NASCAR: NON-ATHLETIC SPORT CENTERED AROUND REDNECKS. Sounds about right to me.

"Do you really think he's there?" Sam asked me.

"I don't know. We don't even know if that was actually the car he was driving or if it was just a misreport by the rental company. If he is there though, I sure as hell know he's not getting away."

She nodded and turned to face the road ahead of her looking about as determined as I was on my first real mission.

"Let me ask you something," I said, "while were killing time on the road here, why did you decide to sleep with me?"

"Feeling a little unsure of ourselves are we?" she said smiling.

"No, I mean obviously because of my boyishly good looks is I given," is as she laughed, "but it's just you don't really seem like the type of girl who goes out fucking guys she meets in bars. Or am I just *that* good-looking?"

She laughed again and thought for a moment.

"Sometimes on this job I guess I think you need to forget about real life sometimes. And no it's not something I do a lot. It had been...a while...before last night. I went to get a drink at a bar, you started talking to me, you were sweet, you were charming, we had drinks, it just happened."

Did she just use the word sweet in the same sentence as describing me? I guess some people turn into assholes when they get drunk and I get...nice? Interesting.

"So how long is a *while*?" I said.

She looked hesitant for a second like she didn't want to respond, but finally caved in.

"I was going through little bit of a dry patch," she said and sighed, "8 months."

"8 months! I don't think I could go 8 months without having sex if someone said they would pay me a million dollars. Glad I could break the streak though."

Curtis Graham: the dry-spell ender. I think I should add that to my business card. Maybe I should come up with a better name first though. Then came that moment when I realized she was still talking while my mind went off. That happens a lot.

"I just got so consumed with my job. I never had any time for a man in my life. My man is work."

"Whose better in the sack: me or work?"

She thought that was funny and smiled.

"Calm down cowboy, I think I used you more than you used me. Even if that use only lasted about five minutes."

"Five minutes? Now I know you're lying hon."

"Do you remember?"

"Maybe..."

"Then I guess you'll never know."

"Touché."

We both smiled and turned back to face the road. I looked over to her and again became awestruck by her beauty. I think she noticed me looking, but pretended not to. The fact was this girl wasn't just beautiful, she was sure of herself like a lot of women aren't. She has a good head on her shoulders and knows what she's doing. So again, why the hell did she ever decide to sleep with me? Oh right, the boyishly good looks. I keep forgetting. We exchanged eye contact again for a second and I got this weird feeling in my stomach that I wasn't really sure what it was. It was like I was in high school again. Then it hit me. Dammit.

Chapter 29

Haded sat with Ali and Wazir by his side in one of the office rooms. This was the part Haded hated – waiting. He wanted nothing more than to get started on his path of destruction that would leave America in shock. But, he knew he must wait for the first part of the mission to be set before he begins. Their next location was not extremely far from their current one, yet they wanted to wait until there was less traffic on the road. They did not want their little device to be set off by a bear car accident. It had to be perfect.

Ali and Wazir were in the middle of an argument that involved the Qur'an. Ali was arguing that according to the holy book, a man is permitted marry the wife of his adopted son if the situation were to present itself. Wazir, on the other hand, said that those rules only applied in the time of the prophet and that it did not make sense in the 20th century. Haded pretended he was not listening to the debate, but in truth followed every word the men spoke. Ali spoke intelligently, thinking before choosing his words. He made sound arguments and used a tone more sophisticated than Wazir, who raised his voice slammed his fists to get his point across.

"Ali is right, Wazir," Haded finally spoke out, "the prophet Muhammad married Zaynab, the wife of his adopted son. Are you saying that the actions of the prophet are not good enough for you? That they would not be considered correct today?"

Haded stared into the eyes of Wazir, who cowered against the cunning gaze. Wazir looked like he was about to say something to argue the point of his leader, but wisely backed off.

"Yes, of course, my leader," Wazir spoke in apology. "It was ridiculous of me to think such absurd thoughts."

Haded nodded. It was becoming clear that Ali was the stronger accomplisher to Wazir. He seemed more capable of handling the extreme requirements that would be needed to make their mission successful.

Then, suddenly, something unexpected happened. The second secure phone for contact with their informant started to ring. They were not supposed to have another update for another three hours and were only to call otherwise in case of an emergency. Haded ran to the phone and picked up.

"Yes?" he answered.

"The warehouse has been compromised," the same voice as before said, "You must leave now. Take everything. They are coming."

The phone hung up. Haded did not react as most men would in this situation. Most people would panic, but this was not the way of a good leader. Although he knew he did not have much time, he took a moment to gain his composure as he had learned in his training. He calmly explained the situation to Ali and Wazir and ordered Wazir to tell the other men to proceed with the evacuation procedure.

"Sir, if I might add," said Ali.

"Proceed..."

"How can we be sure to trust this mystery person? Nobody here has met the man. What if he is trying to lead us into a trap?"

"I like your thinking, Ali. It is always a good thing to look at every situation from multiple angles. Yet, I have already done this. Many have assured me that this man is trustworthy. We must leave."

"I understand, sir. But do we also not even consider the option of remaining here to fight? To show the Americans that we will not run away and back down?"

"And risk the entire mission? We are not backing down, my son. Sometimes one must simply run away to delay the battle. Rest assured, the battle will come. I admire your courage, however."

Haded found it somewhat strange that Ali almost appeared to want to stay in the warehouse. Or maybe he was just trying to make sure every possible decision was considered before they made one. As a true soldier would do, Haded thought. Then something occurred to him.

“Ali, you are very clever my friend. We will stay and fight.”

Chapter 30

We finally arrived to the location of the car in Frederick. We parked about 2 blocks away to set up for the operation. You don't just pull up to where you think a bunch of terrorists are hiding out. You don't want the enemy to know that you're there. It may be a cliché, but the element of surprise is truly one of your biggest assets in a mission. We showed up with what seemed like the entirety of the CIA ops forces. We had four teams, all equipped with enough artillery to make sure none of these fuckers would make it out of that warehouse. With everyone there, I thought it was about time to go. The longer we waited, the more of a chance it would be that they would realize we were here.

“Alright, gentleman, gather around,” I said. “Alpha team, I want you to take the front door. Bravo, you will enter through side door one. Gamma team, enter through the back clear the other side. Finally, Lambda team, split up and guard all three exits. Make sure *nobody* leaves this building without being captured. Are there any questions?”

Nobody said anything.

“Alright, lets do this men. This is a get in and get out mission. If we face hostiles, shoot to kill. If you see the man know as Yusef Haded do not kill him, he is to be taken alive under all circumstances. I'll be leading Alpha team into the building, Agent Moss will be with Lambda. It's go time fellas.”

