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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 Seventeen

“Now hold on one blessed minute!” Jonas Prinkler had trouble negotiating the door and couldn’t step out into the hallway as fast as could the younger Seth Carmassi. “How did I get roped into this? I’m an analyst not some Hollywood commando!”

Carmassi paused for a moment so that his overweight friend could catch up. “You answered the telephone, didn’t ya?”

“Mine was the only one that worked!”

“This is precisely why Megadeath, er, Meredith called you!”

Jonas jiggled his massive body as if to illustrate his point. “Excuse me, but do you see something peculiar here? Look at me! I’ve been behind a desk for pre’near thirty years!”

Carmassi resumed his stroll towards the elevators, trying hard to ignore the visualization offered by his friend’s argument. “Relax, you’ll like Ukraine. *Lots* of pretty girls there; girls that aren’t ashamed to be feminine.”

Increasing his stride to parallel that of Carmassi’s, exhaling audibly under the stress of exertion, Jonas couldn’t clear his mind of thoughts about his own experiences with Florence. “I wouldn’t know what to do surrounded by women that didn’t look and act like leeches. I might drop dead of a heart attack from the shock!”

Carmassi laughed, pressing the elevator call button nearest to him. *If your heart can take that bulk then sure as hell it could take drooling over a bunch of babes.* “We’re not actually going off to war here. The Sorcerer is held within a secure environment and we’ve only got to convince him to cooperate with us.”

“I don’t like the way that you just said *convince...*”

“Would you prefer torture?”

“Point of fact? No. And I don’t necessarily like the way that you said torture either.”

“Relax. The United States of America does not torture *anyone* irrespective of whether they deserve be tortured or not.”

“But he’s not on American soil...”

The elevator didn’t give Jonas a chance to finish his statement as the doors slid open to reveal a crowded car filled with people who looked even less likely to be commandos than had he and so he chose to remain quiet.

Carmassi had heard the comment, however, and smiled broadly at Jonas. “Our flight will leave in the morning.” he spoke as if they had been discussing a rather innocuous commercial flight. “You should pack for about two weeks.”

Jonas nodded, feeling a bit uneasy over the way their fellow passengers scrutinized Carmassi when he said *two weeks*. Certainly, he amused to himself, they had to be thinking of cargo aircraft; no way he could sit within a standard, government-financed airline seat! “Oh, two weeks? Sure thing.” His attempt at remaining subdued seemed to be betrayed by the artificially high pitch of his voice. “No problem.”

“It’s always best to plan for an extended stay.” Carmassi tried to ease Prinkler’s concerns. “Then if our business takes a bit longer, we’re not inconvenienced.”

Jonas didn’t like hearing the word ‘business’ either as it mocked their true mission. He didn’t know much about this Muhammad called the ‘Sorcerer’ by everyone more in the know than he had been but what he did know was that this Arab was by no means someone that he wanted to introduce to his mother.

When the elevator finally emptied – no one seemed unworthy enough to descend to their own basement level – Jonas decided to press the issue. “What, exactly, is *your* technique for interrogating prisoners?”

“Observing them.” Carmassi answered quickly, calmly, and without fear of misrepresentation.

“*Observing* them?” questioned Jonas incredulously.

Carmassi smiled and hit the red stop button causing the elevator to jerk to a halt. “Listen; forget whatever you’ve heard in the movies or through the media. I can learn more about a person in ten seconds of watching their actions than most people could in twenty years of torturing their people. Remember, this is reality here; what happens in war is not what the public thinks. We go about our business professionally and effectively. All that stuff that you hear about Gitmo and Abu Ghraib is put out there to terrify those that we expect to capture. They hear the word ‘torture’ and sooner or later they’ll think ‘My God, I’m going to have my nuts chopped off!’ Then, people like me will throw them into a cell for about two weeks and leave them absolutely alone for the whole time. Their minds just can’t handle the expectation factor. They’ll *want* to talk.”

Jonas slapped at the start button, believing himself to be the target of something similar to another UFO conspiracy theory. “Yeah, right. We just sit there and stare at somebody and we’ll know where their entire organization is and what their plans are for the future.”

Carmassi rolled his eyes. “Well, it’s a bit more complicated than that but, yes; basically that’s what we do. Listen, most of what you hear about outside the Pentagon is pure rubbish designed to distract well-meaning diplomats and a public that couldn’t possibly comprehend the nature of war if its very survival depended upon it and, quite frankly, it does.

“In the Gulf War we had agents planted in Iraq that swore that Americans couldn’t fight in the desert and would get lost. Why? Because our Hail Mary approach sent our forces *through* this very same desert. During 2003 we preached ‘Shock and Awe’ so that the Iraqis would continually think that something *really* bad was yet in store for them.

“Then, consider those wayward nukes from South Dakota. Do you really believe that the Air Force is so stupid as to misplace nuclear weapons that used to be airborne twenty-four hours per day not too terribly long ago?”

“No.” Jonas dragged out his answer as he scratched the top of his head.

“Well, then.” Carmassi continued. “We’re involved in a crisis situation with Iran and the best way to scare people is to convince them that we’re juggling nukes. Gets them real nervous, as they don’t know where precisely we’re sending these same weapons.”

Jonas stopped scratching. “Yes, but we wouldn’t drop nuclear weapons on Iran...”

“Oh?” Carmassi beamed. “If you can’t destroy an underground target with any guarantee, how then do you ensure that people couldn’t use these facilities other than irradiating them unsuitable for use?”

Frowning, Jonas massaged the bridge of his nose while he turned away from Carmassi. “Our government would willingly use nuclear weapons to prevent another nation from developing them?”

“Wouldn’t you?”

“No.”

“Listen; we’re involved in a brutal war here and its scope has yet to be determined. Perhaps we wouldn’t use nukes on Iran – I wouldn’t rule out the Israelis, but that’s a different discussion – but if the frickin’ mullahs would believe for a moment that they just might be a tad closer to meeting Allah than they’d care to they just might all of a sudden-like become peaceful citizens. It’s even worse when our government does something that would rattle our own citizens. Makes them think that we’re just a bit off of our rocker and that unnerves *everyone*. Unpredictability that is.”

“So what’s real?” Jonas questioned honestly as the elevator’s doors swung open revealing their shabby little corridor.

“You’re an analyst.” replied Carmassi coolly. “You know that things are real when there’s no longer any need to analyze them. We exist because we don’t know for certain what’s real and what’s not. We issue educated guesses, not ironclad guarantees. Appeasers want them but they simply don’t exist. Life is all about sticking it to the other guy well before he has a chance of thinking ill about you.”