

Chapter 34

Rod had seen the large manila envelope from Darrin's parents that morning in early April of 2001. It never occurred to him to intercept it. In fact, he never gave it a second thought. Darrin's parents sent him packages from time to time. Pictures of his nieces and nephews. Things like that. A large envelope wasn't anything out of the ordinary.

Rod usually left Darrin's mail on the credenza in the entryway. Darrin noticed the envelope that evening when he returned home from work. He figured it was a new calendar or a magazine his parents thought he might be interested in. He opened the envelope and looked at the short cover note from his father:

April 2, 2001

Darrin: It was 18 degrees last night. I think that is the coldest it's ever been on April 1st in Muncie. A nice April Fool's on us. Supposed to warm up to 57 degrees by the weekend though, so that was probably the last of it. I'm sending an envelope that we got from someone who says he was an Army buddy of yours. Sounds like he's been looking for you. I'll leave it up to you whether you want to contact him. We were concerned that maybe it's some friend of Becky's husband??? Anyway, remember to call pal.

Love,

Dad and Mom

Hmm. Army buddy, Darrin thought. Wow, it had been forever since he had even thought about being in the Army. Darrin was pretty sure he had been in the Army. He remembered chaplain's basic training in Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey. He remembered being a chaplain at Ft. Riley. Then to Saudi Arabia. Not a whole lot else. It didn't seem important. But he guessed that was funny not thinking about a part of your life. Oh well, he had moved on.

Next, he looked at the letter the "buddy" had sent his parents.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Allis:

Please forgive me for this letter if it seems out of the blue. I served in the U.S. Army, First Infantry, with your son, Darrin Allis. I recalled him saying he was from Indiana, and I was hoping that you still lived there. I last spoke to your son about three years ago. We were pretty close, I guess you could say. He was supposed to go on a trip to Africa in 1998 and I never heard from him after that. I sincerely hope he is o.k. I was unable to contact him after that trip. I guess he must have moved. I know he was living in Los Angeles before.

Anyway, it's very important that I get in touch with him. I am enclosing a letter to him and some papers that he had shared with me. If you are able to forward these things to him, I would appreciate it. If you talk to him, please let him know that Johnny Duran is trying to reach him. He will remember me. Again, I hope he is o.k. I want you to know that he was a very special person. I am sure that is because he has fine parents like you.

Sincerely,

Master Sgt. Juan A. Duran (U.S. Army, Ret.)

Duran. Now that was a name that sounded familiar, Darrin thought. Yes, Darrin remembered Johnny Duran being assigned as an assistant to him or to somebody he worked with.

Darrin then tore open the sealed envelope that Johnny Duran had included with the cover letter. Inside was another letter and some photocopies.

Dear Chappy:

You don't know how much I hope this letter finds you well. The last time we talked you were on the way to Dar es Salaam. I had hoped that the mission succeeded. Then I heard on the news that 224 people died in Nairobi. But only 11 people died in Dar es Salaam. I couldn't believe it. That wasn't what I had hoped to hear, but at least your trip was a partial success it looks like.

When I didn't hear from you after that, I tried to call and email and write to you. Nothing worked, so I thought (hoped) you had just moved. And your name didn't have a phone number associated with it. I spent a week calling information in every area code in the country and couldn't find you. I assumed the worst had happened. I still don't know if it did. I hope it didn't.

I am enclosing your notes. You will see that I have checked off the occurrence on October 12, 2000 relating to the ship, the U.S.S. Cole. That was a tougher one. But the timetable is still precise. Now we have the attack coming up on September 11th that we had decided will be in New York. We really need to talk about this Chappy. Please call me right away at (312) 555-1984 if you get this letter.

Sincerely,

Johnny

Darrin started looking through the papers - dates, notes, etc. A stabbing pain started deep inside his head. His brain did not want him to remember this. The pain got worse. His mind started to flood with images. Yes, he knew Johnny. They were there together at Hennessey's funeral. They were there in the office at King Khalid Military City in the desert in Saudi Arabia. Hennessey grabbed the scroll and ran. Jibril was in shock. The dates, he had to write them down. He and Johnny went over Dar es Salaam -- over and over. And Jibril, he was there in Dar es Salaam. Yes, Darrin looked up and saw Jibril. He looked down and saw blood pouring out of his leg. He was put into a car. He remembered being in the back seat of the car. "There, there, little one. You will live." Then he remembered waking up and Rod was there.

He couldn't look anymore. It hurt. He did not want to remember. Hennessey in the coffin. His email before he died. "Hey Chappy." Ignoring him about Tim McVeigh.

No, he did not need to remember this. *Help me, Lord*, Darrin thought.

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Rod had dreamed about a moment like this since the first time he saw Dana Delany play a dominatrix in the movie "Exit to Eden." Dana Delany with that whip and the leather and the full frontal. Wow! He and Tina had been high one night and he talked her into watching the widely panned flick.

"Not bad," Tina said, providing her review after they finished the movie. "Why did they put Dan Aykroyd and Rosie O'Donnell in that movie? Based on their half-hearted performances, I bet they had felt the same way. Is that what you want?"

"Yes, mistress," Rod smiled.

So there Rod was a few days later, face planting into a prone position on his bed courtesy of a little push in the back from Tina. Rod's hands were cuffed behind his back. The only other

thing he was wearing was a small pair of leather underwear – about the size of a Speedo. *This is going to be perfect*, he thought. As a warm-up before Tina put on the cuffs, Rod had smoked half a blunt he'd gotten on one of his annual R.V. pilgrimages to the Michigan 'Huana Farms a couple hours north of Detroit. It was a sativa hybrid he had discovered was very helpful in enhancing his sexual experiences.

Tina was wearing a strapless leather one piece with strategically located metal studs. And she had on the vinyl boots that Rod picked out in a place in West Hollywood. The "whip" had thin horsehair braids on the end of it. Nothing that would hurt too badly. Kind of like getting slapped with some twine. Rod had thought that one over and was still a little afraid that Tina might get carried away with a real leather whip.

"O.k. Mr. Warner," Tina said "Mouth off to me again and I'm going to knock you down on the floor. Now you're going to get what is coming to you."

Tina heard what sounded like deep moaning.

"What a little bitch! I haven't even hit you yet, Rod," Tina said.

"I know. It's not me. This sucks." Rod talked in very choppy sentences when he felt frustration coming on. "Dammit."

Tina grabbed the key clipped to a hook on the right hip of her leathers and uncuffed Rod. He got up and grabbed a bathrobe.

Things were back to normal "physically" for Rod by the time he walked across the house and reached the top of the stairs near Darrin's room. He pounded on Darrin's door like he wanted to pound on Darrin. It helped relieve the frustration a little bit. Now he was just mainly concerned.

“Darrin. What's going on?” Rod asked to the door. He pressed his ear to the door. There was crying.

"It hurts," he heard Darrin saying. Rod opened the door. Darrin was sitting on the floor with his hands on his temples.

“Darrin, what's the matter?” Rod asked, walking toward Darrin. There was no real response. Just Darrin saying, "It hurts."

Ok, Rod thought, what do I do? Maybe he's taken something? What are these papers on the floor? Then Rod felt pain of his own. He could see the letter from Johnny Duran to Darrin's parents.

Didn't see that one coming, Rod thought. Then some notes like the ones he had Jenn pack away at the storage unit.

Rod went into Darrin's bathroom and got him a glass of water.

“Darrin, stay with me here. I need you to take a drink of water. Calm down. Let's get you up to your bed,” Rod said.

Tina appeared at Darrin's door.

"Is he o.k.? Should I call an ambulance?"

It was apparently enough to shock Darrin back to reality – well, a reality where Tina was dressed in a skimpy leather outfit with high-heeled boots on. Darrin stared for a moment and then he put his face back in his hands.

Rod had seen the lights go on in Darrin's eyes. *Tina did look good,* Rod thought. O.k., back to her question. No, Rod didn't want to have to explain this whole mess to anyone if he didn't have to.

“I think he'll be o.k. Can you go grab me a bottle of scotch and a glass.”

“But I thought he doesn't drink?”

“Tina! Now, please!”

After Tina walked out, Rod put his arm around his friend.

"I tried my best, buddy. I kept you away from this stuff for three years. Damn, damn, damn. What is it with this guy Duran anyway?"

Darrin didn't answer.

Rod felt sick to his stomach.

"So is this stuff going to start again?" Rod asked. "The stuff like Tanzania? Answer me!"

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Darrin said in a muffled voice, his face still in his hands.

“Screw this! I'm not going to let him do this to you again Darrin.”

Then, Darrin unburied his face from his hands, turned to Rod, and in a startlingly clear voice said, "It's not his fault Rod. He's just following orders."

“Whose orders?”

Darrin didn't respond.

“Darrin, whose orders is he following.”

“Mine. They're my orders, Rod. Johnny Duran is just following my orders.”

“But you haven't talked to this guy in years.”

“Doesn't matter. He's a soldier, Rod. I gave him the orders a long time ago. Now he's just following them.”

Tina walked back in with the bottle of scotch and a glass. She had also taken a moment to put on one of Rod's t-shirts, which came down below her knees. You could still see the vinyl boots though.

Rod kissed Tina and took the bottle and glass from her. He poured himself a shot of scotch and knocked it back.

ONLINE VERSION

Chapter 35

Stacy didn't see the white van after she pulled into the LAPD substation on Venice Boulevard. She sat there for almost a half hour scanning back and forth for anything that looked like the white van. They must have given up when she pulled off the Santa Monica Freeway.

She pulled back onto Venice Boulevard and headed east, away from home. She drove for about 10 minutes parallel to the Santa Monica Freeway. No sign of the white van. She turned left under the Freeway and got on the Westbound ramp headed back toward Brentwood. "Too many crazy people in this city," she yelled out loud. She turned up Sheryl Crow on her radio and tried to forget about it.

Escaping crazy people in white vans is relatively easy, she thought. What do you do if you have fallen in love with someone who might be crazy? Where did Darrin get all the money? And why does he live such a spartan existence?

Stacy had dated cheap men before. But they were usually only cheap when it came to spending money on a date. They still wore Rolexes and Gucci loafers. Why was Darrin trying to hide his wealth? Did he owe his ex-wife alimony or something? But Tina had told her that Darrin's ex-wife remarried. And Tina would know if there were kids somewhere who were owed child support – that would have been the first question she would have asked Rod about Darrin given Tina's volunteer work on woman's rights issues.

She found the drug thing unbelievable. If Darrin had taken drugs, it must have been some sort of accident. Her curiosity had led her to experiment with a little of just about everything on the market. But Darrin wasn't that way.

“There has to be more to this story,” she said out loud, as she drove up I-405 near Wilshire Boulevard and past the Federal Building where a number of federal law enforcement officials were saying the same thing to themselves.

ONLINE VERSION

Chapter 36

As he inched his way up I-5 to Orange County from San Diego, Jibril al-Attas felt a type of road rage overcoming him. These people – these Americans – had no manners whatsoever. And they were thin-skinned. A bad combination.

“Hey, Habib, use your turn signal the next time,” someone yelled as he switched lanes. And they were obviously racists. Any qualms he had about killing “innocents” disappeared by the time he reached the Orange County line nearly two hours later.

He kept reminding himself to focus on the task at hand. He wasn't quite sure why God was testing him this way. Why couldn't God have just given him the whole message at the same time that evening in 1991? Because the infidel American Hennessey had tried to foil God's plan, that's why. But he did not succeed. No, for some reason, God willed it that Jibril should work with Darrin Allis. There had to be some lesson he was missing in all this.

* * *

Jibril heard Darrin and his men talking while he was still out in the hallway. He knew immediately they were talking about the scroll. He had always known it had power. And now that power was his. They didn't notice him as he stood in the doorway. He thought he might listen for a little while without saying anything in case Darrin Allis wasn't so forthcoming with him later. The “Lions of the Sons of Ishmael.” Those words gave Jibril a warm feeling in his heart. And they would turn against the Americans. Jibril could see that happening. The arrogance of the Americans would cause their downfall.

Jibril felt an overwhelming sense of joy come over him. He was watching a miracle unfold. He fell to his knees.

