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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 Forty-Four

Seth Carmassi approached the pair in the distance with trepidation. They looked oddly familiar; one tiny, almost child-like apparition and another that could only be described as humongous. It was the way in which the latter moved, seemingly out of place no matter where, that brought a bit of a smile to Seth's worn and perplexed expression. *Jonas*.

He increased his stride, digging deeper into the damp sand with each propulsion. He thought about hailing, thought about it twice to be more precise. Still, there was that unnerving suspicion that reminded Seth that the last time that he observed the small Arab, the student was armed. So his mind, rather what was left of it from the ceaseless pounding of the recent storm, remained on alert mode and he proceeded quickly, confidently, but with the presence of caution of the finely tuned warrior.

Seth halted in his steps whenever the two figures did. Commenced in like rhythm. Only when he felt comfortable did he break the routine and encroach with rapidity. The closer they became, the less worried the American remained. It was obvious, after awhile, that neither man was carrying a rifle and, perhaps more importantly, neither man moved as if he were in a condition to wage combat should the opportunity present itself.

Finally, after about ten more rather lethargic minutes, Seth decided that he needn't have been so alert and proceeded to meet with the two stragglers under his own speed. Stopping just short of a jog, Seth closed the gap in a quick five minutes, intensifying his breath with a call to his friend.

Jonas Prinkler halted abruptly, as if a ghost had tapped him upon the loose shoulder. This was quickly followed by a more limberly repetition from the young student.

“Seth?” Jonas’ voice sounded harsh and smoky, yet appreciative. He shaded his eyes against the mid-morning sun that remained hidden behind the opaque sky. “Is that you?”

“Yeah?” Seth trotted up towards his friend, his gaze still fixed suspiciously upon the young Arab. “You guys alone?”

“Have been since I floundered upon the beach like a damn whale.” Jonas replied. Immediately he began scrutinizing the environment. “Haven’t seen anything of the Sorcerer, have you?”

“Uh huh.” replied Seth, momentarily looking back over his shoulder towards the far horizon before returning the young Arab back as his subject of scrutiny. “Hopefully the bastard is dead.”

“The Master cannot be killed.” Haytham’s voice was quiet and nearly unheard.

“What?” quizzed Seth, not withholding his frustration.

Haytham stood a little more erect. “Allah looks over my Master; he could not have perished.”

Seth flashed a brief look of indignation towards Jonas and then threw a hard right against the jaw of the young student sending the Arab into a pirouette. “Allah should’ve seen that coming...”

Jonas shook his head harshly. “Why the hell did you do that?”

“Maybe this kid will get some sense knocked into his frickin’ head.” Reaching down, Seth yanked the dazed student back to his feet. “Religion never should take the place of common sense. God hates idiots.”

Still dazed and bleeding from the mouth, Haytham stood up, leaning against Carmassi for support.

Seth ignored the troubled student, preferring to discuss matters with his partner. “Jonas, I think we’re relatively safe. At least now we don’t have to look like stupid ass Arabs...” He glanced briefly over at Haytham with a smirk. “...well, you know what I mean.”

“Yeah.” Jonas’ sigh eased out heavily. “I know what you mean. We’re still lost. I mean, are we in Russia or Ukraine?”

“Hell if I know.” Seth gazed intently at the sky which seemed to become more opaque with each passing moment. “I just know that we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

Jonas meandered around a bit, unsure as to which direction they should continue but remained silent. He had grown suspicious of the path that he and young Haytham had blazed but his partner’s words caused some anxiety.

Seth placed his hand firmly upon the Arab student’s shoulder. “Now friend, how ‘bout telling us what the two of you had planned? You and the Sorcerer, that is.”

Haytham remained silent.

Seth decked him once more, but let the student extract himself up off the sand. “I’ve got all day for this.” He replied coolly, knocking the Arab back down as soon as he had stood up.

Jonas frowned deeply. “Seth, is that really necessary? Obviously the poor kid doesn’t know anything...”

“This poor kid, as you call him, was traveling with the world’s most notorious terrorist. I want to know what he saw, what he heard, what he smelled. Got it?”

Haytham staggered to his feet and feigned a showing of dignity. “I am entitled to the protocols of the Geneva Convention!”

“I’m not a member!” snapped Seth as he grabbed the Arab by the shoulders and thigh and chucked him into the nearby water. “Never have been.”

“Meredith isn’t going to like this.” groaned Jonas as he subconsciously resumed his trek towards the south. He glanced back up towards the sun which peeked momentarily. “You know, we’re heading south. That means we’re still in Ukraine.”

“Of course.” Seth waded into the water and grabbed the hair of the Arab and dragged him back towards the beach. “I just wanted to confuse our young friend here who seems to understand more than a few words of English.”

“So what do we do now?”

“Well, I’ll tell you Jonas. We find some place to eat, get our asses back to the Lair, and get us a plane for Italy.”

“Italy?”

“Yeah, this punk here isn’t going to be of much use to us. I want to see how ol’ Mahmoud is doing up in Tuscany. He should be talking plenty by now.”