We made the short walk over to the warehouse with extreme caution. We weren't seen by anybody as we got into our positions on all sides of the warehouse. Even after so many of these, I still always get a little nervous before an op like this. As I've seen with so many of my fallen comrades, you never know when your next mission will be your last. When I received the signal, I told every front man to put the detonators on the doors. After our training in Langley, we learn to have entire conversations with one another without speaking a word. There is dead silence. Finally, I gave the 1,2,3 count. The dynamite blew the hinges of the doors right open.

We were now in the most crucial moment of a seizure. Right when the doors blow off, the enemy knows that their location has been compromised. In the most successful operations, the enemy doesn't get a chance to react before you take them out. I was the first one to run through the door. Goggles on, gun pointed, I was ready to go. I saw nothing through.

"CLEAR," I yelled as I made my way through the opening hallway of the warehouse. The men moved in before me and checked out the initial room. There was nobody there. A door opened to what I assumed was another room and I signaled for one of the men to open it. Then, pretty much as soon as he opened the door, it happened.

The unmistakable sounds of shots being fired carried through the door as bullets came flying in. One man was hit, while the rest jumped to the sides in cover. I gave the signal to the point-man on the door and he signaled back he followed. In one swift motion, the entire team of men rolled through the door in unison. With out radar and light technology, they were merely no match for us. Although shots continued to come on, it only took one to two shots for us to take out each person. The team from the back swooped in seemed to surprise them. Exactly how we wanted this to go. Just based off the sounds of guns going off, I guessed that the amount of combatants had decreased by half in just under thirty seconds.

Out of nowhere, I still don't know why, but I jolted my head to the right. I felt the bullet just glaze by my left ear and go past me. I turned around to see a man standing about 15 feet away from me with a gun pointed and ready to fire again. I dove to the ground just as he fired, turned around, and shot him right in the kneecap. Even with all the chaos going on I was able to hear the man cry out in pain. I shot him in the other kneecap and once more in the shoulder just for good measure. These were not mortal shots but gave enough pain for him to be completely incapacitated for the time being.

"Take this man to a secure location," I said to the first person I saw. "Bind him up and keep a close eye on him. Make sure he doesn't take a pill or anything. It could be cyanide."

I surveyed the scene once more and it looked like there was none of the enemy left. Then, abruptly one man got up from behind a pillar and ran towards the back of the complex. A couple of men ran after him and I saw that Sam was right behind them. In a full sprint, I took off towards them. I caught up with them quickly and saw that they were still chasing after him. He turned down a long hallway about three times before there was finally nowhere else to turn. He was trapped. I was towards the back of the line with Sam a little closer to the front. He turned into one of the offices, where surely there could be no escape. He was done for.

Then, though, something occurred to me. How could they have gotten into perfect combat position so quickly? It couldn't have been more than 15 seconds in between the time when we blew the hinges off the door and when we entered the second room. It would have been impossible for everyone to react so calmly and get into combat position in fifteen seconds, even if for some reason they did have their guns on them, which was extremely unlikely in its own right. And where was Haded? The man we were chasing was definitely not him and all the others had been confirmed as not him. He surely would have wanted to be in the fight if he knew their position was compromised. I thought back to the call I got in the car; *"they know,"* said the voice. And then it hit me. They knew we were coming. This was all planned, from the men firing back to this guy running down this exact hallway. That could only mean that...Oh God.

"GET DOWN!"

I saw him run into the corner and dive down onto the ground. I did the only thing I could think of in that moment. I grabbed Sam by the arm, threw her to the ground and jumped on top of her.

"GET DOWN," I said once more, "IT'S A TRA – "

It went off. All I remember from that moment was lying on top of Sam, trying to get as low as I could to the ground. Then the loudest sound I have ever heard, with a fierce ringing accompanying it in the moments after. I looked up briefly and saw fire all over; I saw blood on the ground and arms barely hanging from the lifeless bodies of men. Everything became cloudy. And then, blackness.

Chapter 31

Haded never received a phone call from somebody left at the warehouse, so he assumed everything had gone according to plan. He laughed at the thought of the Americans realizing that he had tricked them. That he had outsmarted all of them. Yes, they had to leave their location somewhat earlier than they had originally intended, but it was them who got the last laugh. He wondered if they had gotten his note yet. Haded liked to provoke and frustrate his enemy, as he found it could often lead to quick and emotional decisions. It was all like a game of chess and he was a master of it, with each piece being played out 10 moves in advance. He had told the men prior to his departure that they would stay and fight to the death and that they would be granted

paradise in the afterlife soon after. He was sure that his fallen comrades were there right now; and that he soon would join them.

Haded and Ali, his newfound most trusted ally, drive on the beltway towards Washington D.C. He couldn't wait to see the Washington monument. Ali was fidgeting in the car and looked somewhat nervous, probably because he just wasn't accustomed to being in the company of such greatness; of such power.

But, this was not the case at all. Ali was uncomfortable because he was worried about what had happened back at that warehouse. He tried to call and warn them, but Haded approached him right as he was making the call. He had hoped that his message could be understood, but he doubted it. If agents dies, Ali thought, it was his fault. He knew about the impending trick and was not able to successfully warn everyone. The blood would be on his hands. Though he knew he now had an enormous opportunity to be so close with Haded, he knew he couldn't be reckless. He had to pick the perfect time to blow his cover, to stop this horrendous plan. He would only get one chance though and knew he couldn't afford to waste it. Nonetheless however, Ali understood that he needed to do more. He couldn't stand by and watch any more Americans die while he sat next to Yusef Haded himself and did nothing. There had to be something he could do.

Yusef Haded drove with an odd combination of glee and determination towards the nation's capitol. The belly of the beast. He looked on at the cars to the left of him and to the right of him, each with people that had no idea about the events that were about to transpire, that would change them and the world forever. He became energized at the thought of seeing the tip of the Washington Monument. He couldn't wait to see the dome of the Capitol and the columns of the Lincoln Memorial. He was so ever excited to see all the buildings he would soon destroy.

Chapter 32

I woke up to chaos all around me. People were running, yelling, frantic about what had just occurred. I tried my best to think about what just transpired. My head hurt like crazy. I looked down at my body and surveyed my injuries. It looked like I had some pretty bad burns on my legs and arms. I couldn't really move my neck to the left without it cramping up and right shoulder was in some pain as well. So, all in all, not too bad. Not even close to that helicopter crash in Russia back in '92. But that's another story.

Then I remembered almost at once what happened. The chase. The bomb. Sam. I was lying down on the back of an ambulance outside. I don't think anyone had realized I woke up yet, because naturally if they did everyone would be rushing over me to see if I was alright. Right?

"You got pretty lucky in there," said a voice from the back of the ambulance.

I turned around and saw a woman, presumably a doctor, putting what looked like a series of shots together. Those better not be for me.

"You were the closest one to the blast to live," she said, "the five men in front of you died from the blast."

That fucking bastard. It wasn't enough for him to get away without being caught. He had to let us know that he was one step ahead of the game. He was taunting us. He was taunting me. I remembered the thoughts going through my head right before the bomb went off. It was a strange thought that if I hadn't figured out Haded's plan seconds before the explosion, I probably would have been added to that list of deceased. And then another thought came to me.

