

Chapter 82

Jimmy Moran's face was still flushed with anger when he walked back into the Observation Room. In some ways he was little relieved to be done with Carl Barrett. He was hoping for a little mercy from Assistant U.S. Attorney Manuel Garza though.

"Manny, what kind of case do you think we have here vis-à-vis Darrin Allis?"

Garza thought about piling on a little. *What good will it do? Everybody knows this office mishandled things. Time to be a pro about this.*

"Jimmy, o' course I need to discuss this with Davis. We certainly have enough to indict. There's a decent circumstantial case there. Problem is that we don't have actual contact between Darrin Allis and al Qaeda. In fact, it looks like they didn't even know where he was. Just being there when some attacks happened may not be enough."

"But what about the financial transactions?" asked Agent Claussen.

"It shows foreknowledge, to be sure. But knowing something is going to happen isn't the same as conspiring with al Qaeda to make it happen," Garza replied. "I'm just trying to be frank with you guys."

Garza sensed the disappointment in the room.

"The real question is whether we pursue a case against Darrin Allis or just use him for now to find Jibril al-Attas," Garza continued.

"At this point I think we need to find al-Attas," Agent Socia responded.

Director Moran nodded in agreement. "Which could not only stop this attack but give us a chance at the ultimate prize."

"Bin Laden," Agent Robles said.

“Well, we’re never going to get Allis’s help without keeping the pressure on him,” Agent Claussen said.

“I think I know how to do that,” Garza said.

“Davis has an ‘in’ on this one, doesn’t he?” Moran asked.

“Uh, it’s complicated,” Garza replied.

“What good is it going to do to put Darrin Allis in jail when the real terrorists are still at large?” Agent Cecil Hogue interjected.

Hogue wasn’t catching the drift of the conversation. Throwing his two cents in now wasn’t going to help his cause. Director Moran shot him a “keep your mouth shut” look.

But Hogue didn’t take the hint. “Darrin Allis may know what’s going on, but I don’t believe he’s part of it.”

“Thanks, Cecil. But all due respect, you thought he had risen from the dead,” Agent Claussen replied.

“What do you think the chances are that Jibril will contact him?” Garza asked. “Davis is going to want to know. He’s also going to be concerned about the hell that will have to be paid if Darrin Allis ends up helping kill taxpayers.”

“The intercepts we’ve gotten indicate that a lot of work was put into finding him. We think Jibril may have recruited a team to pick him up.”

“If he’s some sort of ringleader, why wouldn’t he just find them?” Hogue asked. “The theory doesn’t seem to hold up.”

“Look, nobody said he was the ringleader, Cecil,” Claussen responded.

“Or maybe he decided he wanted to get out. Kind of like the mafia. And they’re not letting him go that easily,” Agent Socia added.

“Look, we can speculate all day on this,” Moran said, closing the discussion. “We’ll wrap up some more interviews and we’ll keep him under surveillance until we hear back from you Manny.”

ONLINE VERSION

Chapter 83

Darrin walked through the main door of the Assistance Center. The dining room, which was the most popular spot, was off the main lobby to the left. But the Pico Avenue Assistance Center was a full-service operation. Clients could also stop by the first aid center, the job placement office, or the family recreation room.

He helped finish up with dinner rush, then assumed his favorite position – washing dishes. It was spaghetti night, and the plates were always a little harder to clean up because of the tomato sauce. He didn't do so well with tomato sauce himself. Seemed to bother his stomach lately.

“Acid reflux,” one of the Assistance Center's volunteer doctors had said. “Try to stay away from it.”

He wondered if it had something to do with the wine. He never had that problem until he started drinking wine.

“I doubt it,” the doctor opined. “Everything in moderation though.”

“I usually only have a couple of glasses.”

“Yeah? Well unless the glasses are really big, I don't think that's what's doing it. Do you have increased stress in your life? That can play a role.”

Darrin nodded his head and laughed. “Maybe that's it.”

As he stood scraping plates into the trash he noticed his neck hurt. Probably from Barrett pushing his head back to the floor. *Why do I feel connected to this guy? And his dead wife? Is it because he reminds me so much of Chuck Cooper? There's a heart there someplace. At least a tiny spark, buried under a lot of grief. Like Chuck Cooper,* he thought.

* * *

The receiving line at his mother's funeral was pretty long. In addition to being active in the community, Viola Allis had raised six children. From oldest to youngest, her children spent over 25 years going through the local school board. She had run for school board and lost. Remarkably, though, her friends voted against her because they knew she was "too nice a person to sit around and argue over that kind of thing."

Darrin saw his former father-in-law out of the corner of his eye. His mind wandered as an old high school friend of his mother went on and on about how they had met. What was he going to say to this guy?

