

Chapter 16

Stacy could tell this talk with Tina was going to hurt. She needed some painkiller first. And the Cosmopolitan wouldn't be quick enough – she just needed the essential ingredient.

“Tina, before you start, what's the bartender's name?”

“I think it's Jacque.”

“Oh, Jacque,” Stacy repeated sarcastically with a French intonation. “Let me see if Jacque,” again sarcastically, “can get me a drink.”

Stacy slapped the bar with her hand, calling out “Oh, Jacque. Frere Jacque. Dormez vous?”

The bartender finished pulling a draft beer for another customer and then walked over.

“Yes, Mademoiselle, what is it that is your pleasure?” he said in a French accent similar to Pepe LePew's in a Looney Tunes cartoon.

“Well, Jacque,” Stacy said sarcastically yet again, “where are you from?”

“Oh, a little village just outside of Paris,” he responded, making sure that his “i's” sounded like long “e's”. And, of course, he dropped the final “s” on Paris.

“Don't say. Which little village?” she questioned.

He looked surprised. “It is, well, . . .,” he started to stammer.

“Look, I'm guessing somewhere outside of Omaha, maybe even Denver. The accent was a little hard to place, but sounds a lot like that French castle guard in Monty Python's ‘Holy Grail.’ But your name is at least Jack or John or something close, at least that's true, right?” She pinned him. And it took about 20 seconds flat.

“Actually, Topeka. Look, everybody's got a shtick in this town. Now what do you wanna drink?” he asked, in an accent that was annoyed but much more true to self.

“Grey Goose. Pour me two right here Detective Clouseau. And give me a glass of water with that please.”

He did and Stacy immediately knocked the first shot of vodka back. A little burn in the throat.

Stacy took a drink of water. *That feels better*, she thought. And then she turned to Tina. “Now, I’m ready for the inquisition to begin. But first, let me throw myself on the court’s mercy and admit that I am guilty of all charges when it comes to Darrin Allis.”

Online Version

Chapter 17

The table in Interrogation Room 3 could seat up to eight people. Darrin had been directed toward a seat on the right end of the table, facing the door. Agent Barrett walked in with a couple of bags of pretzels and tossed them on the table in front of Darrin.

“Here you go, Darrin.”

“Thanks.”

Barrett sat down at the table across from Darrin. Choi sat down to Barrett’s right, leaving two empty chairs between himself and Barrett. Choi was careful not to block the focus angle of the camera that was behind a small mirror in the wall behind him.

“Now, I don’t want to be too formal here, Darrin, but let’s get some preliminaries out of the way,” Barrett started.

“Sure.”

“Darrin, what’s your full name?”

“Darrin George Allis.”

“Is that the name on your birth certificate?”

“Yes.”

“Any aliases?”

“No.”

“And you look like somebody who has been a man all his life, so no maiden names, right?”

“No,” Darrin laughed.

“Any nicknames, Darrin?” continued Barrett with the standard litany that interrogations started with.

“Some of my friends just call me ‘D.’ They're a little lazy that way.”

“Any other nicknames?”

“In the Army some of my guys would call me Chappy.”

“Why's that?” asked Choi.

“Pretty common nickname for Chaplains. I was a Chaplain in the Army for eight years.”

“I see,” said Barrett. *Anywhere else they would call you a cult leader,* he continued to himself.

Online Version

Chapter 18

Where to start? Rod asked himself. He started by searching Darrin's room for possible copies of his airline itinerary that he could give to his own travel agent. If she had to start from scratch, it would take forever for her to find the flights. *I'm sure Darrin checked all of that stuff out*, he thought.

Rod had given Darrin the quiet bedroom upstairs facing back over the pool. It was really peaceful in there, especially with the waterfall running out of the hot tub down to the pool below. Rod had wanted his friend to be comfortable.

Rod also given Darrin one of his old computers. Rod used to swap out computers every year as Pentium chips became faster and faster. Darrin liked the Internet, so Rod gave him a sub-account on his AOL subscription.

Rod hadn't poked around Darrin's room much before, even in the month since Darrin had left for – *there it was, Tanzania, not Tunisia. Becky never was good at geography*, he thought. In fairness, once the State Department person had told her that Darrin was going to die, Becky probably blocked out details like that. *Women are that way. Too emotional.* That's why he didn't know if he'd ever get married. He couldn't handle that on a regular basis.

Now Rod started to feel some emotions himself though. Shock. Confusion. He had tried to respect Darrin's privacy. But what was this stuff? It wasn't on Darrin's desk - he kept little file folders in a drawer of his Ikea desk.

One of the folders was marked "State Dept". It contained a letter on U.S. State Department letterhead:

Warren Webber

P.O. Box 35258

Los Angeles, CA 90049

Re: Concerns about Embassy Security

Dear Mr. Webber:

We have conveyed your many concerns regarding the adequacy of embassy security to our Protection Services Division. We appreciate your thoughtfulness. Further letters on your part will not be necessary. Should we have any follow-up questions, we will contact you.

Sincerely,

Shirley Pellston,

Assistant to the Undersecretary

of State for Embassy Operations

Wow, that was a real blow-off from the government, Rod thought. Who was Warren Webber though? Let's see, what else? Uh, oh. Not good.

There in a file folder marked “Drafts” were apparently some partial attempts at letters. Well, letters in the sense that a kidnapper might write the letters. Words cut out of magazines and pasted to pages with messages. “If you want to stay alive, stay away from the” and that was it. The words took up too much space to add anything else. *Must have been some earlier tries. But why keep this? Maybe to cut the words out over again and use them someplace else,* Rod hypothesized.

And there, in a folder marked “Family” was a June letter he had saved from his father enclosing a check. “Have fun with this money. Your grandfather would have wanted that.” Darrin’s grandfather had died the year before, so it must have been from his estate or something. That probably explained how he came up with the money for the trip to Tanzania.

Rod continued looking. *O.k., how about emails, Darrin? No password on here, so let’s see. Oh, shit. A lot of emails from “duranj342@aol.com.”. A lot. Damn. Really not good.*

Re: Dar es Salaam

Chappy: Attached is a map of the area of the city where embassy is. I have highlighted possible routes that could be used for bombing run.

Re: Your trip

Chappy: Khobar Towers is the pattern. A lot killed. Attached is the approach there

Then a bunch of emails about bomb-making and explosion patterns. Rod had seen enough for now.

Rod called Darrin's parents, but would only say Darrin had hurt his leg "just a little accident. Nothing serious. He'll probably need crutches." Rod was going over to escort him back. Might take a little while due to Darrin's airline tickets and difficulty in changing them. Third world countries can be a problem you know. He would send a postcard if they had to stay for very long.

Rod hung up the phone and exhaled for a long moment. He couldn't have imagined how difficult this "escort" job was going to be.

Online Version

Chapter 19

“And let me say,” Tina began, looking for common ground, “that even though Darrin is not my type, there probably is a little resemblance to your fantasy boy Kiefer Sutherland. I don’t get it. Is that the attraction?”

“If I say yes, then we don’t need to have this conversation anymore, right?” Stacy asked, trying one last time to avoid what she knew would be the most uncomfortable showdown she had ever had with Tina.

“Not so fast. I don’t know what upsets me more here, Stacy. The fact you wouldn’t trust me enough to tell me something this important or the humiliation I felt when Rod told me – gleefully I might add – that he had a secret that I didn’t know.”

“Why was it humiliating?” Stacy asked.

“Well, I guess the humiliating part was what I had to do to find out the secret about you and Darrin,” Tina said looking down at her drink.

“Ooooookay....” Stacy said.

“Why don’t you trust me?” Tina asked.

“Because I can never figure out where you’re at on Darrin! You’re not objective, you know?” Stacy responded. “You hate him, you love him. Sometimes I think you even have a little crush on him.”

“Not true, Stacy, not true,” Tina protested.

“Alright, then, let’s pretend we can turn back the clock,” Stacy proposed. “Let’s say that two months ago I told you I took a walk on the beach with Darrin after your party at Shutters on the Beach and that I started to have feelings for him.”

“Two months this has been going on?” Tina shot back.

“Tina, focus on the issue. Suppose I had told you then. What would you have said?”

“I would have told you - my best friend and maid of honor, I might add – that you needed to be very careful with Darrin,” Tina said sincerely.