Jibril didn't see what happened next. But when he realized the scroll was gone, he went on auto-pilot. God was directing him, he decided. He had one task - get the scroll.

He almost killed Darrin Allis that day in Saudi Arabia. The rage he felt. It was something he thought about when the devil would come to tempt him -- telling him he shouldn't do God's will and kill those who were oppressing his people. He thought about that rage -- of the infidels taking the scroll - the holy words of God, and destroying them. It was what they had done over and over in the world. And now he didn't - his people didn't -- know God's will because an infidel burned it. These sons of whores had to die.

* * *

Jibril couldn't let that rage consume him again when he met Darrin Allis. This man was his only hope of finding what god had in store for the Lions of the Sons of Ishmael. Osama was sick. He was moving from place to place in Pakistan. Not the life of a prince.

Jibril needed to know if his brother, Osama, would have to spend the rest of his life on the run, or if he would return triumphant to the holy land and overthrow the House of Saud. And maybe he, Jibril, would have the honor of beheading the traitors one by one.

* * *

Talking to his brother Osama about the scroll was the hardest thing Jibril ever had to do. Fortunately, the excitement of what was happening to Saddam buoyed the spirits of Osama. With Saddam out of the way they would be one step closer to a Sunni kingdom.

“What is it my brother?”

“I have bad news.”

“Sit, please. Let us have some tea and dates.”

“The scroll . . . ,” he began.

“Yes, yes, you found someone who could read it. What happened? Is it gibberish?”

“No. Not at all. It tells of marvelous things. Marvelous things we will do. It spoke of us defeating Saddam.”

“That is wonderful. I told you, did I not? I told you!” he said slapping Jibril on the shoulder and laughing.

He didn't know how to say it. So he just said it. "An American soldier burned the scroll. It is gone."

“What? What are you saying? You tell me all these wonderful things, but now it is gone? Who did this?”

“A man named Hennessey. A foot soldier.”

“I knew we never should have let them in our land. This is what happens when the House of Saud turns its back on God. Did you kill this . . . this infidel?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I didn't have a chance. He escaped while I was trying to save the scroll.”

Jibril had never seen Osama look this angry. Osama sat thinking for a few moments.

“The first thing you need to do is contact Nasser . . . you remember him . . . , he is a very important man and has the ear of the King. I cannot do it because of the . . . the sensitivities about me. But you tell him that this is my order and he will see it is done.”

“Yes my brother,” Jibril replied.

* * *

Now Jibril would visit Darrin Allis and get the rest of the message. Of course, the message was almost lost forever when Darrin Allis nearly died in Tanzania. That was Jibril's

fault, and Jibril knew it. He felt he had matured in the past few years, though. He would get the rest of the message this time. Then he and Ibrahim would leave this horrible place, hopefully for the last time. They would have to rely on news reporters to describe the slaughter because they would be half a world away by then.

ONLINE VERSION

Chapter 37

The moment had clearly passed by the time Rod and Tina went back to their bedroom after calming Darrin down.

“Rod, what was he talking about orders. What's the matter with Darrin?”

Oh, man, how can I even begin to explain this to Tina, he asked himself. He couldn't. So he didn't. He had to lie.

“He gets migraines sometimes. It's the stress from work at the bookstore. He's stressed out over some orders he placed that got screwed up. You know these Brentwood types – if you make a mistake they will stand there for an hour berating you over it. Bunch of stinkin' movie industry wannabes,” Rod added for effect.

“Oh, wow. I didn't realize he takes his job so seriously,” Tina said.

“No, that's all. I get worried about him sometimes,” Rod said truthfully.

“Well, I think it's nice that you worry about your friend and look after him,” Tina responded, not so truthfully.

In the weeks that followed, Rod noticed that Darrin and Johnny Duran were spending a lot of time talking on the phone and Darrin was on the Internet very late most nights. He noticed that Darrin was even adding Starbucks to his morning routine. Not that Rod was up that early, but he saw the cups in the trash. Looked like a Venti-sized regular coffee.

Enough caffeine in one of those to keep a horse awake for week, Rod thought.

Darrin's “eviction” from Rod's house started innocently enough – for Darrin at least. The three of them – Rod, Tina, and Darrin – were standing around in the kitchen one evening having a snack. Rod loved having cheese and water crackers with a good bottle of wine. He was cubing some pieces of stilton and dried parmesan when Tina made an observation.

“You know something you never see a recipe for is crackers. It’s because you can’t make them at home,” she expounded.

“Realllllly?” Rod replied, sensing he could get a punch line in if he played things right.

“Yes. Really,” Tina shot back.

“You can’t make crackers at home? Is it illegal or something? I mean, did a guy named Nabisco bribe some Congressman in 1895 to pass a law banning cracker making in homes?” Rod said, with a big smile on his face.

It caught Darrin off guard, and he started laughing so hard that he finally doubled over.

“No, butthead, it’s because you need a special oven,” Tina shot back. She looked at Darrin, still snorting, and walked out.

Later that night, Rod came to bed and Tina was already under the covers, laying on her side, facing away from him.

“You still awake, baby,” Rod asked.

Tina rolled over to face him. “Rod, I want him out of here,” she said.

“Why? Because of the crackers thing. Darrin didn’t even say anything.”

“Yeah, but you feel like you need to do your one-man comedy act when he is around. I’ve had it. If you want any more sweet and sour anytime soon, then he has to go.”

The reference was to sex, of course. And an old Saturday Night Live skit with Dana Carvey. Rod loved SNL reruns. He missed some of the best years of SNL when he was living in Australia. In this particular skit, Dana Carvey played an Asian man talking about Valerie Bertinelli. “She a stone fox. I’d like to get a little sweet and sour you know what!” Rod had insensitively started using the same reference with Tina due to her Chinese heritage. Tina

actually thought it was cute, so “sweet and sour” kind of stuck as one of their euphemisms. More descriptive than “you wanna do it?” or, the Southern version, “how ‘bout some sugar.”

“Come on, Tina, you’re not being fair. Where is he going to go? He works at a bookstore.”

“Is he going to live here forever, Rod? You know, my parents are already upset that we’re together. And that I’m living with you before we’re married. But living in a house with two guys? My father is going absolutely nuts.”

“Tell papason to get in 21st Century,” Rod said angrily, rolling over and facing away from Tina.

“So that’s the answer Rod? Do your little ethnic slurs when you don’t agree with my father. Does that make you feel better somehow? Like you’re a bigger man because you were born in Doughnut Hole, Indiana. That’s bullshit. He was born in Hong Kong – that’s the big city, Rod. More cultured than where you’re from. And, speaking of culture, my people had developed an alphabet and were the most advanced society in the world while your tribe was still fingerpainting on cave walls with their own shit.”

You couldn’t stop Tina when she was on a roll. Now, she was going to finish Rod off. “Well maybe you didn’t respect your father because he was some factory worker, but I respect mine. I’m not going to listen to this,” she said, storming out.

That hurt, Rod thought. Tina knew Rod loved his father and had moved back to the States to be closer to him when he got cancer. But Tina wanted Rod to feel the kind of pain he made her feel with his jab at her father. She was a major leaguer when it came to arguing. And she was more right than she knew – not just about how Rod’s comment was out of line, but about Darrin needing to go.

Rod got up early the next morning – no small feat for him - so he could talk to Darrin before he left for the bookstore. He went to Darrin’s room and tried breaking the news to him as gently as he could. He told Darrin that he and Tina would be getting engaged, and that they wanted to kind of start their own life together.

“Hey, man, I'm not saying you have to leave tomorrow. But I'd like you to start looking for a place,” Rod said.

Darrin was reading an email. “Yeah, no, I understand Rod.” Darrin turned to look at Rod. “You've been really good to me. I appreciate it. Let me start checking the newspapers for a place.”

“O.k., well let me know if there’s anything I can do.”

“Sure, Rod.”

As he walked out of Darrin’s room, Rod thought that the conversation was easier than it should have been. Darrin seemed really distracted by this resumed relationship with Johnny Duran. Just like before Tanzania.

Rod didn't really have anybody he could talk to about Darrin. Nobody was really going to understand. They would either overreact themselves - and tell Rod he should call the cops or something - or they would think Rod was overreacting. For the first time in a very long time - since the nights he sat with Darrin in the hospital in Tanzania - Rod turned to the only one he thought might be able to understand and help his friend.

"Lord," Rod said out loud, “please help Darrin. He's tried to do a lot for you in his life. Please watch over him." If there was a God, Rod figured he must owe Darrin Allis something.

Chapter 38

“So you mentioned you were a chaplain in the Army?” said Agent Choi, pushing on to other ground they hoped to cover that night.

“Yes, I served an 8-year hitch from 1988 to 1996,” Darrin responded.

“That’s a long time to be in the Army,” said Barrett. “I mean, I was only in for a couple of years in the early 1970s.”

“Yeah, well I had thought about making a career out of it. But I needed the eight years to help pay off all my student loans and things.”

“What made you change your mind?” asked Choi. “I mean, about making a career out of the Army.”

Another pause. But Choi noticed that Darrin wasn’t looking away, like he was trying to make something up. It was more like he was being very careful with the exact words he was choosing.

"I guess it just didn't suit me. I didn't think I could continue to maintain a level of performance that the troops deserved," he replied. Or meet the most basic standard for being a chaplain, Darrin thought to himself.

“So what’s involved in becoming a chaplain?” Barrett asked.

“Well, first you have to decide you want to be a minister. An Army chaplain is just a minister whose congregation happens to be soldiers.”

“So did you know you were going to be a chaplain when you decided you wanted to be a minister?” asked Choi.

“No, not really. It was something I decided to do once I was in seminary school.”

* * *

Darrin and Becky returned to Muncie the summer after his first year of pursuing his Master of Divinity Degree at Austin Theological Seminary in Texas. He had received his ordination papers that spring and was excited to be spending the summer as an assistant pastor of his father-in-law's church. Pastor Chuck Cooper had taken a small Baptist church of about 150 people and turned it into the largest church in Muncie – over 1,000 members. First Bible Baptist Church had three Sunday morning services and a “standing room only” Sunday evening service.

Darrin and Becky had worked with the youth ministry every summer since they graduated from high school. While other students went on spring break from Scofield Bible Institute, Darrin and Becky came back to Muncie. They also made the five-hour drive from Chicago at least once a month.

Chuck Cooper was carefully grooming Darrin Allis to take over his church one day. Unfortunately, this was clear to everyone and it made it hard for him to get a dedicated group of associate pastors. Older, more experienced ministers weren't going to come in and devote years to First Bible Baptist only to get leap-frogged by Chuck Cooper's son-in-law.

Chuck Cooper had hoped that Darrin would join his staff full-time after graduating with his Bachelor's Degree from Scofield Bible Institute. The Bachelor's Degree would qualify him for ordination. Of course, Chuck Cooper had qualified for ordination through correspondence course and he liked to say that “I just wanted to learn the Bible – none of this other trivia stuff they teach at college.” Of course, most educators wouldn't dismiss English Lit, Geology, Sociology, and Psychology as trivial. But Chuck understood that congregations these days were more educated and expected their leaders to have a similar level of academic background. He didn't object to Darrin getting his degree.

But Pastor Cooper thought there was a line of reasonableness. A degree from Scofield was more than enough. And, having paid for four years of tuition for Becky, that wasn't just his opinion – it was his creed.

Which is why he was so upset when he found out Darrin was considering another 2 years of schooling to get his Master of Divinity Degree.

“You know Dad,” which is what Darrin had called his father-in-law since marrying Becky after their freshman year of college, “I think the Lord wants me to get my divinity degree.”

“Is that really what the Lord's telling you, Darrin. Or is it your own pride?”

“I think God's given me a gift, Dad. And it would be wrong for me not to develop it.”

“So what's this mean? I'm going to support you and Becky for another two years?”

Pastor Cooper snapped.

“Don't you worry about a thing. I can support my wife,” Darrin responded in kind. And he did. He went to Austin Theological Seminary during the day, and worked from four to midnight as assistant manager of a Shoney's Restaurant five nights a week.

Chuck Cooper would still rant to his wife about how Darrin was wasting time and money pursuing “fancy degrees.”

