

Chapter Thirty

Alfred Said opened his e-mail and smiled. Another jumble of numbers from Mr. Martin. He picked up his phone and dialed the main number for the Iranian mission to the United Nations. When the male operator answered, Alfred said in Farsi, “Seyed Mahmood, please.”

“One moment.”

A click and two buzzes. “This is Mahmood.”

“This is al-Said. I feel that I should praise Allah at noon on Friday at Masjid Al-Fatih.”

Seyed Mahmood said, “Praise be to Allah, that he speaks to your heart.”

He disconnected and jotted down the date and time he had just heard.

Alfred Said closed the door to his office and took a copy of *Up Country* from his book shelf. He knew he was not supposed to be privy to the information that passed through his office to Mahmood, but he always took the time to decipher it anyway. Later, he tore up the transcription after placing the sheet of coded numbers in a file marked All-Sports Distribution.

That evening, Alfred sat down to dinner with his wife, Ghodsi. He noticed that she had put on a bit of weight lately. She was looking more and more like his mother, an unsettling thought. She was complaining about a colleague at N.Y.U. “He’s a typical, overbearing Jew. He forever pushes the Israeli economic model as the epitome of what an economy should be. He is unwilling to acknowledge that much of its success has been built upon the blood, sweat and tears of the Palestinian people. He’s such an arrogant

bastard, as if Jews were the master race. Those who see Israel as the new Third Reich are not far off the mark. I really hate the sons of bitches.”

Alfred took these rants of Ghodsi with a few grains of salt. In last year’s contest for department head, Aaron Goldman had beaten Ghodsi. It had pissed off Alfred a bit, too. The group making the recommendation was laced liberally with Jews, who as he and everyone else knows, look out for their own even when there is no exceptional merit found in their candidate. Were it not for the prospect of eventually annihilating the Zionists Alfred would have been tempted to quit the intrigue that was such a huge part of his life. After all, he was an American millionaire. He could really do whatever he wished. But the prospect of spilling Jewish blood overrode all other aspects of his life. In truth, his extreme dislike of all things Jewish was his life altering obsession. And of course the knowledge that he would probably be killed if he tried to leave the network had some significance in keeping him a devoted American mujahideen. And then there was the money. He had become a wealthy mujahideen, which beat being a poor one all to hell.

He was proud of his wife, but was afraid that her increasingly open radicalism might invite some to take a closer look at their lives than he wished.

Alfred said, “I have the same abhorrence for the Zionist bastards that you do, but I must ask you, Ghodsi, to please tone down your public rhetoric. It might bring attention to the bank, and that could prove to be embarrassing.”

She said petulantly, “Well, that’s just too bad. What I do is my business, not the bank’s. Besides, you should be proud of what I’m doing. It seems to be more than you

and your friends are willing to do. You never take a public position on anything, even when it would be easy to do.”

“I ask only that you work more from the background and not squarely atop the barricade waving a crescent flag. Couldn’t you do this for me?”

She was clearly miffed. She sat sullenly for a moment before saying, “I will think about it. My commitment is no small thing, to be tossed lightly aside. And don’t forget how you came to be the president of the bank.”

He knew he should shut up and quit while he was ahead, but he couldn’t resist one more jibe. “As for your ‘commitment’, when was the last time you set foot in a mosque?”

Her voice rose. “This is about justice, not your damned patriarchy. If you want me to act the obedient Muslim wife, then treat with respect me and the things that I believe are important. People depend on me. I have some degree of significance in certain quarters.”

“I know, and thank you for your consideration. I do respect you. But think about the big picture, if you will. The work I do at the bank is incredibly important to the cause.”

Tartly, she said, “You’re welcome. Perhaps at the next ‘Support For Israel’ parade I will appear with a smaller pro-Palestinian sign.”

“That would be nice, my dear. Please pass the bread.”

She said, “You’re a silly man. Of course I know exactly what the bank’s business is and what you do all day down on Broad Street. And as long as I continue to make regular remittances to my brother who, as you must recall, made your appointment

possible, things will continue to go our way. One thing the Americans do have right is a sense of family values. And so do we, Alfred.”

The following Friday Alfred journeyed to Brooklyn. Like most Manhattanites, he did not relish visiting other boroughs. Knowing that a limo might make him conspicuous, he rode the ‘L’ train to Bedford Avenue. The subway car was filled to capacity and he had to stand, swaying in unison with other riders, a clackety-clack ballet. His expensive black cashmere overcoat set him apart from his fellow travelers, most of whom wore jeans and logoed jackets. As the train picked up speed, he watched the tunnel lights begin to flash by rapidly, becoming an incandescent dotted line outside the car. His thoughts strayed, as they had so frequently of late, to the fortune he had accumulated and what he might do with it. He was jostled out of his reverie by a young ochre-skinned, freckled black man who was importuning every one in the car. He was an entrepreneur, a seller of dry cell batteries.

The black man pushed his wares in Alfred’s face. “I got ‘em all. Double AA, triple AAA, C, whatever you need. How many you want, mister?”

“Get away. I don’t need any batteries.”

The young man fixed his piercing, oddly blue eyes on Alfred. “Sure. Thanks for nothing.” He made his way through the car, stopping at the rear door.