“What does that mean? Why?” Stacy asked.

“Because Darrin isn’t who he seems to be,” Tina said, looking away.

Online Version

Chapter 20

Dr. Scott Greenbaum was just pulling into his parking spot next to St. John's Hospital when his pager went off. He recognized the number as Rod's home phone. He called as soon as he got to his office.

"What's goin' on Rod? You're not canceling poker this week are you?"

"No, no . . . I don't know. Hey Scotty, I've got a life and death situation with Darrin and I need your help man."

"Darrin? God, what happened?"

"He's over in a hospital in fucking Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and they've fucked something up badly and put him in a coma."

"What's he doing there? Wasn't there a bombing there?"

"Yeah, I don't know why he's there, some research project. He got hurt outside the Embassy. They sewed up his leg and kept him from bleeding to death. But he had some reaction to the anesthesia they used and it put him in a coma. They got a lot of injured people there Scott and I'm afraid they're going to give up and just let him die." Rod's voice started to crack a bit as he said the last part.

"O.k., Rod. Let me make some phone calls. You'll be at this number for a little while?"

"Yes. I've got my travel agent trying to book the next flight out for me. I've got to leave for LAX in two hours to catch a flight to Washington, D.C. She'll work on the rest of the trip while I'm in the air."

Fortunately, Scott Greenbaum was not only one of Rod's best poker buddies, he was one of the premier toxicologists in Los Angeles. If anyone could figure out what was wrong with Darrin, it was Scott. He called Rod back twenty minutes later.

“O.k., Rod we’ve got to work quickly here. I've got a colleague of mine in South Africa leaving on the next flight from Johannesburg to Dar es Salaam. It's Petr Belke, you met him last year at my place while he was on assignment at UCLA. He's very good and will get Darrin stabilized. Now, how up to date is your vaccination regimen?”

“I had to get some boosters 2 or 3 years ago when I did a reunion for Kawasaki riders at the International Meet in Morocco.”

“You'll need some more shots where we're going. Meet me at my office on the third floor of the medical plaza next to St. Johns and we'll take care of it. You never like to do this just before you fly because you can get a little queasy. You know how to use a vomit bag on a plane, right?”

“Yeah,” Rod replied a little hesitantly.

“Also, give me the travel agent's fax number. My contact at the State Department needs to fax over some emergency visa approvals before the airline is going to let your travel agent book us from Nairobi into Dar es Salaam.”

“How did you do all this Scott?”

“I do a lot of work with the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. They were contacted by the State Department yesterday after the bombing because there is some concern that the bombs the terrorists used in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam might have had some biological components in them. CDC sent out an email to everyone asking for volunteers to go over and do tox workups on the State Department employees just in case. Usually my colleagues from the East Coast would handle that. But this time I’m volunteering. Funny how things come together, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“So call the travel agent back, tell her you need two tickets to Dulles Airport in Washington. Make sure it’s Dulles, Rod, and not National Airport. The State Department has an airlift for Nairobi leaving Dulles this evening and we’re catching a ride. If she books us into National we’re going to get stuck in rush hour traffic trying to get to Dulles from there and we’ll miss the flight. Got it?”

“O.k., Dulles.”

“Then we need the commercial flight tomorrow afternoon from Nairobi to Tanzania. That’s what we need the special visas for and that information is going to be faxed to her.”

“Yes, got it.”

“And one more thing, Rod.”

“What?”

“To get approval for you to go along with me on this emergency medical relief mission of ours I had to tell them you are one of my lab technicians. Remind me to grab you some scrubs and a white coat to make you look official. But for God’s sake, Rod, don’t touch anybody or talk to anybody while we’re over there. Just carry the testing equipment and do what I tell you, got it?”

“Got it. Thanks, Scott. You don't know how much this means to me.”

“That's what friends are for Rod. We'll get Darrin and bring him back. He'll be fine. Just fine.”

Scott Greenbaum was a pretty good poker player. He was stone-faced. You couldn’t tell by looking at him whether he had only a pair of sixes or held four aces. Just so long as he didn’t talk. Scott always gave away his hand when he opened his mouth. Rod could tell from Scott’s voice that Darrin’s odds weren’t looking very good.

Chapter 21

“Tina. Enough with the suspense. Just tell me what you know,” Stacy demanded.

“O.k., o.k. Where do I begin? Back in 1998, Darrin took some trip to Africa. He got hurt in the bombing of an embassy there,” Tina explained.

“Why would Darrin be at an embassy?” Stacy wondered.

“Good question. Rod glosses over that part. He says he flew over to get Darrin. I guess Darrin hurt his leg?”

“Yeah, he’s got a scar on his thigh. Doesn’t really remember how it happened he says. I thought maybe it was from when he was a kid.”

“He doesn’t remember Stacy because he was in a coma. He almost died. You know Scott Greenbaum right?”

“Yeah,” Stacy had remembered him from the wedding and the anniversary party, “A friend of Rod’s right?”

“And apparently a hell of a doctor because he saved Darrin’s life over there.”

“I don’t get it. How was Scott there?”

“Rod. Rod dragged him to Africa to save Darrin. He somehow convinced a hotshot doctor to drop everything and go to Africa. Rod ended up getting some jungle disease himself because he didn’t have time to get vaccinated properly first. It damaged Rod’s heart,” Tina said as her eyes began to tear up.

“Geez,” Stacy said.

“Now you can see why I feel funny about Darrin sometimes. He almost cost me Rod. He still might have shortened Rod’s life a few years. That feels like Darrin stole from me. Stole from kids that Rod and I might have, and . . .,” Tina trailed off, not wanting to finish.

“And what, Tina?” Stacy asked. “Just say it.”

Online Version

Chapter 22

When Rod Warner and Scott Greenbaum finally landed in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on August 10, 1998, it was over 95 degrees and the humidity was over 90%. It was sheer chaos. Troops everywhere. Rod hadn't eaten – well, hadn't kept anything in this stomach at least – for almost 24 hours. It didn't seem things could get worse. But nothing would prepare him for what would come next.

Petr Belke picked them up at the airport. He had rented a Land Rover, which came with a driver and another man riding shotgun. Literally riding shotgun, except with an AK-47. Rod and Scott threw their equipment in the large trunk, and Petr, Rod and Scott piled into the backseat.

“How's the patient, Petr?” Scott asked almost immediately.

“Not so good I'm afraid, my friend,” he replied with the South African accent that was mostly Dutch, but with a British influence. Petr saw the immediate disappointment in Rod's face.

“Who's with him right now?” Rod asked.

“Don't worry, Mr. . . .”, Petr paused.

“Warner, you can call me Rod. Who's with him?” Rod pressed.

“I have two local nurses who I have paid to watch over him. They are caring for him as best as is possible.”

“What are the possibilities here Petr? What could have happened?” asked Scott.

“Well, at first I thought maybe an allergic reaction. And that is what the medical staff thought. But there is no sign of a reaction. No hives. His airway has no swelling.”

“Did you give him an epi?” Epinephrine was the quickest way to deal with an allergic reaction.

“No, I did not want to get his heart beating faster for no reason, you know? I am afraid of other side effects.”

“Yeah, that’s right, that’s right,” Dr. Greenbaum agreed.

“O.k., if it’s not allergic, then what? Too much anesthesia?”

“I spoke with the physician. They use much less anesthesia here than in the States because it is in much shorter supply.”

“Which was why patients in this part of Africa often woke up part way through surgery screaming in pain. So what’s your best guess, Petr?” Scott asked.

“My best guess is that he was on some sort of heavy narcotics when he was injured. When they brought him in and repaired the injury to his leg, they gave him a light anesthesia. I don’t know if it caused an overdose, or made an overdose he had even worse” hypothesized Dr. Belke.

Scott Greenbaum used both hands to wipe the sweat from his face. He tilted his head back and bit his lower lip. Then he looked Rod straight in the eyes.

“Rod, does Darrin ever use drugs that you know of?” Scott asked.

“You know him Scott, he doesn’t even drink liquor,” Rod replied.

“How about anything else. Does he smoke anything, you know . . .” Scott trailed off.

Rod protested, knowing where Scott was going, “No, Scott. No dope. No heroin. No hash. I gave him a cigar a couple of months ago and he almost choked on it.”

“Well, we’ve got two choices of treatment here, wouldn’t you agree Petr?”