But Rhonda Cooper loved her son-in-law and she gave it right back to her husband.

“You leave that boy alone, Chuck. You know how smart he is. He's gonna do great things one day. And, in case you hadn't noticed, our daughter thinks the sun rises and sets on him. I don't think you want to make either of them unhappy, now do you?”

“Pride goes before destruction, Rhonda. You remember that.”

“Study to show yourself approved. That’s what the Apostle Paul told Timothy. You want to keep trading Bible verses or are we finished now?” she asked.

Unfortunately, even though Rhonda Cooper ran the home, Chuck Cooper ran the church. And the way he ran the church – and uneasy mixture of love and fear – left some detractors. But Chuck Cooper – who was a big fan of the Godfather series of movies – followed the old mob adage, “Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer.” He made sure that he kept possible dissenters close to him.

One such “troublemaker” was Jeff Yount, a principal at one of the local high schools. Although Chuck Cooper had put Yount on the church’s governing board, Yount still felt that Pastor Cooper’s sermons were a bit heavy on emotion and a bit light on “practical” Christianity. Darrin preached a sermon one Sunday night about different kinds of love in the New Testament – married love, brotherly love, and God’s love. He referred to the original Greek words of eros, philos, and agape in making the point that “God’s love is a higher love. It expects nothing in return.”

Darrin got rave reviews. “That was a great sermon Darrin. One day you’ll be running this church. And I’m looking forward to it. You’ll have my full support,” said Deacon Yount, pumping Darrin’s arm.

Darrin cringed. Jeff Yount hadn't noticed Chuck Cooper standing behind him. He could see a dark look growing over his father-in-law’s face. First fear. Then fear giving way to angry resentment.

“Well, I don't know what God's plan will be, but this is certainly a wonderful church. We can thank Chuck Cooper for that leadership.” Too little, too late. Pastor Cooper flashed a fake

smile at one of the ladies of the church who said hello to him. He then turned and headed to the large office he occupied on the main level of the church.

Darrin spoke to Becky about it that night.

“Oh Darrin, Daddy only wants what is best for you. He loves you. And even if he didn't, you're married to his daughter.”

Unfortunately, Becky didn't understand that there was one thing Chuck Cooper put ahead of all those things – his own pride. Of course, it was the very thing that he warned his wife would be Darrin's downfall. Another old chestnut confirmed – we see best the flaws in others that we have in our own selves.

The rest of the summer was pretty uncomfortable for Darrin.

“When are you going to preach again, Darrin?” members of the congregation would ask. “Oh well, you know, pretty busy with these different things. And Pastor Chuck is doing a great job,” he would add. Except that Pastor Cooper went on vacation and gave everybody on staff a chance to preach except for Darrin. In fact, Chuck Cooper even asked a member of the congregation who had never preached a sermon before to give the Sunday night sermon during the second week of his vacation.

Darrin got the message. Even Becky got it. “Sweetie, I think maybe First Bible Baptist Church is not the goal we should be striving for. I think Jesus has bigger plans for us,” she told Darrin as they drove back to Austin, Texas that September.

The thought, *No shit Sherlock Holmes* crossed Darrin's mind, but he of course wouldn't let himself say it out loud.

As it so happened, a recruiter from the Army Chaplain Corps came to the Austin Theological Seminary Campus that fall. Darrin hadn't planned to talk to the man, Chaplain

(Major) Phil Pawlik. But as he walked past the booth where Chaplain Pawlik was sitting he noticed the sign “Army Chaplains – Serving God and Country.” Hmmm, God and Country. That sounded good. Darrin really enjoyed the movie “Platoon.”

“Hello, son, can I give you some information on the Chaplains Corps?” asked Pawlik.

“Sure. What’s involved with that?” asked Darrin.

“Well, a commitment to ministry under very tough circumstances,” replied Chaplain Pawlik.

Couldn’t be much more difficult than the summer I just spent taking a whipping from Chuck Cooper, Darrin thought.

“Sure, I can understand that,” Darrin answered. Pawlik went on to explain to Darrin how, once he finished his divinity degree, he could go to 12 weeks of chaplain’s basic training in Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey. Then he would be admitted to the Army as an officer. A captain.

“Don’t officers start out as lieutenants?” Darrin asked.

“Not in the Chaplains Corps. Straight to captain,” Pawlik replied.

That was intriguing to Darrin. His own father had been in Army intelligence for four years and never made it past first lieutenant. Darrin could be a captain.

“And the benefits are great. Do you have student loans?” Chaplain Pawlik asked.

“Oh, yeah,” Darrin sighed.

“The Army will pay a lot of those off for you,” Pawlik said, sensing he might be getting some traction.

One of the attractions of going to work with Chuck Cooper was the security of a regular paycheck. And the ability to pay off student loans. But he never liked the idea of Chuck Cooper owning his soul.

“But the real reward is being able to change the lives of men and women in uniform. They really need the Lord,” Pawlik said sincerely. “Can I tell you a secret?”

“Sure,” Darrin replied.

“The only reason I’m doing this recruiting thing is because I want to get as many Bible-believing ministers in the Army as possible. I figure I can do more good this way, but I miss ministering to the troops. They are the heart and soul of this country Darrin. They protect us today and they will be our political leaders tomorrow. If we can reach them, we can change this land.”

“That sounds great,” Darrin said, agreeingly.

“But most of the Old Guard in the Chaplain’s Corps is a bunch of liberal, mainline ministers who wouldn’t know God if they met him on the street. That’s what has to change too. I’m not going to lie to you – it’s a tough mission. But we’re making progress.”

To Darrin, it sounded like a mission worth pursuing. “You know, this sounds really good, sir. I’m gonna’ go home and talk it over with my wife.”

“Understood. You both need to be committed to this. You’re not going to do your troops any good if you can’t keep your family together. Here’s my card. Would you mind writing down your name and number?” Pawlik asked, trying to get a step closer to closing the deal.

“No problem.”

Becky wasn’t quite as upbeat as Darrin about the prospect of joining the Army. They were standing in the kitchen that evening when he broached the subject.

“Sweetie, I have two girlfriends from high school who are military wives. They are so lonely. What am I going to do if I have to live without this for months at a time,” she asked, grabbing his manhood with her right hand and kissing him on the lips.

“I know it’s a sacrifice Beck, but it doesn’t have to be forever. They will pay off my student loans and we won’t have any debts. You know, that’s what the Apostle Paul said, ‘Owe no man anything but love.’”

She hadn’t seen Darrin this excited about anything before.

“Well, my head tells me this is stupid thing to do, but my heart tells me that this is what the Lord wants. Let me talk to Daddy.”

“Well, we know how that will go,” Darrin groaned.

“You never know. But I want to hear what he has to say,” she replied.

The response from Chuck Cooper was predictable. “Put Darrin on the phone,” he demanded.

“Hello.”

“Darrin, you know I’ve stood by when you’ve made decisions that I disagree with. I thought you and Becky needed to make your own mistakes. But this is a big mistake. And you’re going to drag my daughter off to Lord knows where. That’s gonna break her mother’s heart. You need to rethink this.”

“Pastor Cooper,” he said, reverting back to what he called his father-in-law before he married Becky, “I have a chance to serve God and my Country. I am not going to run when my Country calls. Goodbye,” he said, hanging up the phone.

Becky shook her head. “Sweetie, I know my dad is a lot . And he didn’t treat you right sometimes. But you shouldn’t ought to have said that to him. You know he’s ashamed of what he did,” Becky said.

For all the bravado and manhood he showed now, Chuck Cooper had blatantly dodged the draft for the Vietnam War. He had confided in his family that he was ashamed of that. That

because he didn't go, somebody else had to. Somebody else who may have been wounded or killed over there.

"Beck, I need to know that you believe in this path," Darrin said. "It won't always be easy for us."

"Darrin, I believe in you. If this is where the Lord is leading us, then this is what we should do. I think it so neat that you will be an officer. Samantha's husband is just making corporal or something. You'll be getting an officer's pay."

"And they will be paying off our student loans," he added. "But are you going to be o.k. with living on a military base?" he asked.

"Darrin, I want to see the world. I think this will be a good way to do that," she replied.

Unfortunately for Becky, that would not prove true. Most of the world she would see for quite some time would be the one around Ft. Riley, Kansas. Not really much more exciting than Muncie, and a lot less exciting than Austin, Texas where they were living.

Darrin didn't see Chuck Cooper again until that Christmas. Pastor Chuck cornered him the day after Christmas when Becky and her mother were out at the "50% off" sales.

"I know my daughter, Darrin. You won't keep her. She needs a man around. You're going to be off in a foxhole someplace. She ain't the kind of woman who's gonna sit home by herself."

"It sounds like I trust my wife more than you trust your daughter," Darrin observed.

"That's because I've known her longer," Cooper said.

"You don't know her - you never have. You preached and preached and you never listened."

Chuck Cooper shrugged in mock acceptance. “That may be true, Darrin. But it doesn’t change the fact that you are making the biggest mistake of your life. You’ll see,” he said confidently as he turned and walked away.

ONLINE VERSION

Chapter 39

“So where did you serve?” asked Agent Barrett.

“I was based at Ft. Riley, Kansas with the First Infantry Division,” Darrin answered with a little pride that the agents hadn’t sensed before.

“The Big Red One, right?” asked Barrett, referring to the 1st ID’s nickname, which came from a red Arabic numeral “1” worn on the soldiers’ shoulder patches.

“Yep. Duty First,” Darrin said, repeating the Division’s official motto. “No Mission Too Difficult, No Sacrifice Too Great – Duty First,” he added, reciting the Division’s unofficial motto.

“Did you see any action?” asked Agent Choi.

“Yes, we were called up to Saudi during the Gulf War,” Darrin replied.

“And when was that? I mean, I know when the Gulf War was, but when were you called up?” Barrett asked, knowing the answer but testing Darrin’s memory with dates.

“I went to Saudi in September, 1990. My men didn’t arrive until December and January.”

“That’s interesting. So you were there before your men even got there? Were you trying to convert the Arabs or something?” Barrett asked, smiling.

“To the contrary. I was part of an advance unit that was tasked with implementing the Army’s General Order 1,” Darrin responded more seriously.

“I don’t believe I’ve heard of that,” Barrett said honestly.

“In a nutshell, it was an order that we leave the Judeo-Christian God back in the United States. As long as we were on Saudi soil, we needed to avoid offending the religious sensitivities of our hosts. That meant that, at least in public, there was no God but Allah.”

“And they asked a chaplain to do that?” Choi questioned.

“I guess they figured if they could get a chaplain to do it, they could get just about anybody to do it,” Darrin replied cynically.

* * *

Chaplain Lt. Colonel Al Bryant was already having a bad week. His wife had been sick off and on for over a month. A bad cough. Feeling tired. The base doctors told him that it was probably a virus and that his wife just needed some rest. “It’s still summertime. Who the hell gets a virus in the summertime?” he questioned.

So when Bryant walked into his office at the chapel at Ft. Riley and saw a letter from the Division general, he knew things were only going to get worse. He sat down at his desk and pulled a bottle of Jim Beam from his bottom right drawer. He grabbed his coffee cup and poured a couple of “swallows.” He had been in “this man’s Army” since 1965. He had barely gotten his feet wet as a chaplain when the 2nd Brigade was sent to Vietnam. He landed at Cam Rahn Bay on July 12, 1965. He rotated out once in 1967 when his mother was ill, but returned after her death and stayed until April of 1970. He had been at Ft. Riley for the last 20 years. He had married a school teacher and they had twin boys who would be starting college at Kansas State that Fall.

Bryant slowly opened the envelope like a kid expecting a bad report card. It was all he feared and more.

3 September 1990

Chaplain (LTC) Albert R. Bryant

1st Infantry Division

Ft. Riley, KS

Dear Chaplain Bryant:

As you know, the Pentagon has ordered the 1st ID to prepare for a tour of duty in Southwest Asia. You have been selected to lead an advance unit that will prepare the theater for our troops. Unlike prior tours involving the 1st ID, this will be the first in history where we have to support the morale of our troops under a very strict set of host country religious rules.