"Do you know anything about the condition of Agent Samantha Moss," I asked the women, "she was right next to me when the bomb went off."

"Yeah," she said, "if it weren't for you she probably wouldn't have lived. You jumped on top of her before the explosion and protected her from most of the blast. He has a couple of small burns and bruises, but nothing serious at all. You saved her life."

Oh yeah. I hadn't remembered that part yet. I hoped this wouldn't make her think I was a nice guy or something. I just had this bad habit of saving people's lives. I saw Agent Moss standing about 50 feet away giving report of what happened. She saw me looking at her and excused herself, making her way over to the ambulance where I was. Maybe this would be my best chance to ask her to repeat our one-night adventure. I mean, I did just save her life right?

"How are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm alright. Some burns and a nasty fucking headache, but at least I'm not dead."

"Inspiring," she said, "you saved my life you know..."

I nodded

"How did you know it was a setup?"

"I don't really know. I saw him running into that room and suddenly the whole thing just sort of came to me. It all didn't make sense. They knew we were coming from the fucking start. It's that fucking mole. We need to figure out who this mother fucker is before he derails our whole fucking case."

I like to curse when I get angry. Or always actually.

"Yeah, well I don't really know how to thank you."

"I'm could think of a couple ways," I said with a sigh and she smiled.

"Hey, at least we have a suspect to interrogate now."

"What?"

"You don't remember? Before the blast you took down a suspect alive. He's in the back being prepared for questioning now."

That's right. I didn't remember that until now. If this guy was important enough it could be a big break in the case.

"Who's doing the interrogation?" I asked.

"I think Sampson is taking it."

"Like hell he is," I said as I got out of the ambulance. "My case, my interrogation."

"You sure that's a good idea? You just nearly died in an explosion nevertheless witnessed five people die."

"This isn't my first rodeo, babe. I can handle it."

I don't think she especially liked the babe comment very much, but she let it slide I think because of the whole I just saved her life thing. That one might carry some weight for a while. I told Sam to shown he where the suspect was being held and we walked over in silence. We went to the back of the warehouse where it wasn't even possible to tell that a bomb had just gone off less than an hour before. There were two agents standing outside the door with guns and just as I was about to make my entrance Agent Sampson came rushing up to me in a fury. Sampson was a FBI guy that I had dealt with a couple of times before. He was good at his job, but I think he's always had something against us CIA guys. That's probably because we're better.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, Graham?" he proclaimed all angry. "You were just in a fucking explosion. No way you do this interrogation. I got it."

"Listen you little cock-sucking dirt-monkey. This is my fucking investigation and this is my fucking suspect. Now you can either call the god-damn President of the United States and bitch about it or you can step the fuck aside and let me do my job."

That should do the trick.

"Go fuck yourself," he said as he turned and walked away.

I walked past the agents in front and walked into the room. The suspect in front of me was sitting in a chair and handcuffed to a desk in front of him. He was somewhat short, chubby, and

had a long grey beard. It also looked he hadn't showered in days. He didn't look up as I entered the room. I waited a moment before speaking and pulled up a chair in front of him. Now here are my views on torture: I don't like it. I know surprising, right? The asshole CIA agent doesn't condone torture? Wrong, actually. It's not that I give a shit about those horse-fuckers experiencing unimaginable pain. Trust me I don't. But, in my experience, torture often leads to misinformation more than it turns into solid leads. People will say random things to stop the torture, which only leads us to chasing down a bogus lead and wasting time on catching the bad guy. What I've found is that most people will be willing to compromise if you push the right buttons, especially the lower-level guys or an organization. Now if they aren't willing at all to compromise, a little fun torture is always worth a shot. My favorite is the strapaddo technique. Look it up.

"Now listen, buddy," I said. "You don't have a whole bunch of options here. This is how I see it. We have considerable intelligence that you and your bud Yusef are planning some sort of attack. Five American agents are dead right now because of a bomb you and your friends set up and as you are the only one we have alive, we're just going to pin the entire thing on you. So here it is. Option 1: You don't cooperate. Now I would highly advise not taking this option. Let me tell you how that option would go for you. You stay in this room for a very long time and all of *my* friends get to have a lot of fun with you. You go to a dark place very far from here for a very long time. You won't sleep, you won't eat, you won't pray. You will be tortured every single fucking hour of the day to make up for the lives that you took today and will never see the light of day again. Sounds fun, right? Now, there's option 2: You cooperate, give us some information about what you and your friends are planning and help us catch your pal Yusef. Now *if* you help us and *if* you give us information that leads to us stopping a major attack, things will be looking a whole lot better for you. We might just forget about this whole little incident today and that we ever saw you. You go to a beach somewhere very far from here and spend the rest of your life playing golf and sipping piña coladas by the pool. I want to emphasize again that option 2 is only in place *if* your information helps us *and* we catch Yusef Haded. So lets review your options here pal. First option, you go to a bad place, get tortured, and die. Second option, you help us out a bit, and you leave this country forever. What do you say?"

Now, what I didn't tell him was that whatever option he chose he would still spend the rest of his life in a prison very far away from here and never see the light of day again. So maybe I stretched the truth a little bit? He's a terrorist and killed five American federal agents. Not really a

chance for freedom after that. But hey, if I have to lie to a couple of bad guys to save a bunch of innocent civilians, I'm not going to lose too much sleep over it at night. He lifted his head up and looked at me for the first time. His eyes looked desperate, tired, defeated.

"I help you, you let go?" the man said in very poor English.

"Fuck no. You're still going to jail you asshole," is what I would have said if I were telling the truth, but I didn't say that.

"Yes," I actually said, "if you help us stop the attack we will let you go. You will have to leave America and will never be able to return to your homeland, but yes we will let you leave."

He waited a second and seemed to be mulling over his options. This was the moment where detainees made their decisions. He would either in a couple seconds decide to help us or he would spit in my face. I hoped for his sake that he didn't choose the latter. The last guy who went that route did not leave the room in very good condition.

"I help you," he finally said.

"Good choice. What is your name?"

"Wazir. Wazir Bahri."

"Okay, Wazir. I'm going to leave for a second, but I'll be right back to go over with you what's going to happen from here. Okay?"

He nodded. I ran outside of the room to tell the others of my triumph.

"I want everyone to find everything they can on the name Wazir Bahri," I said to Sam and the other agents outside. "It looks like this guy is gonna cave."

A couple of agents ran off in compliance and Sam remained by my side.

"Curt," she said, "there's something else you should know. Haded...Haded left a note...for you."