The South African nodded and then clarified, “We can treat him for an anesthesia overdose or we can treat him for a narcotic overdose. If we guess wrong, he will probably die.”

That was pretty blunt, Rod thought. Not much bedside manner from the South African medical contingent.

“So what’s your bet Rod? Darrin took a heavy dose of narcotics or the locals gave him too much anesthesia?”

“Too much anesthesia,” Rod said without pausing. “I’ve known him since Seventh Grade. He doesn’t do drugs.”

Scott thought for a moment. “My gut tells me you’re wrong based on the medical evidence. People change, Rod. O.k., here’s what we’ll do. If the blood work-up is inconclusive, we’ll start him on the treatment for the anesthesia overdose theory very slowly. If he doesn’t respond, we’ll switch.”

Petr Belke shrugged.

“I hope you’re right Rod. If not, we could very well fry his brain or even kill him.”

Of course, Dr. Greenbaum wasn’t going to leave patient treatment decisions like that up to Rod. He just wanted to shake Rod up a bit and help him get a more realistic view of Darrin. Scott felt good that he could be there for Rod and help the CDC out at the same time, but this wasn’t like taking a drive to Beverly Hills to pick up a friend who was stranded with a flat tire. No, they had traveled thousands of miles because Darrin had caused his own problems. Scott had never felt totally comfortable about Darrin because he could never figure out Darrin’s motivations. Everybody had a lever – a switch -- someplace that turned them on and off. Scott felt like Darrin’s switch was missing somehow.

Chapter 23

“Tina, please. I have a right to know what happened,” Stacy pleaded. “So Darrin got hurt. How’s that his fault? Accidents happen. I can’t believe you would blame him for that.”

“But Darrin wouldn’t have almost died if he hadn’t been doing drugs,” Tina said, a little relieved to get that one out in the open.

“What? He’s never done drugs! Darrin? Why would you say that Tina? How do you know?”

“Well, because I overheard Rod and Scott Greenbaum talking about it one night after poker.”

“What did they say?”

“Well Rod mentioned that Darrin seemed depressed because his friend died on 9/11. He thought maybe there was shrink Scott could refer Darrin to. Then Scott gets all serious and asks whether Rod thinks Darrin needs rehab, not just a therapist.”

“Rod gets upset and says ‘What the hell do you mean rehab?’”

Scott says, “Is he doing drugs again?”

“Again?” Rod says “Come on Scott.”

Scott says "You come on Rod. He had enough opiates in him to kill a horse when we found him in Tanzania. You wouldn't have gotten that virus if we hadn't gotten on a plane to save his ass. You of all people should be pissed at him for that."

Rod says "I know Darrin."

Scott says "And I know what the tests said. You're wrong. And if he still has a problem like that, his psychiatrist will need to know it."

“I was devastated. Rod hadn't told me about the virus before. I confronted him and he was pissed - more at Scott than me ‘He just doesn't like Darrin because he doesn't understand him. Darrin's a good guy. He's just had some bad breaks.’”

Stacy exhaled slowly. “Ok, so Rod doesn't believe it. And I've never seen anything like that with Darrin.”

“That's not all Stace. There's just something that makes me uncomfortable. He has this coldness sometimes,” Tina said, looking down.

“Darrin's more polite than anyone I know. What do you mean?”

“I know he's polite. That's part of the cold efficiency he has. Almost like a robot.”

“He's an introvert. Everything that comes into his head doesn't immediately come out of his mouth. So what?”

She could tell Tina was a little hurt by that. “I'm sorry Tina. I'm upset. I don't know the person you're describing.”

Chapter 24

When Rod, Scott Greenbaum and Petr Belke arrived at the field hospital, one of the nurses came rushing out to meet Petr.

“FBI man here. We try to shoo him away but he won’t leave,” she said, with an accent that definitely sounded more British than Belke’s.

Rod walked in to see a young man in his mid-twenties leaning over Darrin. Rod had thought about this possibility on the long flight over and he didn’t miss a beat.

“I’m Dr. Warner,” Rod said, reverting back to an almost perfect Australian accent. What are you doing with this Yank?”

“Well, I was just tryin’ to see if he had anythin’ to say,” said the man with a “N’Orleans” accent.

“This man is in critical condition. A coma. Now, please give us space so we can do our work.”

The young man thought for a moment and then looked over at (real) Doctors Greenbaum and Belke.

“O.k., I’ll come back tomorrow. Y’all hear him say anythin’, please try to remember it. Here’s my card. Course, y’all can’t call me cause I’m here, but my name is Cecil Hogue, and I’m with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington, D.C. We think this fella might have some relevant information about the bombin’.”

“Fine. We will let you know. Now g’day, sir.”

After Agent Hogue left, Scott chastised Rod.

“Rod, I told you not to talk to anybody! Now you’re impersonating an Australian doctor? You could get us all in trouble and that’s not going to help Darrin if we get arrested or kicked out of the country.”

“I know Scott. I’m sorry. This is the first I’ve seen Darrin and to see him lying there and some guy in his face like that. I flipped out.”

“O.k., let’s get down to business,” Scott said, changing the subject.

They did some quick blood work-ups on the portable gas chromatograph and it became immediately obvious that Darrin’s system was still filled with narcotics three days after he had been brought in.

“Rod, it looks like he was almost dead from opiates. It’s synthetic stuff – a designer drug with the technical name of alpha-methylfentanyl -- they call it “China White” back in California. It’s like 100 times more potent than morphine. I’m not even sure the anesthesia pushed him over. Might have saved him in fact by slowing his systems down. You can thank Petr for not giving him the epi. That would have been it for him.”

“It can’t be. That’s just not Darrin,” said Rod, still in denial.

Scott started Darrin on the best course of treatment he could come up with under the circumstances – three injections of Narcolax over the course of 6 hours to counteract the opiates in his system. The nurses took shifts staying with Darrin. But there wasn’t much they could do after giving him the Narcolax except check his vitals every hour. Rod, however, never left Darrin’s side.

Meanwhile, Drs. Greenbaum and Belke went over to the makeshift U.S. Embassy set up in borrowed space from the Brits. They did exams and blood work on as many staff as they could.

“I don’t see signs of any biological components yet, Petr,” said Scott.

“No, it looks like your garden variety truck bombing so far,” replied Belke. “Just explosives.” Being from a part of the world that was more accustomed to this kind of violence, Dr. Belke was a little more matter of fact about these things than his American counterpart.

While the “real” doctors were doing some wrap-up testing at the Embassy, Agent Hogue returned to check on Darrin.

Rod was there by himself and heard a voice behind him as he stood looking down at his friend, “Hello Doc.”

Rod rolled his eyes and then turned around.

“Oh, g’day, can I ‘elp you?” Rod asked, wishing the FBI would stay away. Rod was pretty sure his old friend was in real trouble.

“Well, has he said anythin’?”

“No, I’m afraid not.” Think Rod, think. Rod shook his head, “And ‘is prognosis is not good. My colleagues and I don’t think this one will last the night.”

“That’s too bad. From lookin’ at his passport there yesterday it looks like his name is Darrin Allis. Do y’all have any more information?”

“No, that is the first I’ve even ‘eard ‘is name. A patient is a patient to us,” Rod said nobly. “I’ll tell you what. Tonight will be critical. Come back ‘ere tomorrow. If ‘e survives, ‘e just may be out of ‘is coma by then.”

“O.k. That sounds like the right plan. I have a flight back to the States in the afternoon, so I will come back tomorrow mornin’.”

“Very well,” said Rod.

When Agent Hogue returned late the next morning, there was a bodybag - an occupied bodybag - on Darrin's bed and Rod was standing next to it filling out some paperwork.

"Oh Lordy, is that Darrin Allis?"

"Yes, it is. Poor bast'd died in his sleep," Rod said, in a comfortable Australian accent. "Doctor" Warner could tell that Agent Hogue was extremely disappointed by the news of Darrin's "death." *One less notch on your belt*, thought Rod. *What a dickweed*.

"Would you like a copy of the death certificate," Rod offered. "It's no problem mate."

Hogue was late already. He was dizzy from lack of sleep and had been up most of the night in the hotel room with diarrhea. "Is there a copyin' machine around, Doc?"

Rod chuckled a little and then apologized. "As you can see, the conditions 'ere are . . ."