You are hereby ordered to report to Ft. Myer, Virginia on September 5th for 10 days of training on our host country's rules and General Order 1. You are to be accompanied in this training by your chaplain's assistant, a junior chaplain, and an additional chaplain's assistant. I will leave those assignments to your discretion.

After completion of training, you will immediately ship out to King Khalid Military City in Saudi Arabia. You, the junior chaplain, and the two chaplain's assistants will comprise our religious liaison unit. In that capacity, you will be responsible for monitoring the 1st ID's compliance with General Order 1 and you will address any complaints that our hosts may have in this regard.

Sincerely,

Brig. Gen. Wallace D. Ashford

Bryant didn't need this. Not now. He was a still few years from retirement though. The Army had him by the short hairs. He couldn't refuse to go. He would have to figure out a way to go, but then duck out quickly. Which meant he needed someone competent to push the real job off to – whatever it was. His chaplain's assistant, Staff Sgt. Johnny Duran was a natural when it came to ministering to the spiritual needs of the troops. The guy should've been a chaplain himself. The men found him very approachable. In fact, Bryant hadn't done much counseling for the last three years since Johnny had been assigned to him. He left it up to Johnny. He stuck with the marriages, baptisms, Sunday sermons, and administrative hassles of being a senior chaplain. And he spent every moment he could away from the base trying to raise his teenage sons and to be a part of their lives.

Bryant wasn't caught totally off guard. Just a few days before, on Aug. 30th, General Norman Schwarzkopf had issued General Order 1. It began:

Operation Desert Shield places United States Armed Forces into USCENCOM AOR countries where Islamic law and Arabic customs prohibit or restrict certain activities which are generally permissible in western societies. Restrictions upon these activities are essential to preserving U.S. host nation relations and the combined operations of U.S. and friendly forces.

It went on to prohibit alcohol, gambling, and pornography. Even “body building magazines, swim-suit editions of periodicals, lingerie or underwear advertisements and catalogues, as well as visual mediums which infer but do not directly show human genitalia, women's breasts, or human sexual acts.” It would have been enough of a problem if that were all. But the unwritten rules were the ones that would cause the troops and the folks back home to run to their Congressmen.

Although no real matters of religion were officially covered (other than non-Muslims not entering mosques), senior chaplains like Bryant had already heard through the grapevine what was going to happen. Although chaplains would be allowed to deploy with their units, they would be referred to as "morale support officers." They would also be instructed to remove all of their branch insignia (crosses in the case of Catholic and Protestant chaplains, tablets in the case of Jewish chaplains) in the presence of Saudi personnel. Worship services would have to be conducted behind closed doors or in private settings. Soldiers would be told not to wear crucifixes or other religious articles.

The Army was comfortable sending this informal message out to the senior chaplains who were mostly Episcopal and Catholic priests. These guys knew the drill, and that's why they were in charge. They weren't in the Army to "bring souls to Jesus." They were there to make sure the troops completed their mission. If it gave the men comfort to have someone tell them that God was on their side, then that was fine. As long as everybody understood this wasn't some taxpayer-funded tent revival.

But there was an up-and-coming second tier of chaplains who were a lot more zealous about what they perceived as their calling. The "Bible thumpers" is what the more senior chaplains referred to them as. They weren't going to be happy about this General Order 1 – not one bit. In fact, the Department of the Army's after-action report for Desert Storm would later end up condemning the religious restrictions in Saudi Arabia, saying "In future world-wide deployments, current nomenclature, i.e., 'chaplains' and 'worship services,' must not be modified or deleted in order to address different cultural/national sensitivities."

Yep, this is going to be a real shit storm, Bryant thought. But he planned on being back in the States before most of the troops arrived and the real fun started. He just needed the right

junior chaplain there to help. Somebody there to “manage the store” and speak the language of the Fundamentalists to calm any dissenters. Plus, Johnny Duran could take care of the legitimate spiritual needs of the troops.

Bryant had just the man in mind. A smart kid who was two years out of divinity school. Didn't thump the Bible quite as hard of some of the other Baptists, but still a bit too religious. And his practice of reading the New Testament in the original Greek seemed downright arrogant at times. Bryant figured the Good Lord wouldn't mind if the kid were taken down a couple of notches; maybe a little adversity would do him good. But the kid was very gung ho about the Army, so maybe it would work out. He needed another swallow of whiskey to seal the deal with himself.

“Let's see how you do under General Order 1, Chaplain Allis,” he said into his coffee cup.

Chapter 40

“So who did you serve with there in Saudi Arabia, Darrin?” asked Barrett

“My commanding officer was Chaplain Al Bryant. He was a Lieutenant Colonel. He’d been in the Army since the 1960s. Did several tours in Vietnam. A good man.” *Not such a great chaplain, though*, Darrin thought.

“Is he still around?” Barrett asked, wondering if there was another dead body to account for.

“Last I knew he was. I haven’t spoken to him in 15 years. His wife got sick. I think she may have died. He left Saudi before the ground war started.”

“So he was your C.O. Who else was there?” asked Barrett.

“Well, we had a very small unit with a specific mission. So Chaplain Bryant and I were the only officers.” He paused and looked down.

That’s what I like to see, thought Choi. *The Allis “pause.”*

“We had a couple of enlisted men who were chaplain’s assistants, but that’s it,” Darrin added.

“And what were their names?” asked Choi.

“A private, last name of Hennessey, was my assistant, and a sergeant, last name of Duran, also worked with us,” Darrin responded. *Just be matter of fact*, he thought to himself. But he felt the butterflies creeping up again.

* * *

Unlike some of the others he grew up with, Sean Hennessey was never really a “bad kid.” He was more of follower. Unfortunately, he followed the other kids into some things nobody that age should have to deal with. Then he was sexually abused by the older sister of one his

friends. Some say that shouldn't affect an adolescent boy – having sex with an older woman. But since the time it started when Hennessey was 13, he began battling alcohol and drug addiction. And his supplier was the same 20-year-old woman who was using him for sex three or four times a week.

Hennessey never really liked school that much. He found it hard to concentrate. He started falling behind. As time went on, it was just a matter of going to school enough so that the truancy officer wouldn't hassle his mother.

But things changed for him. At age 17, he answered an "altar call" at a Billy Graham crusade in Shea Stadium in Queens, New York. All of that hurt, all of that darkness, seemed to be washed away as he walked from the centerfield bleachers all the way down to the area around second base. He felt like somebody was carrying him, but he looked down and saw his two legs walking on their own as the music played "Just as I am without one plea . . ."

"Do you want Jesus in your heart?" a crusade worker asked him.

Hennessey nodded, tears streaming down his face.

"Then repeat after me." The worker led him through several Bible verses, which ended with a verse from the Book of Revelation, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in."

Afterwards, another worker there convinced him to come to an evangelical church that met in what used to be a shoe store in the Sheep's Head Bay area of Brooklyn. The religious conversion stuck. Hennessey, who had dropped out of school, dropped back in. It took him an extra year, but he graduated. Hennessey then joined the Army out of high school.

He originally thought about having an MOS - basically an Army "skilled trade" --of artillery. But his friend, Billy Joe Charlevoix, told him he would have to spend the summer

training at Ft. Sill in Oklahoma, where it would be over 100 degrees every day for weeks at a time. Hennessey talked to a chaplain in his 5th week of basic training at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. The chaplain, noting Hennessey's interest in spiritual things, recommended that he consider an MOS 71 - a chaplain's assistant.

“We really need devoted chaplains’ assistants. The advanced training is at Ft. Monmouth in New Jersey. You might be able to get weekend leave back to Brooklyn.”

Hennessey did just that. It was a good fit for him – mentally and spiritually. He liked helping people. He had had some instances in which he almost relapsed, especially with alcohol. But he got through it by going back to his bunk and praying – hard.

The toughest thing for Hennessey was the women -- or the lack of women. He had heard in a sermon that masturbation was wrong - God had struck down an Old Testament character, Onan, for that. Well, maybe the minister preaching the sermon was taking his own liberties with the meaning of the text. In any event, Hennessey stopped self-gratifying.

The problem was that the urge was still there. He ended up "fornicating" a few nights a week with a civilian woman he met at the PX at Ft. Monmouth. She was already a single mom, and Hennessey wasn't ready for a family at age 19. He felt like masturbating should actually be less offensive to God than leading this poor woman on. The break up was kind of difficult.

"So you mean the beautiful thing we've been doing, you think it's a sin? So what does that make me in your Bible world? Some kind of whore? Well you go to hell Sean Hennessey!" she screamed as she slapped him repeatedly.

He shipped out to Ft. Riley a couple of weeks later. He never spoke to the woman again.

Johnny Duran's upbringing, on the other hand, wasn't a troubled one. In fact, it was about as normal as they come for the son of Mexican immigrants. But how Johnny, a Catholic,

ended up as an assistant for a Protestant - well, that was classic Al Bryant. Chaplain Bryant's assistant was retiring and Bryant hated the thought of breaking in someone new. At the same time, Sergeant Duran's chaplain, a Catholic priest, was being shipped to Germany. Bryant knew Johnny from several training sessions on recognizing alcoholism, dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder -- that the Army Chaplain's Corp had held at Ft Riley for chaplains and chaplain's assistants. Although Duran was built like a rock and probably should have been a Green Beret, he had a very gentle spirit that put people at ease. Bryant appreciated the skill sets -- strong bodyguard and good with people with the men.

“Sergeant, I understand that Father Thomas is headed over to Heidelberg next month. How would you like to be my chaplain's assistant?”

“All due respect, Sir, I'm a 71C, not a 71P. I'm a Catholic chaplain's assistant,” Johnny replied.

“That's ok. It's all the same stuff as a Protestant assistant. Except it's a lot easier. No worrying about tripping and spilling the cup of Christ's blood during Eucharist. It's just grape juice to us. You can pour more. Just a few simple rules -- no genuflecting, no mentioning the Pope, no praying to Mary, and the Saints are more a football team from New Orleans than anything else. Otherwise, its the same God and Jesus.”

“O.k., I guess that would be something I could do,” Johnny agreed.

Working for a chaplain who was a lieutenant colonel would certainly have its advantages. First of all, it would be much easier working his way to Master Sergeant with a lieutenant colonel's recommendation. And there would be more time on base - and at home with his new wife, Gloria -- instead of out on training missions with the troops. At 33, Johnny was already over half-way to his 20 years and out so he could retire from the Army and start another career.

Gloria wanted to have kids one day. But Johnny wouldn't hear of it before he got out of the Army. "You're only 25, Glory," he said. "By the time I retire, you'll only be 31. I'll be 38. I'll get a part time job and I'll be able to spend time with the kids. My old man used to work 16-hour days at the slaughterhouse. I want to know my kids. Teach 'em how to play baseball, basketball, football. One day I'll have a son who will play point guard for the Bulls."

Johnny loved sports and was a loyal Bulls, Bears, and White Sox fan. As with many couples though, Johnny and Glory would struggle with getting pregnant.

* * *

Darrin wondered whether Johnny would have run off to New York on the evening of September 10, 2001 if he and Glory had had little ones at home.

Chapter 41

“So when you say you’re “men” got there later after you did,” Choi asked, “do you mean Duran and Hennessey?”

“No, sorry, when I refer to the ‘men’ I mean the troops we were responsible for supporting,” Darrin replied. “The chaplains’ assistants like Duran and Hennessey always stay with the chaplains when we’re in theater, no matter what.”

“Why’s that?” Barrett pressed.

“Well, you could say they’re the real soldiers in a way. Chaplains don’t carry weapons. We relied on our assistants for protection.”

* * *

They landed at the King Khalid Military City Airport on September 16, 1990. At over 12,000 feet in length, the main runway was the third largest in Saudi Arabia. Including the four hour stopover at Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany, they had been traveling for close to twenty hours in the passenger compartment of the C-5 “Galaxy” transport plane – 9 hours from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland to Germany, and then another 6 hours from there to Saudi Arabia.