Said thought, those people, they are everywhere. They are as bad as Jews, pushing and grasping.

Alfred exited the train at the Bedford station and trudged up the two long flights of concrete steps. He glanced at his Rolex. It was 11:30. He quickened his pace as he

walked briskly down Bedford toward Greenpoint. Intent upon his mission, he didn't notice the black battery salesman trailing a half block behind.

The Al-Fatih Mosque was located in a busy section of Manhattan Avenue. It was housed in a modest four-story apartment building. The bottom floor was a storefront where the worshippers gathered. The upper three stories were occupied by the Imam's quarters and a madrasa, where Moslem fundamentalism is taught. The school is closed to outsiders. Alfred was aware that this seminary served as a training ground for militants. After all, it was supported financially by *Banco J. G. de Honduras, N.A.* The Imam, Samiul Al-Badr, was recently interviewed by a reporter from the New York Times. He told the scribe, "We only impart religious education here. We preach non-violence. If the students later take up guns, it is not because of what we have taught. It is their reaction to the injustices visited upon Moslems in Iraq and Palestine by America."

As Said approached the mosque, he could hear the muezzin sounding the adhan, the call to prayer, from the mosque's third story window. If one closed his eyes, he would think he was in Ankara or Tehran or Baghdad. Well, maybe not Baghdad. The muezzin's sing-songy chant was not accompanied by a car bomb percussion section.

Alfred pulled a crocheted skullcap from his pocket and stepped inside the mosque. He knelt and untied his \$1,500 *A. Testoni* shoes, slipped them off and set them aside by the door. He moved across to the main hall of worship. A painted line ran cater-corner across the room, so that worshippers might know the proper direction of the qibla, the compass bearing toward Mecca. He was happy to see that the Imam had spent some of the bank's money on new imported Iranian prayer rugs.

Seyed Mahmood was already kneeling upon a prayer rug on the far right of the back row. Alfred went to the mat directly in front of him and knelt down. Imam Samiul Al-Badr entered with a dramatic flourish and began speaking. After the usual calls for Allah's blessing, he got into the meat of his sermon.

“Allah has blessed this mosque with loyal Muslims who believe in the mission of the madrasa. Without their support, we would perish as the desert flower under a hot, parching sun.” He smiled at Alfred as he said this.

"We are convinced of the ultimate victory of Allah; we believe that one of these days, we will enter Jerusalem as conquerors, enter Jaffa as conquerors, enter Haifa as conquerors and all of Palestine as conquerors, as Allah has decreed.

"Anyone who does not attain martyrdom in these days should wake in the middle of the night and say: 'My God, why have you deprived me of martyrdom for your sake? For the martyr lives next to Allah.

“Our enemies suffer now more than we do. Why? Because we are convinced that our dead go to Paradise, while the dead of the Jews and the crusaders go to Hell, to a cruel fate. So we stand firm and steadfast, in obedience to Allah.

"The Jews await the false Jewish messiah, while we await, with Allah's help, the Mahdi, peace be upon him. His pure hands will murder the false Jewish messiah. Where? In the city of Lod, in Palestine. Palestine will be, as it was in the past, a graveyard for the invaders, just as it was a graveyard for the Tatars and to the Crusader invaders, and for the invaders of the old and new colonialism.

"A reliable tradition says: 'The Jews will fight you, but you will be set to rule over them. Who will set the Muslim to rule over the Jew? Allah. And what is Allah's will? To kill the Jews, all Jews. The Muslim nation will spread throughout the world.

"Oh Allah, accept our martyrs in the highest heavens. Oh Allah, raise the flag of Jihad across the land. If any among you would desire to travel to the land of our ancestors, to fight the crusaders, this mosque will find the resources to get you there." Another smile in Alfred's direction.

"Oh Allah, forgive our sins."

After the homily, Imam Al-Badr stepped off the low platform and made his way to Alfred and Seyed. "I am honored that you would travel so far to attend our service."

Seyed said, "Other Imams give us only salt. Occasionally, we like a bit of the pepper which you dispense."

Alfred smiled, "You are doing good work here in the Brooklyn vineyard, Imam. I will continue to do what I can to assist you in my humble way."

"You have been of immense help, honorable Said, for which we are most grateful."

Seyed Mahmood said, "Keep up the good work. And now, I must return to my duties."

They shook the Imam's hand and made their way to the door, where each knelt and put on their shoes. Outside, Seyed said, "Nice shoes, Alfred. Your banking business must be better than my government business."

Said didn't respond directly, but instead pulled an envelope from his coat pocket and handed it to Seyed Mahmood. "Some numbers from a friend."

“Thank you. I will take care of them. And by the way, I hope the FBI hasn’t wired this mosque. They would have gotten an earful today.”

Alfred laughed. “This is America, Seyed. We have freedom of speech and the separation of mosque and state. Hooray for the red, white and blue.”

An SUV with diplomatic plates pulled up to the curb. Seyed said, “May I offer you a ride back to Manhattan?”

As the car with the two men in the rear seat entered traffic, the battery salesman across the street put his Nikon camera in his pocket and headed back toward the subway entrance.

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