Chapter 33

Yusef Haded walked up to the iconic Mayflower Renaissance Hotel in Northwest Washington D.C. just as any other guest would. He donned an expensive suit, sunglasses, and a way about him that said he was a wealthy businessman here to make a large deal. He had parked his car himself in the large garage, not leaving any chance of the valet of the hotel discovering anything. The bomb lay under the truck, where the spare tire was supposed to be kept. Without anyone knowing, nothing would seem unusual at all. Ali stood by his side, wearing a nice button-

down shirt with khakis. They chose to stay at such a luxury and expensive hotel, as they knew the Americans would never expect this. They would expect Haded and his accomplices to sleep at a cheap motel or even sleep in their cars. The last place they would ever look for them was at one of the most expensive hotels in Washington D.C. Additionally, the high security of the hotel for the privacy guests provided extra cover for them. They walked up to the check-in counter of the front desk and were greeted by an African-American woman of about middle-age. Haded instructed Ali to sit down in the waiting area and let him handle the receptionist.

"Hello, welcome to the Mayflower," said the receptionist, "how may I assist you today?"

"Hi," Haded said with a wide smile on his face and in a western-Muslim accent, "I would like a room for two please. Preferably non-smoking."

"Alright...let me see what we have available," she said as she looked through her computer, "you're in luck! We actually only have one room left for tonight. It's on the 7th floor of the hotel and is indeed located in the non-smoking section. Would you like me to go ahead and book it for you?"

"That would be great, thank you," Haded said.

"Okay, great," she said, "the rate for tonight will be \$450. I will just need a credit card and a photo ID and we'll be all set."

Haded pulled out the envelope that he had been given for this specific moment and pulled out a credit card and photo ID to match it. The credit card, which was to be used for this moment only, was designed to trace to a fictional character created by Al-Qaeda from Dubai. The ID created to go along with it was not very thorough and would not work for authorities, but surely was good enough to fool a hotel receptionist. His alias for this part of his mission, Aziz Al Ghurair, was an extremely wealthy financier from Dubai. His affiliates back home had assured that this alias was reliable and foolproof. The receptionist ran the credit card through and checked a couple of things on the computer. There appeared to be a problem for a moment, but she then clicked a few buttons and handed the card and ID back to Haded.

"Perfect, enjoy your stay Mr. Ghurair. Do you need somebody to help you with your bags or is there anything else that I can assist you with today?"

"No, I am fine, thank you," he said smiling as he turned and walked away.

Haded called Ali over to join him as they made their way over to the elevators. They went up to their room on the seventh floor and looked out on the view. In the distance, Haded thought

he was able to see the tip of the Capitol building. Here he was, in the heart of Washington D.C. and sitting in the most famous hotel in the entire city. And the Americans had absolutely no idea.

Chapter 34

"What?" I asked.

"We found a note that appears to be from Haded. And it's addressed to you."

"How the hell would he even know who I am?"

"I don't know," Sam said, "I'm guessing it's the same person who told him that we were coming."

"Where is the note?"

"It's in the back by evidence. I think Fred has it."

"Take me, now."

How the hell did this guy have the audacity to write a note to the authorities he just tried to blow up? I had dealt with criminals and terrorists before this but I think this was a first. I don't know if I have ever chased someone with the cockiness that this fucker possessed. I guess it fell on me to take him down a few notches. We arrived to the evidence station and I saw Fred standing by a bunch of boxes and objects from the warehouse. Even if he knew we were coming, hopefully he didn't have time to destroy everything before he left and just based off the time frame alone of when we learned of the location and when we arrived I guessed we wouldn't have. Fred looked up and saw me approaching.

"I guess you're here to see the letter, huh?" Fred said.

Good fucking guess, Fred.

"Yeah, you would be correct on that one. Where is it?"

Fred walked over and took out a piece of paper with fairly large handwriting on it. Up until now I still kind of thought everyone was playing a joke on me, but I guess this guy really did write me a fucking letter. I opened the folded piece of paper and read Haded's note word for word.

Dear Agent Graham,

Assuming you are still alive to read this, I congratulate you on your survival. I had a feeling you would figure out my plan soon enough. I sincerely hope you enjoyed the gift that I left for you and your comrades, as I put much effort into it. I have heard great things about you, Mr. Graham. I have even heard from some that you are as worthy an opponent as your country has to offer against me. Therefore, I caution you to go further. You will loose. Your country will loose. If you continue to pursue me, more of your men will die. Good luck.

I'll hand it to him, this guy really knew how to piss me the fuck off. I could just imagine him sitting down somewhere laughing about me reading his letter. I felt outsmarted, tricked. One thing I pride myself on is never getting outsmarted. I pride myself on always being one step ahead of the enemy and this time he got the best of me. But the game wasn't over. Not even close. I understood the goal of this note. He wanted to make this a personal match between him and me with him thinking that because of this I would make emotional and quick decisions without thinking things through. And he may even be right. Unfortunately for him, he has made the gross mistake in underestimating me, as some had done before him. Let's just say that I'm still here and they're not. I have never lost a personal battle and this son-of-a-bitch certainly wouldn't be the first one to defeat me. He had certainly succeeded in one aspect of his goal though; this was now personal.

I stuffed the letter in my pocket and took off towards the room where we were holding Wazir. I think a couple of people ran after me but I couldn't even be sure to be honest. I was angry, infuriated more like it. I even knew that this was exactly the reaction that Haded wanted, but I seriously couldn't give a rat's ass. If we wanted to make me angry, fine. It was from that point on my goal to make sure that it would be the last mistake he would ever make. I arrived at the room and burst through the doors. Wazir sat up in surprise, looking as sad and beaten as ever.

"WHERE IS HADED?" I screamed at him with all the rage that had built up inside of me since reading that letter.

"I don't know, I swear," Wazir said, "He tell no one next location. We told everything as happen."

"BULLSHIT. I swear to God, Wazir: if you don't tell me right where he is right now I will take this knife and cut off each of your fingers one by one until by the time you finally tell me the truth you won't even have enough fingers left to write about any fucking torture allegations. NOW WHERE IS HADED?"

"I swear to you I do not know!" he screamed back.

I believed him. I usually got the feeling pretty quickly when someone was lying to me, but I didn't pick that up here. This guy had already agreed to cooperate with us and had no reason to cover for Haded at this point.

"Do you have any way of contacting him?" I asked.

He thought for a moment.

"Yes, actually. I have a cell number that we are only supposed to call in case of emergencies."

"Do you remember the number?"

"Yes. 93-786-412-9917," he said.

"You sure?"

"Yes. I am sure."

"Alright. We're going to give Yusef here a call."

Chapter 35

Yusef Haded stared through the window of his room at the Mayflower Hotel and surveyed the scene. Washington was actually a very beautiful city, Haded thought. It was much cleaner than he had previously expected, certainly much cleaner than all the cities he had ever been to in the Middle East. The monuments framed against the Potomac River were indeed visually spectacular, with influences from Greek and Roman architecture, the classic buildings were supposed to represent the history of the nation. Yet, what the Americans failed to realize is that their nation had no history. Their culture had been living for a little over 200 years, paling in comparison to the thousands of Islam. They had no tradition, yet boasted that they were the most powerful nation in the world. It infuriated him. It certainly made Haded feel better through that these buildings would not be here for long. Washington D.C. would be but a memory that remained in ashes.