The passenger compartment could hold up to 73 people, and was air conditioned and pressurized like a commercial aircraft. The cargo compartment below them was designed to hold tanks, helicopters, and large cargo pallets. On this flight, there were three Bradley fighting vehicles for the 1st Infantry’s Mechanized units and a number of pallets. In addition to the four men in the religious liaison unit, and some mechanics with the 1st ID, there were several dozen members of the Army’s 160th Special Ops Unit who would end up staging out of King Khalid Military City during the Gulf War.

Darrin and Chaplain Bryant had spent ten days at Ft. Myers being briefed by Pentagon and State Department officials on their liaison mission in Saudi Arabia. Staff Sgt. Johnny Duran, Bryant's assistant, and Darrin's assistant, Private First Class Sean Hennessey were with them for most of the briefings. They all knew each other from Ft. Riley, but the experience had helped Darrin solidify his relationship with Duran and Hennessey. Chaplain Bryant seemed to have gone out of his way to avoid spending time with the others. Darrin surmised that Bryant was upset about the assignment and concerned about his wife.

Bryant was even unhappier when he learned that they would be flying on the C-5. The same type of plane had crashed on take-off only a couple of weeks earlier at Ramstein, killing several on board. Fortunately, it would be the only loss of a transport plane during the entire Gulf War airlift.

As the four men descended from the passenger compartment to the cargo hold, the large “clamshell” rear cargo doors opened. The rush of 130 degree air from the tarmac made it feel like someone had opened the oven door to look at a Thanksgiving turkey. An airman stepped on board.

"Welcome to KKMC gentlemen. We haven't received an official weather report from Hell yet today, but we think our temperature here is probably hotter."

A Humvee was waiting on the tarmac to carry the liaison unit to their office on the base. King Khalid Military City had been built by the U.S. Army in the 1970s and '80s at a cost of over a billion dollars, with some estimates putting the cost at between eight and twenty billion dollars. Located two hours from the Kuwaiti and Iraqi borders, the base was built to defend the northeastern part of the Saudi kingdom. As to be expected, the base was surrounded by sand and received virtually no rainfall. Unfortunately, the sand wasn't in the form of beautiful dunes like

in Lawrence of Arabia. Instead, it was flat and the sand was hardpacked – similar to the high desert between Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

King Khalid Military City was designed to accommodate about 65,000 troops. Before the Gulf War, the American presence at the base was primarily the Army Corps of Engineers. Out of necessity, a small version of a U.S. city had grown up in the middle of the base. They were a couple of hundred miles from the Saudi capital, Riyadh, and the nearest town, Hafar Al-Batin, was about 37 miles to the north and had only one grocery store. The area around the base was not only desolate, it also happened to be one of the most religiously conservative in Saudi Arabia. If there were a Saudi version of the American “Bible Belt,” this area would be the buckle.

Their quarters on base were small, but surprisingly comfortable. The Army Corps of Engineers knew what they were doing when they constructed the facilities. You don’t put men in the middle of the desert for an extended period of time without some benefits of home such as hot showers – especially not engineer types who had been the primary occupants to that point.

“O.k. gentlemen,” Bryant said as they parted ways – he and Darrin to officers’ quarters, and Duran and Hennessey to the enlisted men’s’ barracks. “We’ve got our first meeting with our Saudi counterparts in three days. Let’s get some sleep and try to get acclimated to the heat. Remember, you’re representing not only the U.S. Army, but American values. Some of the people we will be dealing with have never met anyone who is not a Muslim. Let’s keep it low-key and start to lay the groundwork for maximizing the morale support for our troops,” Bryant emphasized in a show of leadership that would be a high point for his short tour in Saudi Arabia. Consistent with the spirit of General Order 1, they had been trained at Ft. Myers to talk about their ministry to the troops in terms of “morale support.”

Chapter 42

“O.k., so then it’s you, the other chaplain, uh,” Barrett paused.

“Chaplain Bryant,” Darrin said.

“Yeah, Bryant. And Duran and Hennessey. And a bunch of Saudis?” Barrett asked.

“Yes, Saudi military,” Darrin replied.

“All alone there, huh?” Barrett pressed.

* * *

The first meeting with their Saudi counterparts in late September 1990 went surprisingly well. Both liaison units were accompanied by senior military staff – colonels - who had already been working together for several weeks on plans to defend the Saudi oil fields and repel the Iraqis from Kuwait. Both the men – Colonel Ralph Kent of the 82nd Airborne and Colonel Josuf al-Behery of the Saudi Royal Land Forces – emphasized the importance of the liaison groups working together smoothly.

The head of the Saudi religious liaison group seemed to be even less interested in the mission than Chaplain Bryant. He sat back, not saying much. He allowed his aide, Jibril al-Attas, to do most of the talking for the Saudi liaison group. As Bryant understood it, Al-Attas was somehow connected to one of the wealthiest families in Saudi Arabia. An older brother of his was something of national hero from his days of leading a group of mujahedin fighters for several years in the struggle or “jihad” against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

“So you see,” Jibril said, concluding a thirty minute monologue on the importance of keeping Saudi lands pure, “just like you would not like foreign troops inside your churches in the United States -- because they are sites that are holy to you -- we are very uncomfortable about having foreign troops anywhere in Saudi Arabia. This entire land is our church.”

Darrin stepped up to that one. “Thank you for that explanation. You know that even in our churches we have non-believers come in and make repairs. For example, if our heat or air conditioning went out. We would call a repairman. Otherwise, we would have to make sure we had somebody in our congregation who could do every possible task like that. Obviously, that wouldn’t always be the case. Nevertheless, we expect that a non-believer entering our church would treat it with respect. But we still need their help all the same.”

Jibril al-Attas nodded and smiled. “That is very well said my friend. I think we understand each other. I look forward to working with you to repair this “breach” in the safety of our holy lands.” With that, al-Attas looked to his superior officer and the Saudi delegation stood.

Darrin was impressed with Jibril al-Attas. He was taller and thinner than the other Saudis in his group. He was very poised and seemed very intelligent. His dark beard was well groomed. His British accent was indicative of his schooling – some of the finest available in Great Britain. But that schooling did not seem to have moderated his religious beliefs. Jibril reminded Darrin of one of his favorite seminary professors at Austin Theological Seminary who also spoke with a British accent. The religious faith of both men seemed to take on an extra level of sincerity because of the accent. It reminded Darrin of one of his favorite movies, “Chariots of Fire,” and the Olympic runner and future missionary, Eric Liddle. Although he was Scottish instead of British, Liddle’s explanation of why he would not race on Sunday seemed far more persuasive than if it had been delivered by an American.

As the Saudis were leaving the meeting, Jibril made it a point to shake Darrin’s hand and kiss him on both cheeks. No such offering was made to Chaplain Bryant. Bryant noted the snub later, “Now Darrin, you make sure you keep an eye on that Jibril fellow. If he starts lifting his

robes and asking for favors, you tell him that is not U.S. Army protocol.” Darrin had worked with Chaplain Bryant long enough to know that Bryant was homophobic. It surprised him a bit, what with Bryant being an Episcopal priest. He had understood the Episcopalians to be a pretty tolerant group.

* * *

Notwithstanding his conservative religious beliefs, Darrin had little patience for intolerance. Growing up in Indiana he had seen intolerance first hand. In elementary school he had befriended the only Black kid in his class. He observed firsthand the daily stress placed on his friend because he was different – always “shssshed” even though other kids were talking and always blamed first if something went wrong in class. The low point was in second grade when Darrin stood by his friend as several other kids pelted them with stones one day while shouting the N-word. The school’s principal meted out her own form of justice on the pint-sized bigots – sending them home with bruised rear ends. Of course, those kids were just reflecting what they had heard from parents at home. But since that day, Darrin had a visceral response to words or actions aimed at people who were different.

Although Darrin had probably met a number of gay men in his life without giving it much thought, David Cooper was the one who forced Darrin to reconcile his beliefs with reality. David was Becky’s older brother – Chuck Cooper’s “prodigal son” and Darrin’s brother-in-law. A talented musician, “Davey” had always liked the “finer things.” His mother, Rhonda, discovered that when she walked in on a 12 year-old Davey dressed in his mother’s underwear. Of course, not all boys (or men) who dress in women’s underwear are gay – but Davey was. After that, Chuck Cooper tried to do “manly” things with Davey – fishing, hunting,

snowmobiling – he just didn't seem interested. What he was interested in – the saxophone and writing music – he did very well at.

Not surprisingly, Davey didn't do so well in the rigid confines of First Bible Baptist Church. He left Muncie the week after he graduated from high school in June of 1977 and returned only on holidays. He went to school in New York and played in a jazz band in Greenwich Village bars. Darrin always enjoyed Davey's visits. Of the entire Cooper family, Davey seemed to be the one who had actually thought through his religious beliefs the most thoroughly – which was saying something when the Cooper family included one of the more influential Baptist ministers in the State of Indiana. Darrin found Davey to be one of the most spiritual people he had ever met. Darrin also got some satisfaction out of seeing Chuck Cooper squirm a bit – having a gay son was not something a Baptist minister was going to put on his resume. And Davey was always ready to add a little fuel to fire at holiday dinners – until the Christmas that things got out of hand.

“So, Dad, I read the other day that some people think Jesus may have been gay,” Davey said at Christmas dinner in 1986. “They say there's a hidden reference there in the New Testament to him and John the Apostle. You see it in the painting da Vinci did of the Last Supper there with John looking pretty enough to kiss.”

“Davey, I'm not going to go through another dinner talking about things like this,” Chuck Cooper said firmly. “You know this kind of talk upsets your mother.”

“Oh, come on Chuck, Davey's just teasing you a little,” said Rhonda Cooper.

“Well, this is my house, Rhonda, and we don't need that nonsense here,” Pastor Cooper replied.

“O.k., well then let me talk about this great guy I met a few weeks ago. And I will guarantee you he is so pretty that I spend a lot of time kissing him,” Davey said.

Darrin couldn't help but snicker a little. Pastor Chuck was not so amused. He stood, picked up his plate, and walked into the living room.

“Davey, it's Christmas time. You know this is all very difficult for your father,” Rhonda Cooper said.

“Well Mom, I spent enough years of my life feeling guilty about who I am. And that's because I had a father who told me that what I felt inside – something I couldn't control – was wrong. Not what I did – what I felt. You know how that affects a kid? Mom, I love you and Becky -- and you too Darrin – but it's people like Dad who are standing in the way of people like me getting the rights we deserve. I didn't ask to be made this way. If Dad has a problem, he needs to take it up with God,” Davey said.

Chuck Cooper stood at the door of the dining room, having returned to get his glass of sparkling apple juice. “Davey, I have spent more time than you'll ever know talking to God about this. He and I are in agreement. You're the one living in sin. Until you can admit that, you're not going to be able to change,” said Pastor Cooper.

“Well, Dad, just like you aren't going to start kissing men anytime soon, I am not going to start kissing women. That's not who you are – it's not who I am. So what do we do?” Davey asked.

“I'm going to keep waiting for my son to come back home,” said Pastor Cooper, referring to the father in the parable of the prodigal son.

“I am home Dad. I was home for eighteen years. But you never made me feel that way.”

“I always loved you.”

“But you didn’t accept me.”

“I don’t love the things you do Davey. I hate the things you do.”

“It’s a complete package Dad. You can’t separate the sin from the sinner.”

“You done, David?” Pastor Cooper asked, taking the authoritative approach by calling his son by his full name.

“Are you?” Davey shouted, standing to his feet.

“Don’t take that tone with me, David,” Pastor Cooper warned. “It’s bad enough you’re off sodomizing other men – you don’t need to dishonor your parents.”

“Is that what this is about Dad? Sodomy? If you need to know the details, I only have oral sex with men. I guess that meets the Biblical definition of sodomy, but are you saying that oral sex is wrong? Have you asked Becky and Darrin if they’re committing sodomy? I’ll guarantee you that my little sister could teach me a thing or two about blow jobs.”

I’ll have to give him that one, Darrin thought. Becky giggled.

“David!” Rhonda Cooper exclaimed.

“That’s it, David. I want you to leave,” ordered Chuck Cooper.

“Why? We’re all adults here. I want to know why Becky can do what she does with Darrin, and it’s o.k., but if I brought someone home that I had done that to, I would be guilty of some mortal sin,” Davey responded.