"No, it's o.k., I'm not thinkin' straight."

"I meant that I would write out a duplicate death certificate 'ere. It should only take me about 15 or 20 minutes to rewrite everything," Rod offered.

Hogue paused. "No, I won't need that. It's a real shame what happened to this man."

"Yes, it is. All of these pour souls," Rod said piously, stretching his arm and moving it slowly to his right.

"But this man, especially. I think a whole lot more people woulda' died if he hadn't been tryin' to save 'em. He saved other people's lives and here he gets killed hisself. Not fair, Lord. Not fair," Hogue concluded.

It was then that Rod realized he had gotten it wrong. This guy thought Darrin was a hero. Rod felt terrible. The things in Darrin's room. The narcotics. It had really thrown him. But it was too late to back out of this whole lie he had concocted. And he still didn't totally trust this hayseed he was talking too.

“Well, the Lord’s ways are not our ways,” Rod replied, remembering something from Sunday School when he was a kid.

Hogue exited out the door he came in, fortunately.

Rod had paid the nurses a tidy sum to move Darrin to another area of the hospital and then bring a body from the makeshift morgue and put it on Darrin’s bed. And then, of course, to watch for Agent Hogue and come to get Rod from the cot he was napping on next to Darrin.

Darrin had already started coming out of the coma the night before Agent Hogue returned to find him “dead.” Darrin had recognized Rod. He hadn’t spoken, but he squeezed Rod’s hand. Rod had stayed up all night with his friend, hoping for another squeeze.

“It’s a good sign Rod, but he’s not out of the woods. We won’t know for a couple more days whether his brain is going to return to full function.”

By the time Scott and Petr had finished their work two days later, Darrin Allis was sitting up and talking. He still didn’t remember what had happened or how he had even gotten to Africa. But he recognized Rod, of course, and Scott, too.

“It’s not uncommon for trauma victims to have short term memory loss like this. He may never remember anything from the day of the bombing. The brain does that sometimes to protect the body from shock. Just keep talking to him. Don’t rush things,” Scott advised.

Scott Greenbaum spent the next 16 hours or so sleeping. He had been working ‘round the clock in a time zone 10 hours head of his own, with almost no sleep. The sleep crash and recovery was something they taught in med school. He would wake up long enough to use the restroom and drink a couple bottles of water and then go back to sleep.

The next day Dr. Greenbaum told Rod his plans, “Rod, Petr and I are going back to Nairobi to review the results of the tox work-ups for the Embassy personnel there. You and

Darrin will fly there with us. Here are the medical evac authorizations you are going to need once we get there so that you can get on the direct flight from Nairobi back to Dulles. Make sure he stays hydrated on the plane flight, Rod.”

“Okay.”

“I'd book a hotel room near Dulles if I were you and keep him there a week or so before heading back on a commercial flight to LA. I don't like having his brain pressurized and depressurized too many times in his condition. It's going to be tough enough just getting back to the states. Plus, you'll just love D.C. in August. It's wonderful,” Scott said sarcastically.

“Here's the name of one of my friends at Fair Oaks Hospital there near Dulles. We did our residency together at Georgetown. I want Darrin to see him once you get there and then once before you leave.”

“Take him to this guy, twice,” Rod repeated looking at the name Scott had written down.

“You should ask him to look you over too, Rod. You're looking a little green. God, I hope the vaccine we used on you was good. Normally you'd have to wait a couple weeks to check on the reaction before going on a trip. We just gave you the shots and you boarded the plane.”

“I'll be fine,” said Rod.

“But mainly, Darrin just needs rest,” Scott resumed. “I'll see you back in L.A. in a week and a half for our poker game.”

“Scott . . .” Rod started to talk and then tears came to his eyes.

“Save it, Rod. You've had a lot of stress too this past week. I need you to focus on getting our patient home . . . Doctor,” Scott said with a smile, unable to resist the little jab.

As they rode to the airport in the Mercedes, with Petr Belk riding up front between two armed men, Darrin leaned over to Rod in the back seat. “Rod,” Darrin said, his voice in a whisper, “where are we again?”

“On our way home buddy. On our way home,” Rod whispered back.

Online Version

Chapter 25

Agent Hogue took a deep breath before turning the handle to the observation room door. He felt like the kid in the “Sixth Sense” who could “see dead people.” Only here, he suspected everyone else would be seeing the same thing as him.

He walked into the crowded room and noticed some additions from the morning meeting – Lauri Wentz and Manny Garza.

“Hey Cecil, thanks for joining us. Is that the guy?” Moran asked, pointing to the monitor for Interrogation Room 3.

Agent Hogue spent a moment looking at the monitor and studying Darrin’s face. “Yep. That’s him,” Hogue said, nodding his head.

“Sorry Manny. Agent Hogue here thinks he saw Darrin Allis die several years ago. Cecil, I can ask Barrett to check his pulse, but it looks like Darrin Allis is still alive to me,” ribbed Director Moran.

“I don’t understand it,” mumbled Agent Cecil Hogue.

“So Cecil, how do you know he was dead?” asked Agent Randi Socia.

“The doctor there told me. And I saw the body,” he replied slowly.

“You actually saw Darrin Allis’s dead body? Come on Cecil, that’s spooky,” said Agent Robles.

“Well, I guess I saw a bodybag on the bed. And somebody was in it. I assumed it was Darrin Allis because that was his bed and the British or Australian doctor there said it was him.”

“Well, it sounds like the doctor made a mistake,” said Assistant U.S. Attorney Garza.

“Either that or Darrin Allis rose from the dead!” interjected Dr. Wentz.

“Okay, okay, Cecil made a mistake. But we’re missing something important here. Cecil, why did you want to talk to Darrin Allis back then?” asked Director Moran.

“Because he was standing outside the Embassy in Dar es Salaam when the terrorists blew it up,” Agent Hogue replied.

“What was the date, Cecil?” asked Agent al-Jafari.

“Well, it was 1998, August I believe,” replied Agent Hogue.

“How about August 7, 1998?” asked Garza. “Like on these notes.”

“O.k., so let’s put this together. This guy almost dies in Tanzania on August 7, 1998. He was at least close to dead, right Cecil?” asked Director Moran.

“Yes, he was badly hurt and in a coma. They didn’t think he was going to make it,” replied Hogue.

“And two other guys in his unit die on two other dates on this list. The dates all happen to be bombings or attacks orchestrated by al Qaeda,” said Moran in a way that invited others to participate in the analysis.

“A list written up by Darrin Allis. Don’t forget that,” added Randi Socia.

“O.k. I suppose it could just be a coincidence. Or maybe Darrin Allis wrote the notes after those incidents?” said Luis Robles.

“That’s possible, but then it wouldn’t explain how he “guessed” the date for the next two al Qaeda attacks after 9/11 before they happened,” challenged al-Jafari.

“If the notes are authentic, that is. I can already see a chain of evidence problem there guys,” noted Garza.

“But assuming they are authentic, the notes show foreknowledge. And the fact that he and his friends are killed or hurt on the date of these bombings shows . . . ,” Agent Robles trailed off.

“Right, shows,” picked up Moran “that not only did they know was going to happen, but were there to watch or even to participate.”

Or they were there to try to stop it, thought Cecil Hogue.

Online Version

Chapter 26

“So what’s this ‘coldness’ you’re talking about?” asked Stacy.

Now Tina was on the defensive.

“Well, for example . . . ,” Tina said, “he’s ice cold when it comes to killing animals.”

“Killing animals? What do you mean?”

“Yeah, one time we were driving up PCH on the way to a party in Malibu. Rod was driving, I’m in front, Darrin’s in the back. Rod hits some seagull that had been standing next to the road. I’m like ‘Rod, I think he’s hurt. Stop the car.’”

“Rod stops the car. Darrin says, ‘I got it.’ He dumps out some stuff we had in a plastic grocery sack in the back seat, gets out of the car, and walks back to where the seagull is flopping around on the ground. You can see its guts hanging out the back of it. Rod had really smashed it up. I got out and said ‘It’s suffering.’ Darrin squats down, says the weirdest thing. Something like, ‘Now, now’ or ‘There, there little one.’ He grabs the seagull by the neck. Pats its head. Then twists its head around. The thing flopped a couple more times, then stopped. He puts it in the plastic grocery sack, ties the sack up, and yells to Rod to pop the trunk. Darrin tosses it in the trunk, gets in the car and we drive a couple of miles. Darrin says, ‘Pull over here. There’s a trash can.’ He gets out and slaps the trunk. Rod opens the trunk from inside the car. Darrin takes out the grocery sack with the seagull, and drops it in the can. Then gets back in the car. Not another word. Just like this happens all the time. The road kill clean-up service. Even if they’re not quite dead yet.”