Haded heard a ringing sound from his suitcase. This was from the secure phone that was given to his people for emergencies. He did not know who it could be, but went over to answer the phone.

"Who is this," Haded spoke into the phone.

"Sir, it is Wazir."

Haded did not understand how Wazir was calling him right now. He was instructed to remain and fight with the others. Surely they had not defeated the military forces of the Americans.

“Wazir? How are you alive?”

“Sir, I managed to escape before the Americans killed me,” he explained. “The bomb went off as planned. Many Americans died.”

Haded sensed some fear in Wazir’s voice. He sensed duress.

Haded inquired, “Why did you not stay and fight with your brothers Wazir?”

“I did, sir. They were all dead by the time I escaped. I was shot and I thought I was dead.” He went on, “Then when the bomb went off all of the Americans rushed to the scene. I was able to leave out the back door without being detected.” There was a long pause before Wazir continued, “Where are you, sir? It would give me no greater pleasure to join you in completing out holy mission.”

Haded thought for a moment before responding, “I have no further use for you on this mission, Wazir. You have fulfilled your duty.”

“No, sir. I believe I can contribute more. Please, just tell me where you are so I can join you.”

“There is nothing more, my friend,” Haded spoke. “It is your turn to cross over to paradise. It is time, Wazir.”

“Master, if you could just tell me where you are I could help you. I have new information on the Americans. I can help you.”

His voice was now starting to sound very desperate, as if this was his last chance on the face of the earth to escape his fate.

“No. The decision is final,” Haded said, “Oh, and before you hang up could you please hand the phone over to the American agents standing next to you at this very moment?”

“Sir? I don’t know what you are – “

“Give them the phone, Wazir. Before I scold you for being the lying, weak traitor that you are. You have abandoned Allah. You are a traitor.”

There was a long silence on the phone as Haded guessed Wazir was telling the agents around him that he had figured out their little plot. He had known from the very beginning that Wazir was being coerced. As far as he was concerned Wazir was even worse than the infidels. The first thing they are taught is never to be taken alive. Death is far better than capture. Haded

guessed that it did not even take torture to get Wazir to turn over to the other side. All that was needed probably was a promise of freedom, which he would have been stupid enough to believe. The Americans lie to captives and say they will let you free in exchange for information, when in reality they will send you to jail for the rest of your life. Yet another form of American deceit. Finally, a voice answered on the other side of the phone. It was most certainly not Wazir.

“What’s up Yusef?” the voice said.

How dare he refer to him by his first name, an extreme form of disrespect.

“Whom am I speaking to?” Haded asked, “and you may refer to me as Mr. Haded.”

“Well, *Yusef*, this is Special Agent Curtis Graham of the CIA, which I’m pretty sure you’re already aware of by now. And if you think for one fucking second that I give a donkey’s ass about giving you any form of respect you got another thing coming for ya’ mother fucker.”

Haded did not understand all of the language the man used, but was sure that much of it was offensive in content. For some reason the Americans thought that by racial stereotyping and being offensive they thought they were somehow coming off as better and smarter than everyone else. It just made them sound uncultured and ignorant.

“So, what have you been up to since you got here?” he asked. “Have you tried this thing called Chick Fil A? It’s awesome you gotta check it out. A whole lot better than that hummus shit you guys eat over there.”

“I’m afraid I have several more important matters to address,” Haded responded to the peculiar question.

“No? Going a little more serious? Morton’s? They make a damn good rib eye.”

“Your humor amuses me, Mr. Graham,” Haded said laughing. “May I ask if you received my note?”

“I did receive your note,” Graham said, “I received it before I tore it up, pissed on it, and shoved it so far up Wazir’s ass that he had a minor epiphany. And I have a suggestion for you as well. Run, Yusef. Run as far away from here as you can because if you don’t I promise you I will find you. And I promise you that I will kill you.”

“Your confidence is unwarranted, Agent Graham. It is you who should be running.”

“Now you listen to me you camel-fucking piece of shit, we know what you are planning and we will catch you – soon – and that is a guarantee.”

This man very much amused Yusef Haded. He was certainly unlike any law-enforcement official he had ever dealt with before. His language made him ever more hating of the American people.

Haded replied, "I can assure you that you have no idea what we are planning. But you will find out soon enough. It has been a pleasure speaking with you, Mr. Graham. Goodb – "

"Before you hang up, there's one more thing I want to tell you." The man spoke slowly and clearly now, "You may have killed eight Americans so far, but you will not succeed in your plans. America will kill you just like we killed your son-of-a-bitch father. Oh, you didn't think we knew about that? We know everything about you, Yusef. You tell me that *I* will loose? I say that *you* will loose, Yusef. Your family has a history of it. And I will personally make sure of it."

Haded took a few moments to gain his composure. He could not recall any moment of his life when he was more furious than he was right now. He took a deep breath.

"Goodbye, Agent Graham. I will see you soon. And I will personally make sure of it."

Haded hung up the phone. His entire body fueled with rage. How dare this man talk and gloat about his dead father, his unjustly killed father. Yusef Haded now had another mission on top of his original one. A mission that he would either complete or die trying. To kill Curtis Graham.

Chapter 36

"Well, that went well I think," I said to everyone else with their mouths still open.

Sam started the hate on Curt party and recalled, "Did you just call Yusef Haded a 'camel-fucking piece of shit?'"

That sounds about right.

"No, I think you misunderstood me," I said, "I called him...no yeah you're right I called him a camel-fucker."

"Do you really think it was a good idea to play piss off the terrorist?"

"That's my favorite game," I responded.

Behind Candyland. I just can't get enough of that shit.

"Look," I said, "he wanted to make this whole thing personal with that note so I decided to make it personal right back. Maybe he diverts some of his attention on whatever he's planning on trying to kill me."

"Or maybe he goes through with whatever he is planning *and then* focuses on killing you. Either way, you just became the target of one of the most ruthless killers in the world," Sam said.

"Well so did he."

"Alright, enough of the cock-measuring contest," Fred said, "How did you even know that about his father anyway? I never saw that info on any of the files or anything."

"I have friends in high places."

And by that I mean Dick sent me a text. Gracias, Dick. I checked my watch. It was 9:45. With no new leads or info, it sounded like a time to call it a day and finally get some sleep. I had a feeling it might be the last chance I had to get to rest for a while. We went over some case review for a while before finally calling it quits. A couple of guys took our new friend Wazir over to Langley for further questioning, while the rest of us took my lead and decided to go home.