"Hi Darrin," Chuck Cooper said, firmly grasping Darrin's hand. He reached his left arm around Darrin's shoulder and gave him an awkward hug.

"Hi Chuck."

"I'm sorry about your mother. She was a special lady. Had a lot of class."

"Thanks, that's nice of you to say. How's Rhonda doing?"

Cooper winced a little. Then he looked at Darrin closely to see if he let on that he knew how cruel the question was.

"Maybe you didn't know it, but she's been living with her sister down in South Carolina for a couple years now."

"No, I didn't know that. Sorry to hear that."

"You know, she waited until I retired from the church. Then, about a month later, she told me she'd done her duty as a pastor's wife and she was going to leave." Tears started to well up in Chuck Cooper's eyes and he looked away.

“Becky’s married to a guy that I think hits her. I told her to call the police, but she won’t. What can I do? She’s not a kid anymore. I barely get to see my granddaughter.”

“And Davey?”

“Hmmpff. I haven’t heard from him in over 15 years. I think he talks to his mother once in a while. I sure paid a price trying to raise him right. Your own son turns his back on you.”

And that was Chuck Cooper. Seventy years old and alone. And he couldn’t bring himself to believe that he only had himself to blame. He hadn’t changed much. That was the saddest thing. Still clung to what had gotten him there. There was maybe a spark of humanity in there somewhere, but it had been tamped down by being an overbearing Baptist preacher for 50 years.

“So I hear you’re off helping homeless people,” Cooper said.

Darrin figured this was a payback for the questions on Rhonda and Davey. Chuck Cooper could never let someone get the better of him. He didn’t want pity. He would even things up.

“Yeah, I do what I can.”

“Just remember, you can fill a man’s stomach, but it don’t mean you’re fillin’ his heart. Goin’ to hell on a full stomach doesn’t do much good.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, Chuck.”

“You know, Darrin, I think I was guilty of caring too much about you. That’s the only reason I was tough on you sometimes. I just want you to know that. And I don’t blame you for what happened with Becky. Nor do I blame you for Rhonda leaving me. I don’t think that would have happened if you and Becky had stayed together, but I don’t blame you.”

Let him keep his dignity, Darrin thought. It doesn't matter at this point.

“Thanks Chuck. I understand.”

Tears welled up in Chuck Cooper's eyes again. He hugged Darrin one more time and pulled out his handkerchief as he walked away.

Poor bastard, Darrin thought as Chuck Cooper walked away.

In the weeks and months that followed, Darrin had replayed his encounter with Chuck Cooper over and over in his head. He sometimes wished he'd told him off.

You know, Chuck, there was a time in my life when I would have accepted that responsibility for letting you down and not holding your family together for you. But I know now that the only one to blame here is you. You and your silly belief that you had to spend your life worrying about what God thought of your kids. As if that mattered. All that really mattered was what you thought. And if you would have thought about how talented and loving your son was and how insecure and needy your daughter was, maybe they would have been able to deal with life better than they did.

Darrin knew he wouldn't have felt any better afterward, but it was nice to think about it.

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Barrett would be different though. Darrin had never had a genuine supernatural experience, but that's what it felt like in the Interrogation Room. He didn't know why yet, but he was sure Barrett was there for a reason.

Chapter 84

They had set up the meeting for 9 p.m. in a small warehouse near Culver City. This would be their base of operations. Ibrahim had met with the two men separately over the last few weeks. The two of them then worked together for the first time on what turned out to be “just a practice run” in snatching Darrin Allis’s girlfriend. It was an embarrassing failure. Ibrahim had hoped to present the woman to Jibril as soon as he arrived. Now they were slightly behind Ibrahim’s self-imposed schedule. “If you say anything of this to him, I will kill you,” Ibrahim told them before Jibril arrived.

Jibril entered and took a seat on a folding chair in the back of the warehouse. The two men sat on boxes.

Ibrahim nodded for the men to talk.

“I am Hassan,” the thinner man said.

“And I am Bashir,” the stockier man said.

“You are both Kuwaitis?”

“No, I am a Jordanian,” Bashir said.

Jibril looked over to Ibrahim questioningly.

“I was told you were a Kuwaiti,” Ibrahim said, seeing that Jibril was not pleased.

“No. I’ve never even been to Kuwait.”

“You two never knew each other before?”

“No, not until Brother Ibrahim brought us together.”

Jibril had a bad feeling about this. He didn’t trust Jordanians. You never knew if they were working for the Security Services. And they were Hashemites. Just not trustworthy.