“Don’t you talk that way about my daughter,” Chuck Cooper shot back.

“Well, you’re little girl is all grown up Pastor. And she’s a man-pleaser like I am,” Davey taunted.

That was all Pastor Chuck could take. He threw his glass at Davey, narrowly missing him. It shattered against the wall.

“Chuck, stop it,” Rhonda Cooper cried.

“That’s your answer isn’t Dad? When all else fails, get violent.”

“Get thee behind me, Satan,” Chuck Cooper said, pointing at Davey.

“You’re the only devil in this family Dad. You check your heart for what you’re feeling right now. It’s hate. And it’s always been there for me. It was the only thing I could count on from you,” Davey said.

As Davey walked out of the house, Darrin closed one eye waiting for the door to slam. It never did. Davey wasn’t like that. He wasn’t violent. But he would also never speak to his father again after that day.

Darrin concluded that Chuck Cooper was wrong to single out Davey’s “sin” as one that would particularly invoke God’s wrath. Even if what Davey was doing – having sexual relations with someone of his own gender -- was a sin, well everybody else had their own sins they struggled with and “lived in.” The problem with Davey’s sin was that straight men didn’t struggle with it. And if they didn’t struggle with it – unlike adultery, drunkenness, lying, cheating, stealing, profanity -- then they were free to rail against it without fear of hypocrisy. Being able to rail against something without fear of hypocrisy is dangerous – it makes zealots out of people. And, typically, the same people who railed against gay men also railed against “lesbians,” “welfare mothers,” and “the liberal elite” – a few other categories they also wouldn’t fall into themselves. Start talking about being faithful to your wife and being honest in personal dealings and you wouldn’t get as many amens (except from the wives), Darrin thought to himself.

* * *

And maybe homosexuality was one of the few things Chaplain Bryant hadn't struggled with. Darrin was convinced that Bryant had struggled (and probably lost) with just about every other "thou shalt not" in the Bible. But the homophobic comment about Jibril evoked memories of Chuck Cooper – and a response from Darrin.

"Wow, thanks for the heads up about Jibril. Here my wife was worried about me coming over here with you. I had to promise her that I wouldn't fool around with the local women," Darrin responded, emphasizing the "me's," "you's," and "I's" and giving Bryant a jab of his own. Chaplain (Lt. Colonel) Bryant had a bit of a reputation as a womanizer and a drinker back at Ft. Riley. The words came out of Darrin's mouth before he had a chance to consider the failing health of Bryant's wife and how it seemed to be weighing on him lately.

"I'm sorry sir, that was inappropriate," Darrin said, apologizing. Bryant just shrugged and walked back to his quarters.

Chapter 43

“O.k.,” Agent Barrett continued, knowing the answer to the question, “and do you still keep in touch with this, uh, well either Duran or Hennessey?”

Darrin paused. To Choi, it seemed he was trying to tell the truth, but very carefully.

“No. Unfortunately, both of them passed away,” Darrin replied.

“Oh, that’s a shame,” said Barrett, trying to generate a sympathetic tone. “Did they die in the Gulf War?”

“No, back here in the States,” Darrin replied.

“How?” asked Choi.

“Well,” Darrin said pausing. “Sean Hennessey committed suicide. He had some problems,” Darrin said, looking down.

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Can you tell us what happened?” Choi asked.

“Yes, he jumped from the balcony of his apartment building. He lived on the 14th Floor of a building in Brooklyn.”

“Do you know why he did that?” Barrett asked.

“He had a drug problem,” Darrin said.

* * *

Sean Hennessey wasn’t much for emails. But when Darrin saw something from him he figured it probably had to do with the World Trade Center bombing. He was probably just checking in, letting Darrin know he was o.k. He and Hennessey usually communicated by phone, but Hennessey was probably still stinging from Darrin’s last call. Darrin had convinced him to sign up for “Prodigy” – an early Internet service provider along with America Online –

because Darrin used the same service. It was little more reliable in those days to use the same service if you wanted to make sure your emails weren't going to be delayed.

The email only said "Hey Chappy, I know I haven't always made you proud. But don't worry about me. I have a chance to be o.k. now for the first time in a long time. S.H."

Darrin didn't see the email until the morning after it was sent – the morning after the World Trade Center bombing. It certainly wasn't the type of email he would have expected, so he immediately called Hennessey's number. It was just after 7 a.m. at Ft. Riley, Kansas, but already after 9 a.m. in Brooklyn. A male voice answered the phone. The man had a New York accent, but it wasn't Hennessey.

"Hello, this is Darrin Allis. I am calling for Sean Hennessey," Darrin said.

"Who is this again?" the man asked.

"I'm a chaplain. Captain Darrin Allis. I am a friend of Sean Hennessey's from the Army. We served together," Darrin explained.

"Oh. Well, I don't know how to tell ya this so I'll just say it. Your buddy died last night," the man said apologetically.

Darrin was silent for a moment. "How?" he asked.

"Looks like he jumped from his balcony. He fell over a hundred feet. I don't think he suffered much," the man said, trying to ease things for Darrin.

"O.k.," Darrin replied.

"We're in the process of notifying his next of kin," the man said.

"I know his mother lives in Brooklyn," Darrin said, trying to be helpful.

"Yeah, looks like she's not home right now. Hey, could you give me your phone number and address Captain Allis?" the man asked.

“Sure, and who is this I’m speaking with?” Darrin inquired.

“I’m Detective Jaworski from the New York Police Department,” the man replied.

“O.k., here’s my contact information,” Darrin began. When he finished he asked for Detective Jaworski’s phone number.

“I would like to talk to Sean’s mother if I could,” Darrin said.

“Tell you what, call me back tomorrow and I will get you her information. I have a feeling she would appreciate hearing from one of his friends. I was in the Marine Corps, so I know how guys can get to be like brothers when they serve together.”

Darrin spoke to Hennessey’s mother the next day. She was devastated, but appreciated the call. Her relationship with Hennessey had been strained, particularly over the last year.

“But I know he looked up to you Darrin. He told me everything you tried to do for him. I know he wanted to kick drugs. But it sounds like maybe he was high when he . . .,” she trailed off, and started to cry.

“Mrs. Hennessey?”

“No, it’s Mrs. O’Brien. I remarried,” she said, still crying.

“Right, I’m sorry. Mrs. O’Brien, I’m so sorry for your loss. Your son was a good soldier.”

“Thank you. Thank you for saying that. I guess there are other mothers weeping in the city too with the horrible bombing at the World Trade Center yesterday.”

“Yes, I’m sure that’s true,” Darrin said. “Can I help you with anything. With funeral arrangements, or anything like that?”

“Oh, could you? That would be such a help. I don’t know where to start. And it would mean so much to me if you could speak at Sean’s funeral.”

“I would be honored to Mrs. O’Brien.”

They ended up having the funeral service the following week. Darrin and Johnny Duran flew to New York together from Kansas.

Unlike the services for the six people who died in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing the day Hennessey died, there would be no television cameras at his funeral. It would be closed casket service due to the circumstances. But Mrs. O’Brien wanted a short viewing before the service and asked Darrin to be there. He and Johnny Duran stood on either side of Mrs. O’Brien as the funeral director opened the casket. The mortician had done his best, but Hennessey’s face was badly disfigured. Mrs. O’Brien had identified her only child the previous week, so Darrin didn’t realize that seeing him again would be as much of a shock to her. Darrin and Johnny held her up as she started to faint. They sat her down and the funeral director got her some water.

While Johnny sat with Mrs. O’Brien, Darrin walked back over to the casket. He put his hand on what was left of Hennessey’s forehead area and whispered, “Hennessey, I was always proud of you. You had my back. But I let you down. I’m sorry.”

Darrin and Johnny left after the funeral service and the lunch put on by the ladies at St. Mike’s Church.

It was Johnny who brought up the date on the plane ride back to Kansas. “Chappy, with everything else going on, I didn’t want to bother you with this. But you know the World Trade Center bombing was last week right on the exact date.”

Darrin was staring out the airplane window at the darkness. “Sorry, what’d you say, Johnny?”

“The bombing of the World Trade Center,” he repeated, “it was on February 26th – February 26, 1993.”

“I know,” Darrin replied, looking back out the window.

The two men didn't say another word to each other the rest of the flight.

ONLINE VERSION

Chapter 44

“And how about the other fellow, Duran?” asked Barrett.

“I’m sorry?” Darrin said, obviously distracted.

“Duran?” Barrett repeated.

“He died on 9/11. He was near the North Tower of the World Trade Center when the first airplane hit. He was killed by some falling debris.”

“Was he a firefighter or something?”

“No, just a . . . a bystander.

Barrett noticed Darrin didn't call Duran "an innocent bystander."

“How unlucky is that?” Choi asked. “Did he live in New York like Hennessey?”

“No, he lived near Chicago,” Darrin said.

“That’s a long way from New York,” Barrett observed.

“Yeah, almost 800 miles,” Darrin replied.

* * *

Darrin never really thought he would make it to Illinois with Johnny’s body in the back of the Yellow Cab. But as he passed through each state on I-80 – New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana – he counted down the 725 miles to Illinois. The toll booths – and there were several -- were the scariest, but not one operator asked him about the blanket covered shape in the back seat. One operator did jokingly ask about how much the fare was going to be from New York, but Darrin just replied, “Off duty today.” Finally he merged onto I-90 in Illinois and then the Dan Ryan Expressway just outside of Chicago.

He argued with himself halfway through the State of Pennsylvania about whether he should call Johnny's wife or not. On the one hand, the news that your husband is dead is

something best delivered in person. It would be too cold doing that over the phone, especially if she were there by herself with nobody else. On the other hand, Gloria Duran knew where her husband was headed the previous night and she had to be worried sick about whether something had happened to him.

He decided there was a way to do this. Darrin had the number for Glory's parents stored in his cell phone because he had called Johnny there a few times over the preceding months. He pulled up the number and hit "Send" button on his phone. Johnny's father-in-law answered. "Mr. Sanchez, this is Darrin Allis. Yes, Johnny's friend. I'm afraid I have bad news about Johnny. Well, he was killed this morning outside the World Trade Center. I know, I know. I need you to be strong right now though. Can you do that for me? We are going to have to be strong to help Glory through this. Where is he? Well, he is here with me. I am bringing him back home. Here is what I would like you to do."

It was a little after 10 p.m. when Darrin pulled up in the driveway at the Sanchez home in Oak Grove, Illinois, outside of Chicago. It was a little yellow ranch home with a porch across half of the front. Things didn't look like they were going to go as Darrin had hoped, though. No sooner had he gotten out of the cab than the screen door opened up and Glory came running out on the porch screaming, "Johnny? Johnny? Are you o.k. sweetheart?" Darrin stopped her before she got to the car. Tears welled up in his eyes as she looked up at him from her slightly overweight, five-foot frame. Her raven hair was back in a pony-tail. Her large brown eyes were bloodshot from crying. Her eyes went dead as she saw the look on Darrin's face.

"No. No. No. He is not dead Darrin. Johnny is a fighter. He cannot be dead," she said, breaking free from Darrin and running to the cab. She looked in the back seat and opened the door. "Johnny? You're home now. Get up Johnny." Darrin tried to stop her, but she pulled the

blanket off Johnny's lifeless body. Darrin turned around to see Glory's parents holding each other on the front porch. They looked so sad, so scared. Everybody in America was numb on 9/11. But for the victims' families, the shock couldn't be put into words.

"Oh no. You wake up now Johnny," Gloria said, sliding into the backseat and putting Johnny's head on her lap. "Glory is here. Johnny. Johnny. No. No. Why did you have to do this. Darrin told you. Why didn't you listen? You son of a bitch! Why didn't you listen? This wasn't supposed to happen."

Darrin felt himself getting weak. He leaned over and put his hands on the hood of the cab. He had focused on the mission of getting Johnny home and hadn't slept or eaten in over 24 hours. He also hadn't allowed his grief until he saw Glory.

"God, why? Why him? Why? Everything else wasn't enough? You have to kill my husband, too?" Glory screamed, looking upward. Then she just started wailing.