“You know, Tina, he grew up on a farm or near a farm or something. He’s probably used to that stuff.”

“Yeah, Rod said the same thing. He told me I don’t understand that back in Indiana, if you see a rabbit eating something out of your garden,” then Tina switched to a deeper voice, trying to imitate Rod, ‘you grab your shotgun, kick open the back screen door and blister the little mother effer a good one.’”

“I obviously don’t like hearing that about Darrin, but the thing was suffering. You said it yourself,” argued Stacy.

“I know, but it’s like he knows exactly what to do. No debating it. Just does it. The next time it happened was a lot scarier.”

“It happened again?” Stacy asked.

“Oh yeah, you better believe it. I’d left the outside doors to the dining room open one night and Rod saw a big rat waddle in. We had the exterminator come over the next day and he set some traps in the attic and behind the TV in the media room.

“So Darrin comes over that night. They were fumigating his apartment and we told him he could stay with us for a couple days. We’re watching some movie and we see this rat walk in the room and go behind the TV. I’m like ‘Omigod what is that?’ Then snap! The trap goes off and the most horrible squealing you’ve ever heard starts up. The rat is flopping around behind the TV. I am hysterical.”

“Darrin gets up and says to Rod something like, ‘Hey buddy, do you still have that Dodger seat cushion?’ ‘Yeah,’ Rod says, ‘front closet.’ So Darrin walks out, comes back a couple minutes later. In one hand he has one of those plastic covered foam cushions you sit on at a ballgame. In the other hand he has a frickin’ pistol. He sets them down and pulls back the big screen TV, which isn’t very hard because it’s on wheels. I am beside myself. Darrin has a gun. This big rat is flopping around, squealing. Darrin picks up the plastic seat cushion and pins the

rat down. And he says the same thing he said to the seagull, 'There, there little one.' He presses the gun against the cushion and pulls the trigger. You hear this loud pop. Rod says, 'Jesus, Darrin!' But that's it. Thing's dead. I am standing on the sofa by this point and even Rod is sitting there with his mouth open. We don't move. Darrin goes and gets a garbage bag and a dustpan and scoops the thing up. Then he takes paper towel and some carpet cleaner to the spot on the floor. Tosses everything in the garbage bag when he's done. Picks up the gun. We hear him go outside and toss the bag in the black trashcan."

"We hear him come back in and he goes upstairs to his room. Comes back a couple minutes later, empty handed. He says, 'Sorry Tina. I didn't mean to scare you.' 'Sorry Rod, there's a little hole in the floor there. I'll push the TV back. You won't see it.' After he pushes the TV back he says, 'I guess I'll go to bed now. Good night.' And he walks out.

"Where did he get the gun?" I ask.

"I don't know!" Rod says. He had never seen it before.

"Darrin brought it with him?" Stacy asked.

"I guess so. I told him the next day I wasn't comfortable with guns in the house. He said he was sorry. It was his dad's and he didn't want to leave it in his apartment while they were fumigating since it wouldn't be safe."

"I'm sorry," Tina said, scrunching her face a little. "There's some stuff I think is happier too. But it will still kind of blow your mind. I know it did mine."

"O.k. You better tell me everything," Stacy sighed. She knocked back another Grey Goose and braced herself for more.

Chapter 27

“O.k. Darrin,” continued Agent Barrett, “and you say your apartment is on Barrington Plaza?”

“Yes.”

“How long have you lived there?” asked Barrett.

“Wow,” Darrin thought a moment. “Over five years now,” Darrin replied.

“So, approximately when did you move in?” asked Agent Choi.

“It was May of 2001.”

“And where did you live before that?” asked Choi.

“Well, all over. I mean, I left Indiana at age 18 when I went to college.”

“O.k., let’s work our way back chronologically,” suggested Choi. “Where did you live before your apartment on Barrington Plaza?”

“I lived with a friend of mine. He has a house in Brentwood,” Darrin responded.

“O.k. What is your friend’s name?” Barrett asked.

“Rod, I mean Rodney, Warner,” replied Darrin.

“O.k., Rodney Warner,” repeated Barrett, writing down the name. “Does he still live in Brentwood?”

Darrin nodded yes.

~ ~ ~

“Warner. Warner,” said Cecil Hogue to the others in the observation room, shaking his head and smiling a little. “Things are gettin’ a little bit clearer now.” “Chief,” Hogue asked turning to Director Moran, “I’d like to talk to Darrin Allis’s friend – Warner. I might be able to develop some information relevant to the case.”

Chapter 28

Rod Warner promised himself that if he survived, he would never return to the Washington, D.C. area. Ever. He himself had been hospitalized since returning from Tanzania with Darrin. Fortunately, he got Darrin to the appointment with Dr. Freeman that Scott Greenbaum had arranged. And, perhaps also fortunately, Rod then proceeded to pass out in Dr. Freeman's waiting room.

He woke up at Fair Oaks Hospital later that night. This time, the roles were reversed and Darrin was sitting next to him.

"What's going on Darrin?" Rod asked.

"Well, they say you got some virus. I haven't been much help though. I told them we had been traveling in Africa. They got in touch with Scott Greenbaum and he explained it to Dr. Freeman."

"I feel like I got hit by a truck."

"Yeah, I kind of know how you feel."

"Look you should get back to the hotel room and rest. I'll be o.k. Scott said you have to rest."

"I'm fine. I've been watching all about the President and Monica Lewinsky. Looks like everybody's talking to the grand jury now. Wow, you sure learn a lot about the justice system this way."

The nurse walked into Rod's room.

"Well, hello Mr. Warner! You're awake now I see."

“Yeah, I don’t know how much longer I’ll be awake. Please, do one thing for me,” he asked her. “Get my idiot friend here to a cab. He needs to get back to the hotel and rest. We’re staying at the Four Seasons. Darrin, you have the room key.”

“Yes, it’s Room 2020.”

“Rod, you have an appointment with Dr. Freeman on Friday, o.k.?” Darrin said.

“He knows where to find me.”

“All right Darrin,” the nurse said as she led him out of the room, “let me show you which way to go to get a cab back to your hotel.”

“I hope you make it,” Rod said out loud, collapsing back on his pillow. “It’ll be a lot easier than it was finding your sorry ass,” he mumbled.

Rod Warner got worse long before he got better.

“We’re seeing more of this stuff,” Dr. Freeman told Rod when he visited his hospital room on Friday. “Just weird viruses. I am afraid this one has decided to lodge in your heart. I want you to know, this is serious.”

“I know.”

“But your heart is very strong. Were you an athlete?”

“A long time ago,” Rod replied.

“We can only take this day by day.”

Days turned into two weeks but Rod Warner finally turned the corner. Darrin was feeling much better and came and visited Rod every day.

“So how did you know to come and get me,” Darrin asked Rod.

“Well, you got hurt and the Embassy called Becky.”

“Becky? Why not my parents? Why Becky?”

“I don’t know, I guess she’s still your emergency contact on your passport or something?”

“Oh, I guess I didn’t change that. But why was I there?”

“I don’t really know. You said it was a research project.”

“Research project. Did I have notes?”

It occurred to Rod he had a phone call to make.

“Certainly nothing on you,” Rod said truthfully. “And I don’t remember seeing anything at the house,” he added, much less truthfully.

“Why can’t I remember anything?”

“Well, you were in a coma Darrin. You’re lucky to be alive. Count your blessings.”

“Yes, I should count my blessings. Thank the Lord.”

Now that sounds more like the old Darrin, thought Rod.

The next day Rod called Jenn Belmont, his business manager in Los Angeles.

“Rod, how are you honey?” asked Jenn.

“Doctor says I should get out tomorrow. We may wait and come back after Labor Day weekend. I just can’t get enough of Washington, D.C.”, Rod said sarcastically. “Watching all this Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky bullshit. Not sure how the most powerful man in the world winds up sticking his . . .”