When you're in the middle of a case, there's no real such thing as 'off the job'. You're always thinking up new ideas and paranoid thoughts about whatever you're working on. In this case, my mind was solely focuses on my new enemy, Yuesf Haded. He was determined to kill me and I was determined to kill him. Sounded to me like two people wouldn't walk out of this scenario alive.

Since I drove here, I told Sam I would drive her home. So, we made the about hour-long drive from the boonies of Maryland back towards DC. We talked a little bit about where she was from, her life growing up, and some of the cases I have worked on during my career. She found my adventures in Russia towards the end of the cold war especially interesting. Again, a story for another time.

I felt that always-fantastic feeling of my phone vibrating in my pocket. I just prayed that somebody didn't call a last minute de-briefing or something. I needed by beauty sleep. It was the director. God-dammit.

"This is Graham."

"Yes, I know. I called *you* remember?"

Wise-ass.

"I heard you had an interesting conversation with our suspect," he said, "something about him being a donkey-fucker?"

"A camel-fucking piece of shit actually," I corrected him.

I hate it when people twist my words.

"Right, of coarse. How silly of me."

He seemed to be in an extra good mood at the moment. Not to imply that he's not usually as jolly as Barney the Dinosaur. Or wait...

"Listen," he said, "you have a debriefing tomorrow at 0900 at the Pentagon. I want you guys and a couple others to brainstorm some ideas about how the fuck we can catch this guy. Later you'll be in on the meeting with all the big-shots. I think most of the joint chiefs will be there and the President will be on conference call. He's not in town or something, but this is going all the way up the ladder. Got it?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Is Moss there with you?"

"Yeah, she's here," I said turning towards her.

"Make sure you give her the message. And get a good night sleep. You'll need it."

"Got it."

He hung up and I relayed the information to Sam as he pulled up to her apartment complex on K Street.

"See you tomorrow bright and early," I said in front of the door.

Then she paused a moment said, "You want to come up for a drink or two?"

Wow, well I certainly wasn't expecting that. After our exchanges in the morning I just about thought I was the last guy on the planet she would ask that question to. I guess I really don't understand women. Unless she did really just mean a drink? Well, only one way to find out I guess.

"Sure," I responded coolly (I think), "I could do a drink or two."

"Good," she said smiling. "Park the car."

I parked and we made our way up to her apartment on the 8th floor. She had a very nice 1-bedroom apartment with a living room, kitchen, and bedroom. She went over to the bar in the kitchen and poured us two glasses of scotch. A woman that drinks scotch? Who was this chick?

"Nice taste," I remarked.

"Yeah, well I could never stand those girly Martini drinks. I'm a Glen-McKenna kind of girl."

I didn't know those existed.

"Let me ask you a question," she said on a more serious note, "why do you think these people hate us so much? What makes them want to see millions of Americans die just because we come from a different culture than we do?"

If this was her idea of sexy flirting she definitely needed to brush up on her skills a bit.

But nonetheless I answered, "In all honestly, most people from Islamic culture don't have a problem with us at all. Yes, our culture might be different than theirs, but 99 percent of the people don't have any violent inhibitions against us whatsoever. It's the 1 percent that we have to worry about. They become brainwashed that everyone not like them need to die and that they'll ascend to paradise for carrying out that mission. They pass it down to the generation below them and so on and so on. We just have to break that cycle," I said.

"Yeah, I guess you're right," she said as she sipped on her scotch.

I thought I should lighten the mood and decided it was about the right time to delve into my bag of racist jokes. It was bound to happen sometime.

"Hey, did you hear the one about the Arab guys in Germany?"

"No," she said, "Tell me."

"A Yemini, an Iraqi, and a Saudi were all riding in a car through Germany. Who was driving the car?"

"Who?"

"A police officer."

She laughed and replied, "Why did Pakistani government decide to shut down their driver's ed program?"

I actually knew that one, considering I was the one who made the joke up. But, I pretended to never hear it before to make her feel better.

"Why?" I asked.

"The camel died."

I pretended to laugh as we continued to drink. Want to hear one more? Alright so a guy is taking a walk in Central park when suddenly he sees a little girl being attacked by a pit bull. He runs over to help the girl and starts fighting the dog. He succeeds in killing the dog and saves the girl's life. A policeman watching the scene walks over and says: "You are a hero, tomorrow it will be in all the newspapers: "Brave New Yorker saves the life of little girl," The man then says: - "But I am not a New Yorker!" "Oh, then it will say: 'Brave American saves life of little girl'" – the policeman answers. "But I am not an American!" – says the man. "Oh, what are you then? " The man says: - "I am a Saudi!" The next day the newspapers read: "Islamic extremist murders innocent dog."

Funny right? One more? Fine. So the President of the United States gets a coded email from Osama Bin Laden. It reads: 370HSSV-0773H. The President gets stumped so he sends it to the FBI. They can't figure it out either so they send it to the CIA. The CIA put their top analysts on it, but none of them are able to decipher the code also. They finally send it to the NSA, who rearranges the code 100 times before declaring that it has no meaning. Finally, in a massive joint-agency meeting, the President asks if anyone was able to figure out Bin Laden's message. They all confess that they have not. Later, a janitor cleaning up the room walks in and takes a look at the screen with the code and starts to laugh. 'What's so funny?' the President asks. The janitor takes a moment and says, 'I suggest you turn that message upside-down.'

Get it? All right, I'm done this time. I swear I could go all day though. Where was I again? Right. So we're on about our third drink each when it gets to the point where clearly we both realize that I'll be too intoxicated to drive home. I also think I picked up at some point during the first two that her invitation to go upstairs probably didn't just entail drinks after all. Knowing me though, I could still be wrong, so I waited for the right opportunity. Patience is a virtue right?

"You know, you were pretty awesome today..." she said, "the whole saving my life thing." I saw my opening.

"Yeah," I replied as smooth as the suave James Bond, "Did you ever figure out how you were going to thank me for that?"

"I'm sure you can think of something," she said.

She took off her shirt and walked towards the bedroom, motioning for me to follow.

Huh, I thought, I guess I wasn't going to get such a good night sleep after all.

Chapter 37

Yusef Haded and Ali Saeed lay down on their beds and had very different thoughts going through each of their heads.

Haded could barely sleep. The surrounding luxury of his hotel room did not so much anger him, but he found it incredible that so many people could live in such luxury as millions around the world struggled to feed their children. Yet another reason why the American pigs needed a wake-up call, the entire world needed a wake-up call. Nevertheless, the bed was very comfortable and he was able to think in peace. This was the day he had been waiting for his

entire life. The day he would become famous to history books forever. This was only a minor boost on top though for his mission. Glory was not his goal; it was something that came with great action. He hoped that the first part of the mission was still going to plan, which he had no control over for the sake of secrecy. It was somewhat unnerving to Haded that such a large part of the mission lay out of his hands, yet he had confidence that his comrades would succeed in their plans. And even if they somehow did fail, Haded thought, he could still go forward with his plans. They would just be more difficult. Much more difficult. Yes, tomorrow would a legendary day. And the Americans had no idea what was coming.