"She's been talking like this all day since we brought her over here and told her the news about Johnny," her father said from the porch. "She keeps saying God killed her husband. We told her it was bad people who flew planes into the World Trade Centers and Pentagon. But she doesn't listen."

Darrin just shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. Any words he would say would be a lie. This was not a time for lies. But it certainly wasn't a time for honesty either.

He had warned Johnny not to tell Glory. They had even fought about it. But Johnny had made his decision, and nothing was going to change his mind. "Chappy, I tell Glory everything," Johnny said. "We love each other. If I'm going to hell, or whatever it is that's in store for us, she will want to be there with me. I know things were different with you and Becky. You always felt like you had to protect her. But one day you'll find someone who you were truly

meant to be with. Your true partner. And then you'll understand. You won't need to have walls between you. Not on anything."

And now there was Glory, in the back seat of a Yellow Cab with her dead husband. She and Johnny were together, but Glory was all alone.

"You did everything I told you to do Johnny," Darrin said under his breath. "Except for what was most important."

ONLINE VERSION

Chapter 45

Darrin looked down and was quiet. Barrett and Choi looked at each other. They sat mum for a moment to see if Darrin would say anything else. Maybe break down. But he was just quiet.

Finally Barrett said, "Well Darrin, the reason we wanted to talk to you today -- or tonight I guess -- sorry about the hour. But this is really important that we got a chance to speak with you. The reason we wanted to speak with you is that we think you might be in some danger. And we think it might have something to do with your time in Saudi Arabia."

Darrin looked up.

"Okay."

Barrett noticed Darrin didn't flinch at the "danger" part. Let's try that again he thought.

"Yes, we think you might be in some real danger. That someone might want to harm you," Barrett said.

Again, no flinching.

Barrett continued. "We have a picture that we would like you to look at."

Barrett pulled an 8 x 10 black and white picture out of a file folder and slid it across the table toward Darrin.

"Do you recognize this man?" Barrett asked.

The face in the grainy picture looked familiar to Darrin, but at the same time it looked like a lot of pictures of Arab men he had seen flashed across news shows for the last 5 years. Take away the beard, the glasses, 15 years of aging and 20 pounds or so, and it looked like Jibril. Better play it cool, he thought to himself.

“Looks like a lot of guys I’ve seen on T.V. The beard and glasses don’t help,” Darrin said.

“What do you mean?” asked Choi.

“I mean it’s hard to tell who you are looking at when most of his face is covered with hair and glasses. That’s what people do sometimes to disguise themselves,” Darrin responded. He was happy with his non-denial, denial.

“So you haven't seen a man that looks like this?” Barrett pressed.

“No, I didn’t say that. The problem is I’ve seen dozens of men that look like that.”

“Well, do any names come to mind?” Choi prodded.

“Well, besides names from the news – which I can’t remember – gee, people I interacted with when I was in Saudi Arabia. That seems to be what you think judging by warning that I’m in some sort of danger.” Put it back on them, Darrin thought.

“So you met people in Saudi Arabia that might look like this man,” Barrett asked.

“That was over 15 years ago, but yeah. I probably wouldn't recognize them today though.”

Barrett and Choi looked at each other. Choi nodded, knowingly.

“Darrin, this man is Jibril al-Attas,” Barrett began. “He has an older brother you may have heard of - Osama bin Laden. We think Jibril al-Attas could be almost as dangerous as his brother. And we think he may be looking for you.”

Choi noted the look of surprise on Darrin’s face when Barrett mentioned bin Laden’s name– raised eyebrows and head tilting back. Of course, he couldn’t tell whether the surprise was that the FBI was now aware of his relationship with Jibril and bin Laden or that Darrin didn’t know Jibril was dangerous or looking for him.

“That's Jibril?” Darrin asked.

“So you know this man?” Choi countered.

“I knew a man named Jibril - I didn't know him as Osama bin Laden's brother.”

“How do you know him?” Barrett asked, using the present tense to see if Darrin would admit to currently knowing him.

“I met him while I was in Saudi -- when I was in the Army,” Darrin replied. “He was my Saudi counterpart in the religious liaison unit I worked in.”

“Darrin, based on information we have gathered, we think Jibril is very interested in finding you. Now, any idea why such a dangerous man would want to contact you?” asked Barrett.

Focus on the incident, Darrin thought to himself. That is going to be the last thing of record they would know.

“There was an incident with Jibril when I was in Saudi,” Darrin said. He paused. “I know he was unhappy about it. He may still be unhappy. I'm not sure.”

“Tell us about this incident, Darrin,” Choi said, leaning forward.

Chapter 46

Jibril had missed the exit he was looking for the first time, and didn't discover his error until he had almost reached Long Beach. Again, more anger. Too many exits, too many confusing signs, too many people. But he felt some satisfaction that, unlike the other angry drivers in Los Angeles, he would make things different. The freeways here would thin out very soon.

It didn't need to end up this way, he thought to himself. We could have divided the world. But you couldn't return to where you belonged.

The Americans had been allies of the mujahedin in Afghanistan. His brother, Osama, liked to tell him of a particular day in Pakistan in 1979. Thousands of mujahedin fighters were gathered near Peshawar. A top official from the Carter Administration stood in the back of a pick-up truck and pointed toward the Afghan border saying, "That is your land, and God wants you to take it back!" There were few imams who could have energized the crowd that way, and none that could have supplied the training, rifles, land mines, and Stinger missiles.

After the mujahedin finally drove the Soviets out, the United States was viewed favorably. As the old saying in that part of the world goes, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." There was still the U.S. support for the Israelis that enraged many. But the Palestinians were always the "poor cousins" and many mujahedin felt their condition would improve little even if they had their own lands. Plus, the Israelis were a perfect lightning rod for negative Arab sentiment, and, thus, a necessary evil.

But things changed when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. Osama bin Laden had specifically requested that the Saudi government allow him to lead a group of mujahedin fighters to oust Saddam from Kuwait. The Saudi government's rejection of that request in favor

of a U.S. military presence in the holy lands felt like a dagger in the heart. And Osama said so. The appointment of his younger brother, Jibril, to monitor the American soldiers' activities in Saudi Arabia was an attempt to sooth some of the hard feelings.

Osama could take no more of it after Saddam was pushed out of Kuwait, and the Americans did not leave Saudi Arabia. His communications with the Saudi royal family became more and more strident. So strident, in fact, that anyone other than a member of the bin Laden family would have been jailed, and probably executed. His brothers intervened, however, and Osama was instead asked to leave the country. His citizenship would later be revoked.

Jibril remembered the day that Osama bin Laden left for Sudan. "Our leaders have betrayed us, Jibril," Osama said bitterly. "But the forces of good will prevail. Justice will be done to the House of Saud, to the Americans, and to their Israeli dogs. God will have it no other way," Osama said confidently.

And so began the new jihad. Now, fifteen years later, the next chapters would be revealed.

Chapter 47

Darrin tried to remember how he had written up the incident report. He wanted to stick to that as best he could with Barrett and Choi.

“Jibril al-Attas had given me a religious artifact that had been in his family,” he told Barrett and Choi.

“So how does this turn into an ‘incident’,” Barrett asked.

“Well, I had promised that nobody else would touch this artifact. It was very old and delicate. Unfortunately, my assistant, Private Hennessey, misunderstood instructions and the artifact ended up being destroyed,” Darrin said, looking down.

“That had to have been some misunderstanding,” Choi said.

“It was the night before the ground war started. There was a lot of anxiety there. Men make mistakes when they are under stress,” Darrin said defensively. “Hennessey just made a mistake.”

I made the mistake, Darrin thought to himself. I never should've told them. Never.

* * *

Chaplain Bryant was physically present at King Khalid Military City for about two months. But for all intents and purposes, he checked out of most of his duties there after only a few weeks on the ground. Bryant figured the best way to extricate himself was to have a few shots of Bailey’s Irish Crème in his coffee before the regularly scheduled morning meetings with the Saudis. And in case the Saudi noses weren’t keen enough to pick up the scent on his breath, he made sure to dump some on his shirt, pour some on his hands, and put a couple dabs behind his ears in case Jibril tried to go in for a kiss on the cheek.

The Saudis picked up the message pretty quickly. Jibril pulled Darrin aside after one meeting and told him, “It would be more, how should I say it, productive if you and I could meet and go over these matters. If more senior involvement is needed, we will let you know.”

Darrin was apprehensive about conveying the request to Bryant. To Darrin’s surprise, Bryant was in full agreement. “You know, I’ve got to hand it to them. These Saudis are efficient. These matters – complaints I guess I should say -- are ones that you and Jibril are fully capable of handling. It will leave me to focus on big picture things.”

One of those big picture things involved facilitating the high holiday celebrations for the Jewish troops that the U.S. Army had in Saudi Arabia. For all his faults, Bryant strongly believed in his duty to support the religious expression of troops – behind closed doors at least. This particular mission would be difficult for two reasons. First, there were as yet no active duty chaplains in Saudi Arabia who were rabbis. So Chaplain Bryant worked to find a rabbi who was a U.S. Army reservist, Major Stuart Weinberg, and coordinated his transportation from New Jersey to Saudi Arabia. Second, there was the almost visceral reaction by their Saudi hosts to anything Jewish. Although their hosts generally disliked Christians, their feelings toward Jews were openly hostile. Which meant Bryant did not want any publicity regarding what was going to happen.

Darrin’s job was to coordinate with various supply units to find space where Jewish soldiers would be able to observe the high holidays together and to secure transportation. “Operation Sandbox Synagogue” would ultimately involve secretly bringing in Jewish soldiers and sailors from across Southwest Asia to an empty Air Force hangar without the knowledge of their Saudi hosts. Johnny Duran and Sean Hennessey would end up standing watch outside the hangar with their M-16s, and a military police unit would remain on standby.

Darrin imagined the secretiveness was something like what Christians and Jews went through in Rome during the persecutions in Nero's day. This time, however, nobody was fed to the lions – courtesy of the U.S. Army's protection. Chaplain Weinberg was very moved by all of the effort that Chaplains Bryant and Allis had put in and the soldiers and sailors were very appreciative.

Operation Sandbox Synagogue got Bryant a commendation. "You deserve this as much as me Allis," he told Darrin later.

"I'm just glad it all worked," Darrin responded.

Bryant put his hand on Darrin's shoulder. It caught Darrin off guard and he reflexively tightened every muscle in his body.

"Look, Darrin, I need to talk to you about something," Bryant said.

"Sure, what is it."

"Well, my wife seems to be getting worse. The doctors are trying to narrow things down, but none of the possible diagnoses is very good. I'm going to need to go back to Ft. Riley. In fact, I've already put in for leave. I don't know if I am going to make it back here. But I just want you to have a heads up. Johnny Duran will be staying here though," Bryant concluded.

"O.k. Well your wife is in my prayers. You too," Darrin said.

Because Chaplain Bryant had characterized his trip back to the States as "temporary leave," no official action was ever taken to replace him. The Army was already short on chaplains as it was and they had to rely heavily on reserve chaplains. Darrin doubted that they were going to assign someone else to supervise the liaison office and he ended up being right. But between he and Johnny and Hennessey, they were doing a pretty good job. In addition to the liaison duties, Darrin filled in on some other "special projects" like Operation Sandbox

Synagogue before his battalion arrived from Ft. Riley in late December and early January. After the troops arrived, Darrin spent most of his time with them.

But he and Jibril still had a regular appointment on Saturday mornings at 0900. The meeting was the day after Muslim Friday prayers so that the imams and other interested parties could pass along to Jibril concerns gathered from their faithful.

Jibril would go over the list of Saudi concerns and Darrin and his men would address them as best they could. He was surprised at how petty most of the concerns were, while at the same time how flexible the Saudis were in accepting solutions. It seemed like they were usually satisfied by effort, not practical results. One example was the disposal of latrine waste from Christian and Jewish soldiers.

“We cannot have our holy land polluted by such things,” Jibril said.

“And our Moslem soldiers?”

“That will not be a problem. It is the Christians and Jews.”

“Well, Jibril, I assume that I will be told there is no way to separate the latrine waste of Christians, Jews, and Moslems, so it will all have to be treated the same.”

