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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 Seventy

August 20xx
Opposition safe house
Tabriz, Iran

It had been an aggravating multi-month journey for Seth Carmassi and his entourage of Arab prisoners. Smuggling themselves into Iran hidden with filthy, petroleum-soaked barrels was horrible enough, but the lengthy ride towards Urmia on the Qods Freeway, over the Highway 12 bridge spanning the Daryacheh Oroumieh, and then onto Highway 34 into the city ushered in a series of muscular spasms that still hadn't dissipated.

Had the trip not been orchestrated by Seth's Iranian contact, Sarosh Pirooz, the adventure might have been more disastrous than mere leg cramps. It was Sarosh who owned and managed the safe house located south of the roundabout near the hospital, almost within sight of Shahid Madani High School. It was not a spacious home – even by Iranian standards – but solidly built and offering a chance to plan various operations without the neighbors gaining notice.

Nevertheless, Seth felt uncomfortable within *any* city, let alone one dominated by a fanatical government. Operatives of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard strolled everywhere and, as Seth knew from experience, where the Guards traveled so too did elements of Hezbollah, yet another Iranian 'gift' to the world.

The home that Sarosh provided gave Seth a chance to catch up on some much-needed sleep, but even after the months he still twitched at the slightest sound, an occupational hazard for someone hunted by virtually every nation on the planet including his own.

Seth was in intelligence, which meant that he had to target his enemies, lie to his friends, and suck up to the government that paid his salary. At least that's what the United States expected him to do. Targeting his enemies was okay, except when Washington made one of those eternally nasty backroom deals that turned enemies into allies a minute or so too late for Seth's aggression. As for lying to his family and friends, well, that was to be expected for someone whose actions could be detrimental to those whom he actually loved and cared for. It was kissing up to government bureaucrats that tore at his conscience.

Never meeting a politician that he enjoyed the company of, Seth fancied himself a proponent of the people. Not in the Guevaran sort of way that attempted to popularize terrorism for terrorism's sake, but through legitimate concern for the inalienable rights that politicians always seemed to feel emanated from them alone. Seth was not religious, merely pragmatic. He could not decide whether there was or was not a God, but *anything* was preferable to deifying those in Washington.

Remaining practical was a matter of survival for the presently displaced American. Whether Iranian mullah or American president, everyone seemed to suggest that it was *they* who knew better than the populations they served. The mullahs lied that what they espoused was really a religion. The president lied that what he represented was constitutional administration. Being an intelligence operative merely made Seth a skeptic of anything anyone in position of power said.

Of course, Islam was not a religion anymore than the president was patriotic. It was just packaged that way to keep the masses confused and obedient. The same held true for the president of the United States. Even Captain Edward Smith admitted to the existence of icebergs when his beloved *Titanic* ran into one. Regardless, the mullahs corralled their population while preaching the false gospel to the rest of the world and the president wined and dined his country's way into oblivion.

Seth's journey throughout the Middle East therefore was not an ordinary pilgrimage to impart political agenda upon the

world at large. On the contrary, Seth's patience with bureaucracy had long since grown thin. Suspecting that his nation's future was really, *truly* at stake, Seth decided that the time was ripe to settle matters once and for all.

There were only a few avenues available for concerned citizens to do what legions of governments could – or would – not do. The greatest crime in the history of the world, according to Seth Carmassi, was that politicians actually believed that their existence mattered. That somehow a singular prince, president, cleric, or legislator made a difference within the unimaginably old universe. This was about as religious as Seth got; that somehow *something* made individual human ambition infinitesimal.

Seth lay awkward in the old cot and stared at the ceiling, reflecting upon his thoughts. The Iranians would kill him if they caught him. Tehran's intelligence operations were brutal if they were not productive. The old man urinating in the street earlier was probably arrested more on charges of being an infidel spy than a public nuisance. His own president probably wanted Seth dead too for it was nearly impossible for opportunism to arise when others called you out on your ambitions.

With someone as experienced as Seth, there could be no denying that his ultimate boss was young, green, and perhaps a bit too damn arrogant for Carmassi's tastes. America represented the spirit of three hundred million souls that rested upon countless millions who died to protect their inalienable rights. America did not represent one man's twisted dreams.

Although the jury was still out on whether Seth actually believed in God as an omnipotent being who would judge individuals for their actions upon this sorry assed planet of his, Seth *did* believe in Evil and was nearly as certain that it was a deceptive force, one that had to be waded through aggressively. To simply acquiesce to the current and get carried away by the Stygian forces did not seem like a good way to reach safety on the other side.