“Yep, she’s a little different from the L.A. dolls you’re used to Hot Rod,” Jenn interrupted. “Is there anything I can help you with?”

“Well, I know you’ve been checking on the house and all, but I do have a big favor.”

“Name it, honey.”

“It’s about Darrin. His doctor thinks I should keep his stress level down as much as possible. He was working on some research project and the doctor is afraid if he jumps right back into that, it’s going to slow his recovery. I need you to take everything out of Darrin’s room at my house. Books, files, his computer. Box them all up for me. Put them in that storage space I have down on Olympic near Bundy.”

“O.k. How about I just put them in your garage?”

“No, the doctor said no stress. I don’t want to take a chance Darrin goes looking for the stuff around the house. Just put them in the storage space. Got it Jenn?”

“Yes, yes. I got it.”

“And I also need to ease him slowly back into things. He was taking a lot of calls on this project, getting emails. I need you to have the phone number changed at the house. And cancel my AOL account.”

“Wow, Rod that seems pretty drastic.”

“Look Jenn, he almost died. I traveled all the way to Tanza-fucking-nia to get him. I’m not going to have him go through this again. It goes without saying that this is all between you and me. Got it?”

“Got it.”

“Thanks Jenn. Sorry for being abrupt. I’ve been in a hospital with bung fung fever or whatever the hell it is and I want to go home and not deal with any of this anymore.”

“I understand Rod. Have a safe trip back sweetie.”

“O.k. I’ll call you for lunch.”

Rod hung up the phone and took a deep breath. Darrin didn't seem to remember anything about the trip or about Johnny Duran or any other interesting things he kept in his room. Rod wanted to keep it that way.

Rod remembered when he and Darrin were in high school. Darrin was always trying to convince him to come to church with him. Rod went once, and that was enough. Too much emotion for him. And people making promises to God that they couldn't keep. Even though Rod's family was also nominally Baptist, they didn't spend too much time worrying about "the Lord's work."

Rod knew that Darrin had always been a bit frustrated that he couldn't "save" his best friend. Rod had felt bad about that when he was younger. But now, almost 20 years later, Rod Warner was going to try to save Darrin. The first step was getting him back to L.A. alive and out of trouble with the FBI. If this next step worked, Darrin could start over with a clean slate – he really would be "born again." Thanks to Rod, this time.

Chapter 29

Tina paused before going on with more details about Darrin. “I want you to know I am a little ashamed of what I am about to tell you.”

“Why?” asked Stacy.

“You’ll see in minute. I just want you to know that I am not proud of this.”

Stacy rolled her eyes. “Go ahead Tina.”

“O.k. When Darrin was back in Indiana visiting his Mom last year while she was doing her chemo, he asked Rod to stop by and get his mail and water his plants. We went over there one day and I saw that there was brokerage statement in the mail from Merrill Lynch. I made some comment like, “Wooo big bucks has a broker,” you know because Darrin is always acting all poor. So Rod says, ‘Yeah he uses my broker.’

“Hmmm, I thought. A bit curious. So I said, ‘I thought Mitch’ – he’s Rod’s broker – ‘only handles high wealth individuals?’ Rod said ‘Yeah,’ then shrugged his shoulders and wouldn't say anymore. Well, you know how curious I can be.”

“Tina,” Stacy said judgmentally.

“Well, Rod had something to do one day and said something like, ‘Oh, crap. I need to water Darrin's plants. I haven't been over there yet this week.’

“I blurted out ‘I need to go to the Ralphs grocery anyway, I can stop by there on the way back.’”

“He just said, ‘Thanks baby. That's nice of you. Here's the key to the apartment and the mailbox key. There's a plant in the kitchen, two in the living room, and one in the corner in his bedroom. He's got a little watering can under the kitchen sink. And remember his mail too.’”

“I just said, ‘O.k., I’ll try to remember everything.’”

“So you could say I spent some time over there that day getting acquainted with my fiancé’s best man. You can find a lot about people looking at where they live. And Darrin is very orderly with everything. Everything has a file folder.”

“Soooo, I started with the file folder that said, ‘Merrill Lynch Statements.’ My eyes almost popped out of my head. He had over four million dollars in various accounts there!”

“Four million dollars?” Stacy asked. “Darrin?”

“You better believe it.”

“Where would he get that kind of money?”

“I don’t know Stace, but I told you there was some good news there.”

“What else did you find?”

“Well, the rest of it is not quite as good.”

“O.k., get it over with,” Stacy groaned, eyeing her empty glass and wondering if “Jacques” was intentionally ignoring her now.

“I notice that he has a checking account feature on his Merrill Lynch statement and that he’s pulling \$10,000 out of his investment accounts every month and depositing it into his checking account. He’s got checks off that account for his rent, his utilities, and the like. But every month, he also has a check written out to somebody named Roberto Sanchez. And it’s for \$5,000. I went back through a whole year’s worth of statements at least. Every month, usually on the 30th, he writes out this check. And there is always the same thing on the memo line – the word “Glory.” I looked at the back of the checks and they seem to be getting deposited in Oak Grove, Illinois.

“God, \$5,000 a month. That’s \$60,000 a year. I wonder who Roberto Sanchez is?”

“I don’t know. So that was the financially interesting stuff. Then there was a whole lot of other stuff – newspaper and magazine clippings, computer print-offs, and books on 9/11, terrorism, the Iraq War, and Timothy McVeigh.”

“The Oklahoma City bomber?”

“The same. I remember looking at a page he had paper clipped in the McVeigh book about how McVeigh felt like the chaplains in the Army had let him down. I remembered thinking that Darrin was an Army chaplain, so that must have hit close to home.”

“Yeah, maybe so.”

“Stace, I’m sorry. I just want you to know everything. I would feel terrible if I didn’t tell you and something happened.” Tina could see that Stacy was very troubled by what Tina had told her.

“Hey, I bet I’m looking at this all wrong, sweetie. Two of the most important people in my life, Rod and you, seem to think the world of Darrin. I know the way I am. I’m overly suspicious, I’m nosy, I look for the negative. I bet you guys are right about Darrin,” Tina offered. “I really want you to be right.”

That didn’t seem to cheer Stacy up. So Tina tried again to add a little more balance to her critique of Darrin.

“And I want you to know that I really appreciate everything Darrin has done in helping get Rod going on remodeling the house. What would have taken me years, Darrin got Rod to do in months. He found us an architect that volunteers down at the homeless shelter. He’s a creative guy, reasonably priced. And Darrin convinced Rod that we should go on a vacation when the remodel starts – even booked the tickets for us on Expedia.”

Stacy gave a half smile.

“We’re going to visit cousins of mine in Hong Kong for a couple of weeks. We’ll get to see the ancestral homeland. Then we’re flying to Sydney to see where Rod spent ten years of his life. It’s going to be great. And I owe that to Darrin. He didn’t have to arrange all of that. I’m sure he’d rather have Rod around for the next couple of months than off with me.”

“Thanks sweetie. But, it looks like Darrin and I still have a lot of talking to do.” *But where do we start?* she thought.

Online Version

Chapter 30

Agent Choi noticed that, so far, Darrin Allis was answering their questions without hesitation. He didn't actually expect much hesitation at this point, but he was also trying to "baseline" Darrin's normal response time. This would be important in reviewing Darrin's answers to the tougher questions ahead.

"Let's move on to your occupations. Again, let's go in reverse chronological order."

"O.k., well right now I am a food service manager at the homeless shelter."

"That's the Pico Avenue Assistance Center where you work now?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"How long have you been there?"

"Since January 2002."

"And about how many hours a week do you work?"

"About 55 hours a week."

"Well, that's a lot. I guess you get paid a lot of overtime."

Darrin squirmed a bit. There's his first lengthy pause Choi thought. That's a "tell" that's he not going to be as forthcoming.

"Um, well, I kind of donate my time above 40 hours a week."

"You mean, you don't get overtime?"

"No, I don't get overtime."

"Do you get paid at all for that time?" Choi asked.

"Ah, well, like I said, I donate it." Darrin responded.

"Okay," Barrett said moving on, "you don't get paid. Who cares? We're not the California state employment office."

Sensing Barrett was getting irritated, Choi continued quickly. “Now what did you do before your current job, Darrin?”

Again, a pause.

“Well, I was a minister for a while and a chaplain.”

“And when did that stop?”

“Back in 1996.”

