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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 Thirty

“Master? Master?” Haytham scampered forward until he found the edge of the manhole. He retrieved a match from his pocket and lit it, providing a brief moment to gaze upon his surroundings. The opening appeared seemingly out of nowhere – to where he wouldn’t have expected to find such an orifice arising out of a drainage channel – and his inadequate lighting revealed only a small steel ladder descending into the blackness below. He thought that he could see a body lying in the distance but the light faded quickly as the match burned out.

Haytham needed more light. Even though he was physically capable of descending the ladder, to do so without visual aid would certainly allow the prospect of his becoming just as immobile as his master and so he scooted back a ways to formulate a plan. Given the circumstances, he had found himself less afraid of detection than of abandoning his leader and heading off into a foreign land on his own and so he ignited another match and quickly scoured the drainage trough for anything of value.

To his immediate left, he saw a few sticks lying scattered upon the concrete but it was what rested a few meters towards his right that caught his attention. Obviously tossed from some inconsiderate pedestrian outside of the channel was a clear vodka bottle with its neck shattered. He hoped – prayed – that it still held some of its contents.

Quickly moving over towards the broken liquor bottle, Haytham found to his delight that the fractured container held a moderate some of the clear beverage and he quickly picked it up by the safe end before the match burned down into a reddish ember. Crouching, he scurried off towards where he

remembered seeing the lying sticks, exercising extreme caution to avoid the open deathtrap.

It took several minutes of hand searching before he found a piece of wood sufficient in length to use as a torch and immediately tore off his left sleeve and wrapped the cloth around the stick. Next, he poured some of the vodka over the material and retrieved another match from his pocket to ignite the liquor.

For an agonizing few seconds, the match seemed to dissipate with no effect upon the fabric. Haytham cursed softly; he had very few matches, only a small vial retrieved from Muhammad's stolen tactical vest. He was about to reach for another one when he noticed a faint bluish glow work its way ever so slowly from the match towards the end of the cloth wrapped around the stick. Gingerly, he upended the torch until the aqua flame grew more intense and finally ushered in a larger and more pronounced yellow glow.

"Praise be yours Allah." Haytham exhaled softly as the torch began to burn more brightly. Sacrificing security for practicality, the young Arab moved slowly towards the manhole, carefully positioning his torch so that the flames would not burn out before he had a chance of descending into the hole. Retrieving the broken vodka bottle, still possessing a bit of liquor, he tucked the container into his trousers making sure that the sharp end pointed away from his person.

The metallic ladder was damp with dew and the subterranean chamber smelled foul with human wastes but Haytham climbed down as quickly as he could. Beneath his feet, about ten meters down, he could see the outline of his master curled up in a ball with the putrid sewage flowing almost imperceptibly around his body. Haytham wanted to chuckle at the sight – his Lord supreme master lying amongst a pool of infidel secretions – but the realization that it was he, a small and insignificant Arab student, that laid Muhammad amongst the contemptible sewage displayed before him which shattered such joy from fully taking root.

Haytham's right leg reached the bottom first and he nearly tumbled into the grungy water himself as it slipped upon

the slick surface of the concrete tunnel. From the brief pirouette experienced before he could steady his body against the ladder, he could see that the tunnel extended far into the distance from both directions. He also saw what his mind thought were numerous large rats scampering off into the darkness. Their presence scared him even more than the foul odor that made him gag with nearly every breath. Still, his most immediate concern was for the large individual lying unconscious at his feet.

“Master Muhammad?” Haytham spoke, trying to find a sufficiently clean portion of the large man to shake. “Master, are you okay?”

It took some effort of the part of the student, but the unconscious man finally showed some reaction to his prodding.

“Master!” Haytham continued.

“Where am I?” the large man asked lazily. “Where are we?”

“You fell through a manhole. It was dark, we couldn’t see it.” Haytham danced around the truth; he hoped that his master wouldn’t remember the facts. “We’re underneath the drainage channel.”

Muhammad’s face showed eerily within the orange-yellow glow of the torch; his face covered completely with the human excrement that saturated the water of the chamber. “I feel sick.” he spoke, then turned sideways to vomit upon the water with a hoarse gagging sound.

“I fear that it is not too clean down here.” Haytham offered, hoping to regain the vantage of the surface. “Are you injured so that you might not be able to climb the ladder?”

The elder man felt around his body, then crouched down low against the water as he allowed his senses to finally catch up with reality. “I don’t possess any major abnormalities. Where’s my rifle, young man?”

Haytham shone his torch around the immediate vicinity. He knew instinctively that there was only one place where the weapon could be – hidden beneath the brownish liquid.

“Well, young man?” scolded Muhammad groggily. “Where is my rifle?”

“It must be beneath the water somewhere.” Haytham swallowed a lump, a clog of phlegm that dripped as lazily as did the water beneath his feet flow. Knowing that ultimately his hands would have to dip into the thick liquid, he decided to use his already soaked feet to search the foul smelling and slippery environment for the submerged Kalashnikov.

“Well, find it.” Muhammad stood up slowly, gazing into the darkness towards his left. “This tunnel seems to trail into that direction. Is that not the way in which we were traveling?”

Haytham paused briefly in his search. “Yes, Master. The ladder is positioned on the side from which we came.”

“Good.” Muhammad spoke, apparently losing thought of the filth in which the two men stood contemplating their future. “We will travel through this tunnel. Perhaps we can escape the attention of those searching above. Let’s gather our belongings and make haste.”

“Yes, Master.” Haytham replied hesitantly, preparing himself to follow Muhammad through the mysterious path of human waste into the unknown. *I would’ve preferred that we travel up there in civilization with the better smelling infidels.*