What choice did he have at this point? These men had done nothing wrong. They were servants of God. Plus, God could work through anyone. He had worked through al Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born al Qaeda leader in Iraq. He had worked through a crusader like Darrin Allis. God could work through anyone.

If he was to ever be able to take over for Osama, he had to learn this and not be biased. Doing so only would limit God's plan.

"Very well. Let us discuss what you will need to do for God's glory."

They spent the next hour going over and over the plan. Jibril then had them each repeat the plan back to them.

"Now, which of you knows how to use a syringe?"

"I do," said Bashir. "I used to work with a physician."

"Then that will be your responsibility."

"Thank you, brother. It is a high honor to work with you."

"Yes, it is. But not because of me. Because of God. This is God's work. If it is God's will that we succeed, then we will succeed. If we fail, then we will be martyrs."

Both men nodded in agreement.

"Now, I am going to give you something." He reached in his shirt pocket, pulled out two large pills, and handed one to each of them.

"If you are ever captured, you need to bite down and swallow this pill. I will not lie to you. You will enter paradise immediately. You will be martyrs. Tell me if you think you cannot do this."

"I can do it," said Hassan.

"As can I," Bashir said.

“Good. It will only come to that if it is God’s will. But we do not know God’s will on this when it comes to us. We do know that if we are captured, they will torture us. They will make us speak and betray God. This is what they have done to our brothers over and over again. We cannot let that happen.”

Jibril went on to give the same speech he gave that summer evening to the 9/11 hijackers in Hollywood, Florida. Being part of a bigger plan. Doing whatever it is that God has called on one to do. That no man who serves God dies in vain.

“Know this: to live is to glorify God, to die is to glorify God. Paradise awaits us. We know 70 virgins await us. But not just virgins – that is only an example. God will give us our heart’s desire,” Jibril concluded.

Chapter 85

Michael Thompson was usually a pretty cool customer. But this particular morning was different. A corporate transactional lawyer who was used to running several major deals at a time, he had learned long ago to compartmentalize his work life and his family life. It was a skill that had made him very successful at both. He had always been there for Althea and the children, all the while keeping his clients happy. It often meant working until 3 a.m. after getting the kids to bed, but he had done it.

There was only one occasion on which he had completely broken the rule of keeping work and family separate. It was when a young associate named Davis Northern started working at the firm. Michael saw in Davis the potential for the same African-American success story he had written for himself. Davis had some rough edges, and a big chip on his shoulder about doing everything on his own. But with some mentoring, the kid would go places.

Davis never worked “for” Michael at the firm. One rule of mentoring at the firm was that a mentor didn’t supervise daily work. Only career development. Michael would give Davis advice. He would run interference for him if he had a problem with another partner at the firm.

Unlike Michael, Davis was a litigator. And a fine one. He was a master storyteller. Not only in writing briefs, but in persuading a jury. He was quick with a joke and able to put people at ease.

Michael ended up bringing Davis into the Thompson family as sort of a fourth child. Davis’s family lived in Michigan, outside of Flint. With the work schedule of a busy law firm associate, it was rare for him to make the trip back to Michigan, even for holidays.

The Thompson children were accepting of their new “sibling.” But Althea didn’t know what to make of him. He refused to acknowledge the good done by the civil rights leaders of the modern day. “I just think we lost our way after Dr. King was assassinated,” he would say.

And he was against affirmative action. “At some point, we have to break this dependence. We need to sink or swim on our own. Otherwise, we’re never going to have respect.”

“Doesn’t wash Davis,” Althea said. “The deck is stacked against people of color. There’s nothing wrong with evening up the playing field.”

“I made it on my own, Althea.”

“Maybe so, Davis. Maybe so. But until we see some proportionality of success by people of color, we need affirmative action.”

Althea chalked it up to a young man trying to find his way – his frame of reference. No harm in people talking things out. He’d see as he got older.

But her indulgence ended when she found out Davis’s questioning had led him to the “dark side.”

“Lance Mason asked me to start getting active in Republican politics,” he told Michael and Althea one evening at dinner. Lance Mason was one of Michael’s partners and a longtime Republican activist.

“Is that something you’re interested in?” Michael asked.

“Lord, why the Republicans?” Althea asked.

“The party platform reflects my beliefs.”

“And the field isn’t as crowded for a black man,” Althea said.

“It’s a benefit, but not the reason.”

“I’m going to go check on dessert,” Althea said, excusing herself from the table.

“You know you’ll be criticized. Are you prepared for that?” Michael asked.

“I’ve always done things my own way. Try being a Black kid growing up in rural Michigan.”

“I’m not talking about white folks.”

“I know. You’re talking about Althea,” Davis said, looking toward the kitchen where Althea was.