“And you’ve had your current job since 2002, so what did you do for the five or six years or so between 1996 and 2002.”

“Well, I was unemployed for a while in 1996 and 1997, and then moved to California in 1998.”

“And what did you do?”

“I have a hard time remembering everything that far back.”

“Please try your best. Again, you started your current job when?”

“In January 2002.”

“So what did you do in 2001?”

“I was a manager of a bookstore.”

“What about in 2000?”

“Well, from 1998 to 2000 I had a lot of interesting jobs. Waiting tables, acting, working part-time at a bookstore. You know, the kinds of jobs a lot of people take when they first move to L.A.”

“Can you be more specific on the timeline?” Choi asked.

“Well, starting in 1998, I was a waiter in Brentwood. Then I took some time off to travel. I came back and did some work as an extra for TV shows and commercials.”

“Tell us about the time you took off to travel,” asked Barrett, sensing the first fertile point of questioning.

“Well,” Darrin said, pausing to think for a moment. “Some of it is hard to remember.”

Choi could feel his heart starting to beat a little faster, like a predator feels before pouncing on his prey.

Online Version

Chapter 31

Rod had never been so glad to get back to L.A. as he was on September 9, 1998. He was tempted to kiss the sidewalk outside the terminal at LAX. Between rescuing Darrin in Africa, bringing him back to the States, Rod's own lengthy illness and recovery, and then an unusually late Labor Day weekend that year, he had been gone for a month.

Jenn Belmont had done everything the way that Rod asked. In fact, she also put in a request that Rod's mail be held at the Brentwood Post Office. If Rod was trying to keep Darrin from having contact with the outside world – and that's the way it appeared to Jenn – then holding back the U.S. Mail was about the only other step left.

The limo driver dropped Rod and Darrin off and they walked up to the front door. "I guess I remember the house, but not much else," Darrin said. "How long have I lived here?"

"Only about four months before you left for Africa."

"O.k. Do I have my own room?" Darrin asked, sounding more like a 10-year-old than a 33-year-old.

"Yes. But you took almost everything with you when you went to Africa," Rod explained. *Of course, I sent off the rest to storage,* he thought.

"O.k., I think I'm going to go sit out in the sunshine by the pool," Darrin said.

"And I think I'll join you after I see if Marisa – do you remember her, the housekeeper – has kept my Foster's supply up while I was gone. You want a beer or something," Rod asked, testing a little.

"You know I don't drink," Darrin chuckled.

"O.k., well near death experiences can change people, you know. Just checking," Rod replied.

Rod kept a close watch on Darrin for several months after they got back. In the first few months, Rod intercepted three or four letters from Johnny Duran. He held them for a while, not knowing whether to open them or not. He had a good relationship with his mail carrier, though, and talked to him about what he wanted for his annual holiday gift that year. With that, he was able to have the letters "Returned to Sender, Address Unknown." The letters stopped coming after that.

He decided not to get Darrin his waiter job back because he didn't want to trigger any memories if he could avoid it. Jenn Belmont pulled some strings and helped Darrin get some entertainment industry work – some production assistant jobs, but mostly just as an extra. After a while, Darrin had done enough work to earn his SAG – Screen Actors' Guild – card. That allowed him to get some speaking roles on some sitcoms. Like "Coffee Shop Patron Two" on "Friends."

Darrin thought it was cool seeing himself on television. But that wore off after the first couple of times.

It certainly had impressed Darrin's ex-wife though. Maybe a little too much. Becky and Darrin "slipped up" a bit on one of Darrin's trips back to Indiana to visit his family. Becky's new husband went ballistic when he found out and actually tried to track Darrin down in Los Angeles to beat him up. But things eventually subsided. Becky and her husband went to counseling. Things went back to their version of normal.

As for the pure monetary rewards, the pay as an extra was o.k. If you were asked to show up and you got your voucher, you got paid union scale for an 8-hour day. You would eat the continental breakfast when you arrived. But you always hoped your scene would be shot before

noon and you could go home. If you were lucky, lunch would be set out by the time you were done so you could grab a sandwich, chips and a drink first.

A lot of the people Darrin ran into were aspiring actors: many from the Midwest, but also a number from the South. The wealthy ones – ones whose parents were probably footing the bills to keep them in L.A. – always had cell phones to their ears. Talking about their plans for the evening or calling “daddy” for some extra money. The not-as-wealthy spent most of their off-time sleeping so they would be ready for their evening jobs – security guard, waiter, bartender - that really paid the bills.

Darrin really only needed the jobs to earn some spending money. He didn't owe Becky alimony and didn't really have any bills. Rod was generously providing him room and board. He worked pretty hard at Rod's place though. There always seemed to be something to do.

When late spring came and the studios stopped production for the summer, Darrin got a job at one of the bookstores in Brentwood. It seemed like he saw as many celebrities at the bookstores as he had on the studio lots. They were generally pretty friendly. Maybe there was less stress on them in the summer. No 16 hour-a-day shooting schedules.

Darrin liked the bookstore better than the studio work. He had always liked reading -- the experience of being transported to another time and place without really going anywhere. And it was gratifying helping others get the same experience.

He did some more studio work from Fall 1999 through Spring 2000. But he found himself working more and more at the bookstore. He liked the comfortable routine of grabbing some coffee next door and coming in to work early to read the newspaper.

It was around that time he noticed some patrons buying sets of Christian books known as the “Left Behind” series. Although he was no longer an ordained Baptist minister, Darrin still

had an interest in people's views of the "end times." He figured he should check out what the customers were so interested in. The "Left Behind" series of books posited the theory that Christ would come and take the faithful Christians (which Darrin assumed the author thought were only Evangelical Christians), and that the world would then fall into a great time of tribulation and be tormented by an anti-Christ. The series followed the adventures of some wayward Christians who hadn't quite made the cut with God. They got "left behind." After many adventures, and a lot of death and suffering, Christ would come back again and defeat the evil anti-Christ and non-believers.

Although the story-telling was interesting, he found it quite preachy (which was saying a lot for a former preacher). But these books weren't intended as entertainment. These were really morality tales. Be good now, accept Jesus as your Savior, go to church, stay untainted by the masses, and miss the horrible mess that the world will descend into. It didn't ring true to Darrin, not even with his religious background.

Darrin liked to think about different viewpoints. In fact, he was cursed with the ability to see both sides of most arguments. But he didn't see the side to an argument that Christians should allow – or even cause - the Earth to get worse and worse in hopes of hastening the End Times. The notion seemed to run counter to everything he'd been taught about good stewardship of God's creation.

In the Summer of 2000, Darrin accepted a promotion to bookstore manager. It was an election year, so the shelves were stocked with books about Al Gore and George Bush. There was little doubt that California would be in the Gore column, but Darrin still had a number of Republican customers who wanted a fair balance of reading material in the store.

The shock of the election outcome was too much for many of his customers to take. He had never really been that political. He was much more interested in the process than in the victor. Al Gore was a Baptist. George W. Bush a Methodist. But Gore was a liberal Baptist, and from what Darrin knew of Methodists, “W” had to be on the conservative end of the political spectrum for the normal Sunday morning Methodist crowd.

Darrin figured that whichever white guy won probably wouldn’t make much of a difference for him. But a number of his customers threatened to leave the country upon Bush’s inauguration in early 2001. A couple of them even carried through on the threat.

For his part, Rod thought it was great that George W. Bush had been elected. He had been fascinated by a story written by conservative columnist Tucker Carlson, chronicling a ‘week in the life’ of candidate Bush.

“Come on Darrin, Tucker Carlson says this guy uses the “F” word more than I do. And he drinks beer. And he owned a baseball team. We just had the smartest President ever with Clinton. He got so bored he had to spend his time getting hummers from some intern. It’s about time we handed this country back to those of us with average intelligence. Bush’ll spend so much time trying to figure out what’s going on, he won’t have time to screw around.

“Can’t argue with that logic, Rod,” Darrin replied. “You don’t think the fact Bush wants to cut your taxes has anything to do with your views?”

“Naaaah,” Rod laughed. “For the record, I didn’t vote for him.”

“Rod, that’s because you didn’t vote for anybody,” Darrin chided. “You got up around 10 in the morning, thought about it for 20 seconds, couldn’t figure out where you would vote – assuming you were even registered – and gave up. You, sir, are a fine American.”