Ali lay down on the other bed, directly across from the most dangerous terrorist in the world. One who had no idea his now most trusted ally was working against him. If Haded's plans came to fruition, Ali thought, it would all be his fault. He had accomplished what he thought would be the most difficult part of his assignment – to gain the trust of Yusef Haded – but he hadn't quite fully prepared himself for what he would do if he found himself in that position. How could he break away and just tell the other where they were, what Haded had. The implications of what the enemy had somehow managed to acquire were not even comprehensible to Ali. The devastation would be imaginable. The entire capitol city destroyed. It would be the largest event of the history of the world. And the only American who had any idea about it was him. But, he thought, how would he find a way to tell somebody? Haded never let Ali leave his side and he couldn't for the life of him think of a valid excuse to go somewhere. He knew he only had one shot at this. He couldn't risk blowing his cover. And what was this first part of the mission that Haded kept talking about? Whatever it was, he had a feeling it was coming. And fast.

Chapter 38

Well this was a familiar sight. I looked over to my right and saw Sam next to me. How did this happen again? Oh, right, I'll remember for future use that hero + alcohol = sex. And people tell me I'm bad a math. At least this time I remembered it. Wow is just about the only word that could sum it up. She was just as good in bed as she was hot, which in my experience was a pretty rare combination. This was now the second time I'd slept with this girl in two nights, meaning that phrase "one night stand" couldn't really apply anymore.

"Stop staring you creep," she declared with her head still turned towards the other side.

"I wasn't," I fired back.

I was. I looked at my phone and it was 7:45. Meaning we had about an hour to get over to our 9 o'clock meeting at the Pentagon. I supposed I didn't have time to go back to my place and get some new clothes for the day, but I figured nobody would probably notice.

"Wake up," I said, "We have an hour to get to the Pentagon."

"Aren't you gonna' get a girl breakfast first," she said.

How does a leftover snickers bar from my jacket sound?

"What do you have here? You got bagels?"

"No."

"Pancakes?"

"Also no."

"Well what do you have to eat?"

"I have egg whites, fruit, and some greek yogurt. Your choice."

This is why I don't live with women. I groaned and made my way to the kitchen where I found some cereal to eat. I made her a plate of fruit and yogurt and went back into the bedroom where she was getting dressed. Her naked body once again amazed me, a perfect combination of curves and toned. Her bare breasts were almost enough to make me jump on top of her again, but there was that whole national security thing that we had to get to. I looked away to resist temptation.

"So about this girlfriend situation..." she started to say.

I had almost forgot about that. I meant to call her yesterday, but I guess I forgot to in between the chasing down a crazy terrorist and almost getting blown up.

"I'll call her today," I said.

"Good."

Morning after talk sometimes be a bit awkward, but we ate our breakfast while talking a little about the upcoming meeting and other things about the case. The main idea from our brainstorming session is that we were fucked. We had no current leads, no idea where he was, and no clue about whatever he was planning. The only things that we had going for us were Wazir, who seemed about as clueless as a midget in the NBA, and this mysterious man on the inside whose only form of contact had come in a phone call that I didn't put together until too late.

We left her apartment at about 8:30, plenty of time to get to the Pentagon even with the DC traffic, which can really be a bitch sometimes. It's not like I ever put on my emergency lights

to breeze past everyone sitting in morning bumper to bumper action. Like that's really something I would do...we drove in silence for a while as we were drinking our coffees. I turned on the radio to my favorite station, Sports Talk 980. They were in an intense debate about the quarterback play for the Redskins. Washington fans never shut up about the fucking Redskins. When they lose one game the coach needs to be fired and when they win one game everyone starts buying tickets to fucking Super Bowl. We listened for a while before Sam turned it off. Why can't women ever just appreciate sports for what they are: men's excuse to drink beer.

"Not into sports much?" I asked.

"No it's not that," she said, "I just can't stand those fucking assholes. All they do is talk about our quarterback play, but it's the running game and the defense that are the real problem. 14 carries for 35 yards? Yeah like that's gonna end in a win. And we give up 132 on the ground to San Diego? What are we gonna do next when we face Green Bay. Their ground game is going to eat our defensive line for breakfast."

Who was this girl?

"Yeah," I said, "that sounds about right."

I looked over and she let a small smile come out. We pulled up to the Pentagon and I flashed my creds to the guy working security. He let us through the checkpoint and we made our way up to the west side of the building where the meeting was. The Pentagon building, located in Arlington, Virginia, might be the coolest building in the world that nobody really knows about. I'm pretty sure it's classified as the largest office building in the world, with over 28,000 employees working there or something like that. It also has some highly secure war rooms in the basement, which would be where we were headed. We parked the car and walked into the building at about 8:45. We were early. Fuck. Nothing I hate more than missing an extra fifteen minutes of sleep when you can avoid it. We went through security and took the elevator down towards the room where we were meeting. It's crazy to think about it now, but that was the moment where it was all truly about to begin.

Chapter 39

"Sir," Ali asked his leader, "may I ask where we are going today? Where are we taking the bomb?"

“Nowhere, Ali. Not yet.” Haded further explained, “Be patient, very soon this will all make much more sense.”

Again, Ali had no idea what Haded was referring to. Clearly though, he thought, something big related to the attack was about to happen. It couldn’t be the bomb though surely, as he has been with Haded this whole time. And he kept talking like this event was the precursor to the bomb, a first attack of some sorts. He had already asked too many times about it and would be suspicious to ask any further. But, he knew, he needed to find a way to get this message across to Langley. They needed to know about the bomb.

Ali went over to the desk in the hotel room and took out the paper and pencil that was supplied for the guests. He made sure to write only when Haded was not watching and wrote carefully,

GIVE TO FRONT DESK ASAP: CALL ROOM 729 AND COMPLAIN OF CREDIT CARD TROUBLE WITH IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE REQUIRED. DELAY AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. ASAP
THIS IS A MATTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY

This was the best idea that Ali could come up with. It was extremely risky, but it was likely the only move that he had in his bag. He finished writing the letter without being detected and put it in his pocket. He knew that if Haded discovered the note his cover was completely blown. The moment had come. This was his big play. Haded, sitting facing the window was not looking. Ali went in the bathroom and stayed long enough as if he had actually urinated. He flushed the toilet and pretended to wash his hands. He then opened the bathroom door and saw Haded still sitting there staring at the window. He dropped the note on the ground and slid it under the door with his foot. He walked back and sat once again at the desk, as all he could do now was wait. Sure enough, about five minutes later, the phone of the hotel room rang. Haded left his perch by the window and went to answer it.

“Hello?” Haded asked in the exact same accent he had used earlier. “A problem with the credit card? That is impossible...”

The note had worked. Ali was silently thanking whoever it was who had seen the note and given it to the front desk. He only hoped they would be natural enough to fool Haded long enough.