Michael smiled. “Not just Althea.”

“But she’s the one you’re worried about.”

“Well, of course you always worry first about your wife. When mama’s not happy, nobody’s happy.”

“Things have to change, Michael. We can’t go on with business as usual. Think of how much worse things have gotten in the Black community over the last 25 years.”

“But how about being more of a moderate voice in the Democratic party? Why not change the party that’s going to be more accepting of you?”

“You mean the party that takes us for granted? No thanks.”

“That’s not true Davis.”

“Michael, I love you like a father. But you’re not going to change my mind on this.”

Michael knew that was true.

“All right. I’ll respect your decision. You promise me you’ll keep your eyes open. If you ever feel like you’ve made the wrong choice, don’t be stubborn. O.k.?”

“O.k.”

Althea wasn't nearly as understanding. Later she said, "Michael, I don't even know what to say to you right now. I don't know how you could let him do this."

"Let him? He's almost 30 years old 'thea. He can make his own decisions."

"This is an embarrassment. Does he hate himself that much that he would do this?"

"Come on now, I don't think he hates himself at all."

"Well, then maybe he hates us. Maybe this is his way of getting back at us for something he thinks we did wrong."

"Why are you taking this so personally, Baby?"

"Because I feel like he's joining the enemy. And you know they're just going to use him. My God, I can't imagine him getting up there like Clarence Thomas and"

"He's doing what he thinks is right."

"He's a political opportunist. That's what he is. And in the process he's going to make a bunch of Republicans feel like they must be doing right by the African-American community because one of our own is standing there with them."

"Would you rather he just sat on his hands?"

"Like you? Yes."

"Like me? That hurts, 'thea."

"I don't mean it like that Michael. I just mean he can be successful and be a role model without being out front."

"You think this is my fault, don't you. You think I'm encouraging him."

"I'm just saying that you're his mentor. If you were a little more outspoken about these things like I am, maybe he wouldn't have felt comfortable doing this."

"And?"

“And. Maybe you think some of what he’s saying is true.”

“I don’t think it’s bad having more than one voice for the Black community.”

“Even if what he’s saying is wrong?”

“I think people are smart enough to figure out what’s right and wrong. I just know that a lot folks don’t feel represented.”

“I can’t talk about this anymore, Michael. But you mark my words, you’re going to regret this. I don’t know when or how, but you’re going to regret this.”

She was right. “Always right,” Michael said as he looked in the mirror, tightening the knot on his tie. The gray hairs had overtaken the black hairs on his head. He figured he’d have a few more before the day was over.

Althea was standing there dressed and ready to go as he walked back into the bedroom.

“I just feel sick,” she said. “How in the world did I end up in the middle here?”

“I think you kind of put yourself there, ‘thea.”

Althea gave him a dirty look.

“I’m sorry. I’m a little nervous, too,” he said.

He put his arms around her waist. “I love you.”

“I know,” she said.

“Just try to forget it’s Davis, o.k.? Respect him like you would anyone else. This isn’t going to work if you talk down to him.”

“Do you think I’m stupid? I’m trying to help Darrin. Why would I talk down to Davis?”

“I think you do it without noticing.”

“I’ll wait for you downstairs,” she said, breaking away from him.

This wasn't starting out well. It occurred to Michael that the reason Althea and Davis didn't get along had more to do with the similarities in their personalities – particularly their stubbornness – than the differences in their politics.

It also didn't help that Davis kept them waiting outside his office while he finished up a conference call.

“Any idea when he'll be done?” Althea asked Davis's assistant.

“Should be any minute now Mrs. Thompson.”

Althea leaned over the desk to look at the assistant's telephone. “Shouldn't there be a red light on?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, if he's on the phone, shouldn't there be a red light on there on your phone showing he's on the line?”

“Oh. Well, he must have just hung up.”

Althea looked the assistant in the eye. “Please remind him we're here then.”

“He knows you're here,” she responded firmly.

“Maybe he forgot,” Althea said, raising her voice.

The assistant thought about responding in kind. But this woman scared her a little bit.

“O.k.,” she said. She buzzed Davis's line.

“Mr. and Mrs. Thompson are still here,” she said in a low voice. “I will.” She looked up at Althea, “Let me show you and your husband in.”

“Althea!” Davis said, somewhat overdoing it by throwing his arms out. Kill 'em with kindness was the approach he always took.

She turned her cheek as he kissed and hugged her, all the while she kept her hands at her sides.

“Michael, good to see you as always,” Davis said turning to him with outstretched hand. “Please come in and have a seat.”

