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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-Six

Ense et aratro

Jonas shook his head softly, nervously. “I don’t think drowning the guy is going to get him to talk.”

“We’re not drowning him.” replied the General coolly.

“I could almost understand having him go around feet first, but backwards – *head first* – doesn’t give him much time to react.”

“That’s the point.” interjected Seth Carmassi, standing within the darkened corner partially oblivious to the plight of the Arab terrorist presently enduring the ride of his life. “He can’t prepare. His mind is worn out and so he can’t focus on time. His ‘punishment’ is coming faster and faster as he’s losing his ability to concentrate.”

“Still, that water’s got to be damn cold.” Jonas turned away from the prisoner and retreated towards his partner.

“Warm water would actually kill him about now.” explained Seth, taking a swig out of a whisky flask borrowed from General Hulderich. “The cold shocks him back into reality.”

“We’re not barbarians.” The General’s voice drifted in from the distance. “We calculate everything. Especially victory.”

Jonas glanced briefly back towards the prisoner tied to the large, wooden wheel. “I’m just an analyst, mind you, but I don’t see how we’re supposed to get anything useful out of him.”

“He’s not our target.” Seth prodded his overweight and compassionate friend out through the door. “We just want to freak him out enough to go running back to his masters.”

Jonas sensed that the full treatment imparted upon the Arab prisoner left much to contemplate. He couldn’t understand the ends, much less the means. If the goal was merely to break the prisoner’s will, that much had been accomplished back in Ukraine when they trailed him high above the country behind a speeding aircraft.

This treatment seemed to serve no purpose but to dehumanize the man. An elaborate if sadistically orchestrated function designed to humiliate others at the prisoner’s expense.

“Now, we start working on young Haytham.” Seth motioned Prinkler towards a red metal door near the end of the stone hallway.

Jonas fully expected to witness another horrendous spectacle but found himself struggling to believe his eyes when his gaze fell upon the young Arab, seated comfortably at a dining table, wolfing down a sizeable plate of pasta. A can of Diet Coke sat next to him, beads of condensation slowly draining down the silver container towards the Formica table.

“Well, Haytham.” Seth’s voice seemed almost motherly in tone as he straddled a chair opposite the student. “You won’t be abused by Mahmoud anymore.”

The young Arab paused briefly, suspiciously, before continuing with his meal.

“That man in there wanted you dead.” Seth continued, feigning interest in the cleanliness of his fingernails. “You know that. And for what? To kill others? Mahmoud wanted you to blow yourself up and it wouldn’t have done a damn thing. You might have killed dozens, even hundreds of Christians but we’re too large a group to stop. We went to the moon, for God’s sake. You don’t think that all we’d have to do is push a button and the likes of you guys would cease to exist?”

Seth shook his head slowly, glancing towards Jonas as if it was all the larger man's fault. "I don't know, Jonas. I don't think that this kid is as intelligent as you said he was." He redirected his attention quickly back towards the young Arab. "Listen, Haytham. You guys seem to think that we can't fight you fanatics. Our entire history has dealt with the likes of you. Ever hear about our Great Plains Indian Wars? We beat people who spoke another language, dwelt in the desert, and scalped innocent men, women, and children. Where are they today? They're living rich off the hog running casinos! Don't believe for a moment that we can't teach your culture a thing or two about getting along with others."

Haytham interrupted his consumption of food long enough to permit an audible gulp of the Coke. His eyes gazed harshly upon Carmassi's face, a posturing move intended to hide the fear that flowed through his veins.

Seth did not fall for the effort. "The choice is up to you, my young friend. You can either die a slow, agonizing death like your master in there or you can help us rescue your people from a fate worse than death." He glanced at his watch. "Don't think that you have any other options. All we have to do is send you back to your fellow terrorists and they'll take one good look at how well-fed and well-clothed you are and know instantly that you've told us everything that we wanted to know. Of course, you and I know differently, but will *they*?"

The eating ceased abruptly. Haytham stared at his plate, a souring expression flowing over his face. He knew the American was correct; his people would naturally assume his decent treatment at the hands of their enemy came about because he squealed on them. He was stuck. He couldn't talk to the Americans and he couldn't escape and go back.

Seth leaned forward towards the Arab student, resting his chin upon his arms and his arms upon the back of the chair. "So

what is it going to be? Do we help you get your parent's out of the Middle East or do we sent you back to your death? Makes little difference to me, but I hate to see a nice, bright student like you killed unnecessarily. Is that why you studied to become a doctor? To kill indiscriminately?"

Haytham's appetite disintegrated. This American sounded logical, deceptively logical in his reasoning. Still, he was an American and therefore no good Muslim could want anything more than his immediate death.

Seth decided to change his approach and retrieved a Taurus OSS .45 pistol from his shoulder holster. "I tell you what. I can't bear to think of you being beheaded by your own kind as a 'friend' of the infidels. So I'm just going to shoot you right here and now. Maybe your parents will still think that you died a hero's death."

Before Carmassi had a chance to level the pistol at the young student, Haytham threw his body backwards, tipping himself over in the chair and crashed down hard upon the floor.

"Seth!" Jonas threw his arms up in front of his partner, not believing that an immediate firing of the sidearm was in order but still hesitant over the methods involved.

De-cocking the firearm, Seth calmly replaced it into its holster. "Seems that you owe your life to my partner here. I suggest that you return the favor and tell us what we want to know. Don't piss off the one that just saved your life..."