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This novel is written exclusively for Right Truth Blog (www.righttruth.typepad.com) and its readers.

In loving memory of my precious
Sara (7/25/1951 to 12/13/2003) who always
encouraged me to write from the heart and was
at once both my greatest critic and my most
loyal fan.

In love with you always!

And...

To the greatest dad anyone like me could ever
have hoped for: Joseph Stanley Godlewski
(11/29/1918 to 04/14/2008).

You gave me life. Thank you!

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Chapter Eleven

June, 20xx
Viper's Lair
Kerch, Ukraine

Deception had been part of Muhammad's game plan from the beginning; elemental traces of a lost art that he had carried over from his fascination with Ninjutsu as a youth. Yet, he was not so enchanted with what his contemporaries viewed as a martial art than what the ancient Asians viewed as domination of the senses and of movement. It fortified his mind, permitting him to outmaneuver his enemies; it became a foundation for his life, allowing him to subconsciously control his fears and emotions; and, most of all, it convinced him that the best offense was a quick, decisive, and absolutely brutal one.

The tall, grubby, unclothed Arab with the semblance of a nearly devoured beard had decided that it was time for him to pounce like a panther upon the unsuspecting infidels. Allah had willed it as soon as the further retrieval of facial hairs had become a distinct impossibility. He knew that time was running out; that his adversaries would notice his choppy beard and inquire as to why their charge had begun to behave so erratically – even for someone of his infamous peculiarities.

Muhammad had another motive, however. He was growing tired of not being able to endure the pain of torture for Allah. He had become irritated over the indignity of not being accorded the recognition that the 'Sorcerer' had grown accustomed to. Saints may have frequently died in silence and obscurity but heroes required an audience and, within his cramped but brightly lit cell, *he* had only the infidels with which

to note his subsequent actions. Often forfeiting personal desires, an astute actor must work with the only audience at his disposal and herein Muhammad decided to act out his grand play of exodus and Allah be damned if there wasn't a supporting cast awaiting him beyond the walls of his theater.

Such salvation is expected during the whole of one's life but the Sorcerer knew that when it came, it often came swiftly and unexpectedly for those who had not practiced sufficiently for its arrival. He knew that his own was but a matter of commitment; an irrevocable decision to charge ahead and accept whatever fate and Allah's Will would bestow upon him. Once unleashed, his deliverance would come quickly or it would be outwitted by death. He would accept either but demanded at least one – for now.

His sole furnishing had been his worn mattress and he discovered that if it was carefully positioned against the far left corner, it stood at a fairly shallow angle without deformation – even when his recently reduced weight stood partially upon it. This, combined with his height, enabled him to perch just outside arm's reach of the blistering bright light. Near the intense glare of the exposed bulb, he could finally detect the presence of the scrutinizing camera and therefore knew precisely where its field of view lay.

Regardless, the heretofore unobserved camera was but a minor inconvenience. He actually needed to be viewed by the infidels for his plan to work and so he accepted that his positioning of the mattress would bring him into full view of those watching from the outside world. With his feces bucket in hand, he had managed to elevate himself quite high upon the mattress and was therefore able to swipe at the incandescent bulb with the can. It was an all-or-nothing proposition but Muhammad never allowed his thoughts to consider failure.

Strung over the edge of the bucket, secured partially with the handle, was one of the two braided ropes that he had fashioned out of his own hair. It was the fractionally smaller specimen, just less than a half meter in length. The rope had been swirled within the odoriferous mixture of raw human wastes to which he embedded the aluminum shavings that had

been diligently removed from his meal tray – a process much aided from the removal of the small circular metal fasteners that had strengthened the handles of his mattress.

When the can struck the light bulb, a very brief flash of flame ignited the stiff, nearly dried rope and caused the looser filaments near the edge to incinerate. This combustion initiated the neighboring strands until their blaze torched the human wastes that saturated them and finally this fire ignited the coarse aluminum powder that had taken longer to fabricate than had the human hair rope itself.

Muhammad's cell had gone from a steady brilliance, to a supernova-like spark of unspeakable glare, to a darkness punctuated by the dullness of a solitary flame, to an orange glow of open flames interspersed with flares of white specks, to the deepening reddish ambiance of a soft fire but these were only brief moments of interpretation for the Sorcerer's efforts were corralled by his need for balance until his mixture of human wastes and hair could ignite. He had no such time to reflect upon the precise cadence of combustion for he was slowly losing his stance and whether his feat had worked or not mattered very little. Gravity would soon overcome his thigh muscles and everything – his body, the bucket, the mattress, and the room's illumination would come crashing down upon the hard floor.

Protecting his hands from serious injury, Muhammad landed in a haphazard tuck and roll maneuver that caused his arms and chest to accept the burden of impact and he made a complete revolution before he realized that his breath had been forcibly spent and the need for oxygen drove him to momentarily abandon his thoughts of success. After several agonizing minutes, he discovered that his cell had faded into near blackness, punctuated by several glowing embers distributed unevenly throughout the cell.

His mattress lay perpendicular to his body, covering his right leg up to the knee and the bucket rested upon its side a few meters from his head, the remnants of its contents spewed out against the wall. As the freshness of air – at least that freshness that could be offered under the circumstances – flooded his lungs, Muhammad's mind began to scrutinize the situation that

he had found himself experiencing. He realized that it was a stalemate at best. His efforts had succeeded in busting the lamp but his desire for a roaring flame or even an explosion from the bucket failed to materialize. What he got for all of his effort was a dimly lit room illuminated by something resembling an alchemist's ode to toiletries.

Regardless, Muhammad humbly accepted his position as Allah's decree and quickly scrutinized his options. A quick check of his left foot showed that his toes still clutched the remaining braid of hair; it might come into use as a means for strangulation. Barely visible within the dying light, he could detect the relative position of the surveillance camera but could not determine whether it was functional or had been damaged in the fracas of his busting the light. He positioned himself within the darkest of the corners – the most opportune spot just past the swing of the cell's door.

From this vantage, Muhammad realized that he could confront those entering the chamber and perhaps rush them before they had a chance to discover his whereabouts. It was in this that he forced his consciousness to reflect upon his childhood interests for he knew that both stealth and speed would be to his best interest and that he would have to divert his thoughts from the roughness of his fall and the frailty imposed by inconsistent nutrition.

About a meter into the darkness from the door, Muhammad stood at the ready with the braided rope clutched tightly within his hands. He was tired, fatigued, and battered. It did not matter. He had an undeterminable wait of minutes or hours. It did not matter. As soon as the cell door opened, Muhammad would make a break for his freedom or all of his struggles would merely succeed in accomplishing a quick and unexpected death. It all rested with Allah's will and his personal faith and determination knew that Allah wouldn't have allowed him to come this far without a decent chance for success.

Muhammad would indeed escape from his cell. He would vanquish the infidels. He would make the West pay for all its excesses. He would become the earthly Lord of all Muslims and create his own empire devoid of the oft-dribbled calls for a new

caliphate. *He* would become the world's judge, jury, and executioner while his dreams manifested themselves into a queer menagerie of glory, ambition, and lust. *That's* what mattered most to him.

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