“Very well, as long as that of Christians and Jews does not touch our soil.”

“O.k., where are we supposed to put it?” Darrin asked.

“That is not our concern.”

“But the problem is the waste touching the soil, correct?”

“Yes,” Jibril confirm.

“O.k., I understand. That will no longer happen,” Darrin said.

So from then on, the order was that all waste was to go in containers. Containers that still would be buried in the Saudi desert. But the contents of the containers would not mix with Saudi soil.

“Chappy, wouldn’t it be better for the waste to decompose in the soil?” Johnny asked Darrin later. “I mean, how many hundreds of years will it take for the plastic containers with sewage to break down?”

“Sergeant, our hosts are pumping enough oil out of the ground in this country to create their own environmental nightmare. A little more plastic in the ground – another petroleum-based product I might add -- isn’t going to make things worse. On the other hand, asking our troops to put a cork in it and not use the latrines for however many months it will take to liberate Kuwait is not an option for us, is it?” Darrin asked rhetorically.

The sewage issue “resurfaced” once hundreds of thousands of troops arrived in theater. The engineering units said it would be impossible to haul off that much waste. Meanwhile, the Saudis also started demanding that Christian and Muslim blood be kept separate in military hospitals. These matters ended up being taken all the way to King Fahd himself. More moderate minds prevailed and the Saudi demands were dropped.

Chapter 48

One Saturday morning in mid-February 1991, Darrin was a few minutes late for his meeting with Jibril. Jibril was standing over Darrin's desk looking at something. "My apologies," Darrin said, "I needed to provide some 'morale support' for a Special Operations unit doing some recon work in Kuwait today." Along with the daily bombing sorties that had begun in January, Special Ops units were the backbone of the efforts to prepare the battlefield for the eventual ground assault. Both men knew that Darrin had been talking to the men about Christianity, but Jibril appreciated that Darrin had referred to it as morale support.

"Apology accepted. I noticed that you have a book open here. I apologize for looking at your things, but what language is this?"

Darrin walked over to see his Greek New Testament opened to the Gospel of John. He had been reading it in preparation for the "morale support" that day. The message was based on Jesus' words not to fear those "who can destroy the body, but to instead fear Him who can destroy the soul." He read to the troops out of an English version of the Bible, of course, but he always studied out of the Greek version because it used the actual words that the New Testament was written in.

Like most languages, ancient Greek had many of its own colorful idioms and nuances that were lost in the English translations. He felt his advanced study of ancient Greek language in college and seminary was one of the most useful things he had ever done. He had also studied Hebrew, the language that the Old Testament was written in, but did not have nearly the same mastery of the language. One day, after leaving the Army, he hoped to teach ancient Greek at the seminary level.

“That is Greek. Not modern Greek, but ancient Greek. Many of our holy texts were written in ancient Greek,” Darrin explained.

“Interesting. I have something I would like you to look at. It is a manuscript that has been in my family for quite some time. It was a gift to . . . to my great-grandfather from the Ottoman Empire over 75 years ago,” Jibril said.

The Ottomans, Muslims from Turkey, had ruled much of the Middle East for centuries until World War I. However, the inhabitants of modern-day Saudi Arabia were very independence minded and had many struggles with their Ottoman overseers. Gifts and bribes were commonly used to keep the Arabs in line, particularly when the brutal Ottoman military forces were occupied in other parts of the Empire.

“I would be honored to look at it,” Darrin said, emphasizing “honored.” From what he had gathered in his training at Ft. Myers and his experience so far in Saudi, “honor” seemed to be a primary form of currency in the Middle East. “But I don’t read Arabic very well at all. I am trying to learn it. But as you know, it is difficult for a beginner.”

“Oh, I am sorry. I did not explain fully. The manuscript is written in this language. Greek I guess. I was a teenager when I looked at the manuscript, but I remember these types of letters,” Jibril said.

“Well, I look forward to looking at the manuscript. Again, it would be my honor.”

“Excellent. I will bring it by when we meet again next week. It is in a safe place in Riyadh so I must have it brought here,” Jibril said. “Now, there are some concerns that have been brought to my attention regarding the practices of some of the women you have brought to our lands.” He continued on with a number of items that seemed to Darrin even more petty than usual.

Darrin nodded his head as Jibril spoke, but his mind wandered as he thought about the manuscript. It was intriguing. He always loved a challenge. Of course, he had his doubts that the manuscript was written in ancient Greek, but he wasn't going to insult Jibril by disagreeing with him.

One week later, Jibril entered the liaison office carrying a plastic cylinder similar to the ones used by architects to carry blueprints or by cartographers to transport maps.

“Here is the manuscript we discussed last week,” Jibril announced. “This has a great deal of sentimental value to my family as it represents a part of our history. To my knowledge, no one in my family has read this scroll. But we view it as one would any ancient artifact. Please, I must insist that you be extremely careful with it.”

“You have my word,” Darrin responded. “Should we open it now and take a look?” Darrin asked, hoping that if it was not actually written in ancient Greek then Jibril would take it with him. He felt he had a good working relationship with Jibril, but holding onto artifacts now that Iraqi Scud missiles were landing in the area of King Khalid Military City made him uneasy.

“Yes, by all means,” Jibril said. He opened the cylinder and pulled out what looked like an intact manuscript. “I am not certain where you would start on something like this,” Jibril admitted, himself a little nervous.

“Well, I did observe a group reviewing one of the Dead Sea Scrolls several years ago. We should unroll it carefully, and then read it from the center of the scroll – the front -- to the outside – the back,” Darrin recommended.

Darrin allowed Jibril to do the unrolling. If the thing was going to disintegrate into dust, he wanted Jibril to be the last one holding it.

“It is surprisingly well preserved,” Darrin remarked. Which probably meant the maximum age was only a couple of hundred years. Hardly “ancient” Greek.

Darrin looked at the now exposed first page. “Well, this does appear to be ancient Greek,” he concluded after a few moments. “But it is handwritten, so I have to slowly work my way through each sentence. At least one letter in every other word is unfamiliar, but I can generally figure out the letters from the context of the words. I recognize some of the text from the Christian New Testament. These appear to be verses from the Revelation of St. John the Divine.”

“Well, then it appears I have brought the manuscript to just the right person. God be praised. I notice that these letters on the side seem to be out of place. Like someone ran out of room and wrote them in. And they seem to be in a different style of handwriting,” Jibril said.

“That is very observant. Very good. Yes, these words do appear to have been added later,” Darrin agreed as he read the words and noticed that the ink was also a different color. He felt like a child getting a new bicycle at Christmas time. But the words Jibril was pointing to were something out of Dr. Seuss’ “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas.” Please don’t ask me what those words say, Darrin prayed.

“Well, as I said, this is very slow reading because of the handwriting. Would it be possible for you to give me some time to look this over and see what we have?” Darrin asked.

“Of course, of course,” said Jibril. “Please take the time you need. I am imposing on you, after all.”

“Oh, this is no imposition at all,” Darrin said, disagreeing.

“Fine then. I have nothing else on my list this week.”

More time to focus on the scroll then, Darrin thought. “O.k. Well why don’t we plan to talk again next week at our usual time and I should have a chance by then to review more of this manuscript,” Darrin said.

“Very well,” Jibril said, pausing and turning from cordial to very serious. “I do not need to tell you how important this manuscript is to my family. In fact, if they knew, some of my family members would not approve of me bringing it to you. But I trust you, Darrin Allis. You are a good man. I can see that. Please be very careful that nothing happens to this manuscript. I would also like you to promise me that no one else will touch it. Only you.”

“You have my word, Jibril,” Darrin promised.

Chapter 49

Darrin got very little sleep over the next week, spending every free moment reviewing the manuscript. Hennessey had mentioned to him some concerns about one of the troops -- a gunner on a Bradley fighting vehicle. It wasn't uncommon for the troops to approach the chaplain's assistants instead of the chaplains. The chaplain's assistants were enlisted men, while the chaplains were officers. Sometimes the men didn't feel comfortable talking to officers. Although their official jobs were to assist and protect the chaplains, one of the greatest services performed by chaplains' assistants was just listening - listening to the troops.

"This guy seems off a bit Chappy. I don't know, something there. Or not there I guess. Kind of like the guy lacks a soul," Hennessey explained.

"You know Hennessey, men deal with fear in different ways. I'm sure he's just scared. One day soon these men are going into battle. They know that. My immediate problem though is that Jibril is coming in tomorrow and I've got to get some more progress on this manuscript," Darrin said.

"You don't look so good Chappy. I think you need sleep," Hennessey suggested.

"Probably," Darrin agreed, realizing that he might not be fulfilling his other duties. "So does this guy want to talk to a chaplain?"

"Well, he was raised Catholic, but isn't really Catholic anymore. I explained to him that I was baptized Catholic but that now I'm an evangelical. He didn't seem that interested in pursuing it. Something just kind of bothered me about him though. You know how you get that feeling sometimes?" Hennessey asked.

"Yeah. Well why don't we give his name to the Catholic chaplain for 2nd Battalion, Major Genovese, and ask him to follow up?" Darrin suggested.

“O.k. Chappy,” Hennessey agreed. “In case the Major asks you, the guy’s name is McVeigh. Tim McVeigh.”

“Got it,” Darrin said, going back to reading the manuscript.

“What's the manuscript about, anyway?” Hennessey asked. “I see a bunch of numbers you've written down in your notes there.”

“Why don’t we talk tomorrow about it? Oh, and please contact Jibril and ask him if we could meet in the late afternoon tomorrow. Tell him I want some more time tomorrow to review the manuscript,” Darrin ordered politely, as was his custom.

ONLINE VERSION

Chapter 50

Darrin was fascinated by the manuscript. Likely some kind of apocryphal text, or a reproduction of one, from the 2nd or 3rd Century. There were many of these kinds of “second rate” Bible stories from that era that didn’t make the cut and were omitted from the modern version of the Bible.

To start with, Darrin couldn’t get over how remarkably preserved it was. But he had recalled hearing that the same thing had happened with some of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

What he had originally thought was a partial text from the Revelation of St. John the Divine -- also known as the Apocalypse, or the Book of Revelation, or just “Revelations” to Baptists and other Christian fundamentalists – was really just a jumping off point for this story. It could best be described as “It’s a Wonderful Life – the New Testament Version.” Instead of Jimmy Stewart playing the starring role, however, it was St. John the Apostle. And unlike Clarence the Angel in the old Frank Capra movie, it was Jesus Christ himself leading John through an alternate version of history – a “what would happen if.”

Darrin recalled the text from Chapter 10 of the Book of Revelation, which is how this manuscript began.

And I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. He held a little scroll open in his hand. Setting his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, he gave a great shout, like a lion roaring. And when he shouted, the seven thunders sounded. And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, "Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth." So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

Only in the manuscript Darrin held in his hands, John revealed what was to be kept silent. He talked about what was in that scroll that was sweet like honey, but bitter in his stomach. A discussion found no where else in Christian (or non-Christian) writings that Darrin was aware of. Events described with surprising detail, leaving little room for ambiguity. But the reason for all of it . . . it wasn't something Darrin's mind, or his soul, was able to accept.

And then there was the Grinch-like writing on the first page of the manuscript that Jibril had pointed to. It was writing Darrin first chose to ignore as commentary inserted later on. But he had looked at that writing over and over again. It looked different at first, but on closer examination it was the same handwriting as the rest of the manuscript. It was most certainly written later – but by a hand under much more stress than the free flowing writing of the earlier text. Perhaps the hand of a much older and wiser author, who had written the following (roughly translated to English):

Cursed are the hearers of these words. But greater still is the curse on those who would try to keep these things from coming to pass. For they will bring death to themselves and multiply the sorrows to man.

That type of language was certainly inconsistent with the much more encouraging language of the New Testament letters to the early Christians – blessed are you for this and that. No, it didn't appear that the writer wanted this text read from the pulpit on Sunday mornings. Which in itself was quite odd for an apocryphal text. Those writers also proposed alternative versions of Bible stories, but they encouraged others to “spread the word.” This text was not meant to see the light of day. And, judging by the excellent shape the text was in, that appeared to have been the case for almost 2000 years.