He continued on the phone, "Is that really necessary? I am quite busy..." The person on the other side of the line spoke for about a minute and Haded replied shortly, "Very well. I will be right down."

Haded turned to Ali and told him, "There is some problem with the payment. I will back shortly. Do not leave this room."

"Yes, sir," Ali said obeying his leader.

He watched as Haded got up and heard the door behind him. As soon as the door closed, Ali ran to the phone sitting on the desk and dialed the CIA number for informants. He knew he did not have much time, as Haded would not believe the lies for long. The phone rung several times before a deep voice answered.

"This is Jim's Electronics, how may I help you?" said the voice.

"I would like to schedule an installation for June 19th," Ali responded to the code.

"Proceed," the man instructed.

"This is Sparrow 7 reporting directly to the Hawk," Ali spoke clearly and with urgency. "In the company of Coyote 1. I repeat in the company of Coyote 1. Location Mayflower Hotel, Washington DC, room number 729. Coyote 1 in possession of duffle. I repeat, Coyote 1 in possession of duffle."

There was a long pause on the other side of the line.

"Is this a 100 % conformation on all counts?"

"Yes, god-dammit, he has a *fucking* nu – "

Ali dropped the phone in an instant as he heard the loading of the gun behind him. He turned around slowly to find none other than Yusef Haded pointing the barrel of his pistol directly at his head.

"You know Ali," Haded said in a deathly whisper, "It is amazing what one can see through the reflection of a window."

Chapter 40

Sam and I sat in the basement of the Pentagon everyone else coming to the meeting arrived. Winnie was really right, there looked like there were guys from just about every agency there to brainstorm "How can we whack Yusef?" FBI, NSA, Army Special Ops, there was really nobody left out on this except for the local sheriff's department. My favorite pal Agent Sampson

from the FBI was there and I think he was still a little pissed about that whole interrogation thing. You know, the one where I bitched him out? The human genitalia himself was also there in Dick Forester. He was actually the last one to arrive. Classic Dick right? The meeting started a couple of minutes late, as people seemed to be talking about some event that had just transpired in New York City. Did I miss something? I thought it was about to get this thing started so I kicked it off.

"Alright, who want's to start?" I asked.

"Why don't you lead off Big Shot," proclaimed Sampson, "I mean you are the guy who figured out the big bomb plot aren't you?"

Yeah he was definitely still mad.

"Fine," I said, "How about we start off with this Wazir Bahri guy...what were we able – "

Sampson interrupted me, "Hey, Graham, isn't that the same shirt you were wearing yesterday?"

I hate working with spies. It wouldn't take him long to put together –

"Wait a minute, you two fucked didn't you?"

There it is.

"Shut the fuck up Melvin. And yeah I know your first fucking name dickhead."

That got a laugh from the rest of the room, who I think were sincerely enjoying this nice little exchange we were in the middle of. Hey, what's a good terrorist investigation without a little sex scandal to thrown in there?

"Hah! Melvin! That's hilarious!" Dick yelled.

Nice one Dick.

"There it is, ladies and gentlemen," Melvin declared, "CIA professionalism at its finest right there."

Everyone laughed again.

"Shut you're fucking mouths all of you," Sam said angrily.

Actually, I'm not joking this time. This was her.

She continued, "In case none of you were aware of it, there's a psychopathic terrorist running around Washington D.C. right now with god knows what in mind and we have NO fucking idea where he is. Now if everyone would spend a little more time on that and wasn't so damn focuses on who either myself or Agent Graham decided to spend our personal time with, which is none of your fucking businesses' by the way, then maybe we would be a little closer to actually catching this guy."

Damn, she was good. I might need to stick around this broad. Well, that certainly shut everyone up and we could finally get back to business.

"So, as I was saying," I spoke, "where did our interrogation with Bahri go last night?"

"Well," said Agent Doak, the lesser version of me, "we've concluded that he definitely has no idea about where Haded is. We asked him some other questions, but he didn't really tell us anything that we didn't already know."

"Great," I said, "Our only lead is getting is nowhere."

"There was one interesting thing, though," Doak went on to say, "When he was asked about any specific weapons he knew Haded to have he became very uncomfortable. The lie detector said he was telling the truth when he said the only thing he knew about was the bomb that went off, but I had a feeling he was holding something back."

Of course he was, they're always holding something back. There was no way Haded didn't have something bigger in mind for his attack. A lot bigger. Either this guy Wazir really had no clue what was going on or he was lying to us. And I was leaning towards the latter. Obviously, there was still the prospect of the mole in the table, but Sam and me were still the only two people who knew that intel to the best of my knowledge. It was certainly possible that one of the people in the room right now was the one working for the other side, so that was one thing we couldn't discuss.

"So, anyone got any more fucking ideas?"

"What about cameras?" one of the NSA agents said from the back, "if we assume he's in DC, which our analysts say there is a 70% chance of being true, then we could go through street cameras and look for facial recognition."

Leave it to the NSA and their fucking statistics. I'll give them a statistic: they have a 0% chance of me giving a shit about their fucking statistics.

"We don't have time for that," I responded, "and he definitely is in DC. That's his main target here. It always has been."

"How do you know that?" Melvin asked.

Well thank you for asking Melvin.

"Well for one that's the only major city around where he's been known to be. Haded has always been a big-time target guy. London, Berlin, this guy doesn't deal with small attacks. And, if this is his first and probably last time in America he's going to want to make a big splash if you know what I mean. And how much bigger would it get than the nation's capitol? None. He's

also gone deliberately out of his way to this point *not* to go to DC. He's gone to Richmond, Virginia and Frederick, Maryland. He's been on both sides of the city without actually ever going anywhere inside of it. It's classic tradecraft."

"I think Graham's right here," said Doak, "his target's got to be DC."

Everyone seemed to be in agreement.

"So, the question from there," I said, "is how the hell do we find him?" I added, "And quickly."

I sure as hell didn't want any more of those fucking street camera ideas. Damn NSA. It was getting a little strange, people weren't supposed to check their phones during meetings like these, but everyone's seemed to be going off like crazy for the past fifteen minutes. Finally, Dick couldn't resist the urge anymore and checked his phone. It looked like Dick had just seen a ghost as a blank look came about his face.

"What is it?" I asked.

And then the moment happened that I will never forget. It was almost as if he couldn't even get out the words, but he finally managed.

"There...there was a second one," Dick said and took a pause, "We're under – "

BOOM. The entire ground shook, our feet trembling beneath us. It was as if there was a 6.0 earthquake rocking Washington D.C. and we were right at the heart of it. The sound of the explosion was so great that I can still hear it in my dreams. But, it was not so much of an explosion, as it was...a crash. The power was gone; the roof was crumbling as everyone lay on the ground in fear. They did it. They had hit the Pentagon. And from that very moment on, I knew the world would never forget the day September 11, 2001.

End of Part 2