“Yes, yes, a fine American. Thank you!” Rod replied in his best imitation of Saturday Night Live’s John Lovitz playing Master Thespian.

Political books remained popular through the Spring of 2001, and Darrin kept the store well stocked and his customers happy. Rod was pleased that, almost three years after what had happened in Tanzania, Darrin seemed to be thriving.

For his part, Rod had fallen for Tina Fong, an advertising executive that Jenn Belmont had introduced him to. Tina was driven. Rod liked to compare her to a motocross bike: she was small, sleek and beautiful. She provided you with the horsepower to go places. You didn’t control her, as much as you guided her along to where you wanted to go. Even when she was at a standstill, you could hear her engines running.

Rod and Tina had talked about moving in together. Rod was concerned about Darrin though, and what he would do. He didn’t want to kick his best friend out. But then something happened, and Rod felt like his hand was being forced.

Chapter 32

Stacy had always liked nice cars. The first car her father bought her when she got her license was a small, silver Mercedes. She got her first speeding ticket the next day. And she hadn't slowed down since. Stacy's monthly auto insurance bill was larger than most peoples' car payment. She was always one ticket away from losing her license. She had played the system to the max. She had done the maximum number of traffic school courses one could do to take points off her license. And she was proactive in avoiding tickets after getting pulled over. Most of the traffic cops on the Westside of L.A. had been treated either to the sight of her hiked up skirt – and very sweet pair of thighs -- when they approached her car or her uncontrollable sobbing that she “just couldn't get one more ticket.” Fortunately for Stacy, most of the traffic cops were men.

For all the speeding though, Stacy had never been in an accident. Her reflexes were near perfect and her instincts about what other drivers would do were keen.

As she drove her blue BMW Z-3 back to Brentwood from the Santa Monica bar where she had just met Tina for drinks and a lecture, a white van cut her off and came to a dead stop. Most drivers would have tried to slam on the brakes – and would have ended up piling into the rear end of the van. Stacy's reaction was the opposite – she hit the gas and swerved to the left around the stopped van. Although a foolish move for most drivers, Stacy always kept track in her mirrors – and her head – the exact location of any car within a couple hundred feet of her.

Stacy hit the horn and gave the “single digit salute” to the van driver in her rearview mirror. The van started to speed up and Stacy knew she had violated a cardinal rule of L.A.: if you do flip somebody off, you had better duck. People in L.A. carry guns and use them – often when driving.

Stacy knew she didn't want to go near her condo until she shook the van. She took a right at the next light and got on the Santa Monica Freeway heading toward downtown. She could still see the van in her rearview mirror. In fact, it had run a red light on Pico Boulevard to keep up with her.

“Oh man, come on!” she exclaimed. She had choices. She could floor it on the Santa Monica Freeway and probably outrun the van fairly quickly. “Wanna race all the way to Las Vegas, asshole?” she said out loud, seeing the van get on the Freeway.

But it occurred to her that if traffic stopped on the Freeway (as it often did in L.A.) she would be a sitting duck while the van wound through traffic after her. So she did what any rational person should do – she pulled off at the next exit and headed straight for a police station.

Chapter 33

“So, Darrin, in the summer of 1998, you traveled. Where did you go?” asked Barrett.

“Well,” Darrin paused, “I don’t really remember it, but I’m told I went to Tanzania, in Africa.”

“That’s kind of funny that you wouldn’t remember a trip like that. I mean, most people probably never make it to Africa in their whole lives. So you would think it would be hard to forget that,” Choi said, probingly.

“Well, I ended up getting hurt and was in a coma. It affected my memory.”

“Then how do you know you were there?” Barrett asked.

“Well, my passport is stamped. And my friends who came and picked me up after I got hurt sure remember it.”

“Yeah, who was it that picked you up?” Choi asked.

“Well, my friend Rod Warner - I mentioned earlier that I lived with him for a few years. And then another guy, a doctor, Scott Greenbaum.”

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“Scott Greenbaum? Gene didn’t we have a Homeland Security Meeting with a toxicologist named Scott Greenbaum a couple of months ago?” Director Moran asked Agent Gene Claussen back in the observation room.

“Greenbaum, Greenbaum. Yeah, he gave the presentation of the potential impact of biological weapons on the Greater Los Angeles Area,” replied Claussen. Gene Claussen was the Homeland Security liaison for the FBI’s Los Angeles office.

“I wonder why he was flying to Africa to pick this guy up?” asked Moran, a bit puzzled.

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“How did you get hurt in Tanzania?” Choi asked Darrin.

“Well, I’m told I was standing outside the Embassy in the capital, Dar es Salaam, when somebody drove up with a truck bomb.”

“Oh, the Embassy bombing back in 1998. What a horrible thing. Did you ever talk to anybody in the United States government about this?”

“No, not that I recall.”

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“It wasn't for lack of tryin',” said Agent Hogue to the other observers.

“Well, it sounds like he's pretty open about being there. Even though he says he doesn't remember, he's not trying to pretend it didn't happen,” observed Agent Socia.

“Why would he be standing outside the Embassy though?” asked Agent Robles.

“Well, one answer might be that he was in the truck when it pulled up and he jumped out before it exploded,” hypothesized Agent al-Jafari.

“No, no, I specifically remember witnesses saying that he was outside the Embassy before the truck pulled up. He was yelling at people to stay away. He at least scared a lot of Americans. A lot of others either didn't understand him or thought he was nuts,” said Agent Hogue.

“Laurie, what do you think?” asked Moran, turning toward Dr. Wentz.

“Well, it could be a couple of things. He could have felt remorse over what was going to happen. Decided he didn't want to go through with it. Or, . . .,” said Dr. Wentz.

“Or what?” asked Moran.

“Well, based on the personality I'm seeing here, and his background of being a chaplain and then working in this homeless shelter, it might be "Fireman's Complex,” suggested Dr. Wentz.

“Fireman's Complex?” asked Moran. “I’ve never heard of that.”

“We see it sometimes with safety workers like firemen. They cause a horrible event to happen so they can rush in and save people. Maybe that's what happened here. He helps set up a bombing and then rushes in to save peoples' lives. But before he can do much, he gets injured himself,” she explained.

“I think Lauri is being nice in not mentioning that some of your colleagues went with this same theory with Richard Jewell back in the '96 Olympic Park bombing. We know how embarrassing that was for the Bureau. Let’s keep all this speculation within the ‘cone of silence,” urged AUSA Garza.

“Good point, Manny. But Cecil, would Lauri’s theory be consistent with the eyewitness accounts?” asked Director Moran.

“I suppose so,” Agent Hogue responded.

Director Moran looked at the monitor for Interrogation Three and stroked his chin.

“Cecil, I want you on this case. Gene, set up a meeting with Scott Greenbaum. Take Ron with, but you guys let Cecil know what you find out. See why the hell the good Doctor Greenbaum went over there to get this guy. This smells funny.”

“And then we should stop by and see his friend, Rod Warner,” Cecil Hogue suggested.

“I think I remember him. He may be helpful.”

“Good idea. Go out with Ron on that visit. We need to develop this a little more. We better not hammer this too much tonight before we get our ducks in a row,” said Director Moran, picking up the phone.

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The phone in the interrogation room rang. Barrett paused for a moment. Agent Choi walked over and picked it up.

“This is Agent Choi.”

“Ron, this is Jimmy. We've got some leads on the Tanzania trip that we need to work a little more in the field. Let's skip the questions on that for now. I need you and Carl to move on to the other things we wanted to talk to him about.”

“O.k. Yes, thanks for the call. Bye now.” Choi hung up the phone.

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Barrett resumed the questioning.

“Did you know somebody at the Embassy?”

“Agent Barrett,” said Choi interrupting. “We will need to ask Darrin about this some other time if we are going to get to the things we need his help with tonight.”

Choi then nodded toward the phone.

Barrett understood immediately that the team "behind the mirror" wanted him to stop asking questions about Tanzania for some reason.

"You're right Agent Choi, we need to talk to Darrin about other things tonight," Barrett said.

Darrin was relieved. He had started feeling the butterflies -- a lot of them. He felt he had done fine so far. He had told the truth as far as not remembering on his own after he got back

from the trip. And that was the frame of mind he put himself into when answering the questions. Of course, thanks to Johnny Duran, Darrin now recalled everything.

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