

## Chapter Fifty

Disgrace washed over Seyed Mahmood like the effluent from a backed up septic tank. He paced back and forth in his office at the Iranian U.N. Mission, trying desperately to put together an acceptable explanation of the disaster at *Banco J. G. de Honduras*. When Darya, his inside woman at the bank had called him an hour ago, his heart had nearly stopped. He had asked, “Where in the hell is Alfred Said?”

She replied, “He has gone on a sailing trip to the Bahamas.”

“At the very same time we are attacked by... whoever the man was. What a God damned coincidence. Who do you think he was, Darya?”

“I’m guessing CIA. But that’s just a guess. Worse, I tried to call the number of the man Alfred went with. It’s disconnected. I fear Alfred is in big trouble, if he’s still alive.”

“Oh, my God, this is a catastrophe. I’m ruined. They have...they have everything.”

Darya said, “For all the good it’ll do now, I’m going to delete all the computer files and then get out of here. Before I leave, I will fax to you the latest contact numbers and e-mail addresses I have for all of our cell leaders, in the event that your files are not up to date. Good luck with Minister Jarsan.” She disconnected from Mahmood.

Though Said was never aware she possessed it, she had the combination to the safe which was hidden behind the Buttersworth painting in the president’s office. He had been careless about leaving things like that laying about. She opened the safe and removed the cash it contained. She quickly estimated the total to be about three hundred thousand. She knew he had been skimming, but it was unusual for him to let this much

accumulate before moving it out of the bank. She smiled as she thought, *perhaps he was planning an unannounced escape from the domineering Ghodsi*. She then removed the Buttersworth painting from its frame. She used a metal letter opener to remove the tacks holding the artwork to its stretcher. After rolling the canvas up, she secured it with a couple of rubber bands. She knew from research that it could bring as much as a quarter million at auction. She said a quick prayer aloud, "Praise Allah for providing me such a nice severance package."

At the Iranian Mission, Mahmood's secretary knocked on his door and then entered without waiting to be invited. She laid a fax from the bank on his desk and waited for instructions. He scribbled a note and handed it to her. "Send this to everyone on the list. Do it at once."

She read the message. "Stand down. Cease operations immediately. You have been compromised. Contact this office in six months. Mahmood."

"Please close the door as you leave. Oh, and call Ghodsi Said and tell her that it appears that her husband may not return from his trip to the Bahamas. It might be appropriate for her to plan a quick visit to Iran. " When the secretary left, he opened his desk drawer and removed a revolver. He sensed the oily sharp metallic taste of the barrel as he placed it in his mouth. It was the last sensation he would ever feel.

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