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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 Twenty-Five

July, 20xx

USAF MC-130P, "*R.J.'s Justice*"

Airborne over Sea of Azov, north of Kerch, Ukraine

The rarified air of altitude hampered Seth Carmassi's attempt to ignite the Cuban cigar confiscated from the individual now trailing the aircraft feet first by a thin safety line and it took quite an effort to finally light the massive log of tobacco booty. He gazed back towards Jonas Prinkler who, being somewhat hostile to the suggestion of perching precariously on the edge of the aircraft's loading ramp; lay sprawled out in the corner like a feline desperately trying to avoid a bath and who was nearly as green as his flight suit. Carmassi shook his head softly, then turned towards the aircraft's loadmaster, marveling at the young woman's fiery red hair that engulfed her microphone headset and the brilliant sapphire blue eyes that peeked out through her teardrop eyeglasses.

"Bridget." Carmassi spoke, holding the microphone closer towards his mouth so that all could hear him above the din of both aircraft and environment. "How far out is he?"

The beautiful girl smiled, unsure of whether she should've returned the wink. "About fifty-five feet, sir."

Flashing a quick 'thumbs up' to Jonas, Carmassi followed through with a broad sweeping motion arching his left arm out towards the trailing prisoner in the distance. "Definitely *not* within fifty feet."

Jonas was far too sick to argue the point and any glance towards the poor soul trailing far behind the aircraft, sweeping to and fro for the past three hours and from either side to the

next with the buffeting motions of the aircraft was well beyond his stomach's ability to remain in control. He longed for the much tamer flight of their arrival into Ukraine.

Carmassi could not determine how much the prisoner Mahmoud could see from his particular vantage point – they made every attempt to secure him without disrupting his senses – but the microphone headset duct-tapped to the Arab's head ensured him that he was privy to everything being discussed from within the speeding aircraft.

“Mahmoud, old boy.” Carmassi spoke in near fluent Arabic. “Are you prepared to talk yet? We've got plenty of fuel aboard, more than this aircraft actually needs; we can stay out here all day if you like...you decide. This is fun!”

From what words he could understand, Jonas didn't like the thought of one minute longer and rolled over onto his left side and vomited a load which was immediately sucked out the open door of the aircraft like a missile and hurled towards the suspended Arab.

The pretty face of the Air Force sergeant frowned significantly as she retrieved a clean rag for use by the overweight analyst now surpassing the color of his jump suit.

Carmassi chewed a bit on the cigar, contemplating various solutions and methods, then turned back towards the girl. In methodically dictated words intended for his prisoner to understand should the latter, as expected, be conversant in English, Seth spoke. “Bridget. Are there any suspension bridges around here?”

Bridget smiled broadly, her intense blue eyes sparkling from the glow originating outside of the aircraft. “Not at nine thousand feet, but there are a few mountains hereabouts...”

Waving an acknowledgement, Carmassi turned his attention back towards the prisoner whipping around on the safety line like a snagged bass. He couldn't tell if Mahmoud had understood, but there appeared to be some struggling which suggested that at a minimum the man was having a terrible time being dragged forcibly through the turbulence created by the roaring aircraft.

“C’mon Mahmoud.” Seth goaded. “Don’t you want to get back down to warm Mother Earth? It’s freezing up here. Of course this aircraft won’t go hungry because we can refuel as needed, but don’t you want a nice, juicy piece of pork to warm your belly? How ‘bout some *kosher* meat, hmmm?”

“You’re making *me* sick!” Jonas’ voice could be heard pleading over the headsets.

“Where’s Allah now, Mahmoud?” Carmassi decided to alter his tactic. “He *ain’t* going to help you – but *I* can! I can help you by baptizing you in all of that damn water *way* the hell down there...”

Realizing that he was making little progress, Carmassi decided to up the ante. He turned towards the girl and twirled his finger around in a quick circle, signaling that he wanted the pilot of the Hercules aircraft to begin a sharp circle. Within seconds of her command to the cockpit, the large aircraft proceeded to bank heavily to the right, the horizon tilting drastically. Immediately Carmassi began to see the trailing prisoner’s lifeline drift off towards his right as centrifugal forces attempted to free the Arab from his umbilical with the aircraft.

“Mahmoud, Mahmoud.” Carmassi spoke in a soft, motherly manner. “I’ve got my whole life ahead of me. You, on the other hand, I’m not so sure about. I know that you’ve killed many Americans before and so you know that I could kill you right here and now and not even flinch a muscle. One more dead Islamist doesn’t bother me a bit. *However*, you might be able to save some future lives and for this reason I am forced to consider ways in which I might save your sorry ass. Therefore, I’ll give you one last chance to make it back down to earth in one piece before we infidels release your safety line...”

An incoherent muttering in Arabic came over the headsets, suggesting to the aircraft crew that, at a minimum, the prisoner had heard the efforts to cajole him into compromising his operations.

Sliding carefully on his backside across the loading ramp, resembling something of a cross between a spider and an overturned tortoise, Carmassi moved over towards the Arab’s safety line and began to kick it lightly with his foot, sending

distinct quivering vibrations down towards the terrorist. “Hey, wakeup Mahmoud. I need to know; do you bounce or float better? Which do you prefer; concrete or water? We don’t have much time left; either you come back aboard as our friend and ally or you become useless flotsam. Unfortunately, we will *not* give you a chance to become a martyr. Oh, you’ll *certainly* die; but not even Allah will find your sorry ass. So how ‘bout it? Care to humor me with a reply?”

After several further minutes of silence from the spiraling prisoner suspended fifty-five feet behind the aggressively circling aircraft, Carmassi voiced his instructions to the aircraft’s flight crew in clear, fluent Arabic. “Okay, guys; let’s drop down to fifty meters and see if we can find us a soccer match to crash...”

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