Althea hadn't been to Davis's office before. There were the obligatory framed diplomas. University of Michigan. Harvard Law School. A picture with the first President Bush. Another picture with the second.

“Must be kind of tough on you Bushies these days,” Althea said, pointing at the picture with Davis and “W.” “Unpopular president, unpopular war.”

“Oh, I don't pay much attention to the politics,” U.S. Attorney Northern replied, looking toward the picture.

Althea rolled her eyes while Davis was still turned away.

Davis turned back and took a moment to smile at Althea and Michael one at a time.

“This is kind of like having your parents come and see your new home for the first time. I want to thank both of you,” he said, pausing on Althea.

“Well, you've certainly accomplished quite a bit, Davis,” she said.

He nodded.

Althea couldn't help but feel a little proud of him. She wasn't sure that was the right way to feel. She straightened up in her chair, looking all business. She had a job to do.

“Well, I'm glad you two came in today,” Davis said. “I'm not sure there is much I can do here, but I think it's good for us to talk.”

“I want you to know, Davis, that I’ve worked with Darrin Allis for over four years now. I can’t say enough good things about him. I think I would have given up on the Assistance Center a while ago if it weren’t for him.”

“I understand Althea. Believe me, this all came as a shock to me as well. Frankly, there aren’t a whole lot of white, Midwesterners on our radar screen when it comes to the war on al Qaeda.”

“I don’t see why he’s on anybody’s ‘radar screen’ in the first place,” Althea replied, holding her fingers up in quotes when she said “radar screen.”

“Well, it wouldn’t be proper for me to go into a lot of the details of the case because they’re confidential. But let me give you one possible theory that seems to be consistent with the facts.”

Althea sat back in her chair a bit, looking skeptical.

“Darrin Allis was a Baptist minister and an Army chaplain. He comes from some pretty fundamentalist roots. His father-in-law is a minister back in Indiana. About as conservative as they come.”

“It’s his former father-in-law, I believe.”

“Yes, yes. Former father-in-law,” Davis replied. “But from a church that really takes this Second Coming stuff seriously.”

“I’ve never heard him talk about it,” Althea said.

“Well, I don’t know. He’s kind of a secretive guy. But we think he had some contact with al Qaeda during the first Gulf War. That he found some common cause with them.”

“A fundamentalist Baptist and Muslims?” Michael questioned. “Hard to think of two groups that would be more opposite in their world views.”

“You’d be surprised. I was. Until I found out that some devout Muslims also believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.”

“I don’t think Muslims believe that,” Althea said, shaking her head.

“They do. They call him Isa. No, they don’t believe he’s God’s son, like in the Christian faith. But they think he’s a great prophet. And they think he will return one day and convert nonbelievers to Islam.”

“So what does this have to do with Darrin Allis, exactly?”

“We think he may be working with al Qaeda. Some plan to try to bring the ‘end times.’”

“Darrin Allis? End times? That sounds so . . . ridiculous,” Althea responded.

“I didn’t say it was logical. I just said it’s a possible motivation. Or money.”

“That boy lives a pretty spartan life, Davis.”

“Seems like it. But, otherwise, we’re having a hard time thinking of a reason why he’d be doing what he’s doing.”

“And what’s that? What’s he doing?”

“Completely stonewalling us,” Davis said, leaning forward. “He is trying to protect one of the world’s most dangerous terrorists.”

“How?”

“By not cooperating. By not even trying to cooperate. I mean, he’s not even pretending to help. It’s very frustrating.”

“So what do you want him to do?” Althea asked.

“We want him to tell us exactly why a known terrorist tracked him down from half the way around the world.”

“Maybe he doesn’t know. Have you thought of that?”

“That’s not all. We want to know why he was able to write down the date of every major terrorist attack before it happened.”

“What?”

“What are you saying, Davis?” Michael asked.

“I mean, this gentlemen is either the greatest psychic the world has ever known, or he’s been privy to the planning of al Qaeda attacks going back 13 years. And I don’t believe in psychics,” Davis said.

“And I don’t believe that he’s working with al Qaeda,” Althea said.

“It’s not just lucky guesses, Althea. He was in Tanzania during the Embassy bombing back in 1998. And he was there in Lower Manhattan on 9/11.”

Althea put her hands on her mouth. She tilted her head back. “My Lord,” she said.

“And he’s been making money off the terrorist attacks.”

“How’s that?” Michael asked.

“Sells futures on the Dow and S&P 500. Put options. Terrorists hit. Market drops. He cashes in.”

“How much?” Althea asked.

“Millions. Five million or thereabouts.”

That answered a few questions for Althea about the “mystery donor” Darrin had found. Althea’s eyes started to moisten.

“Davis, he’s a good boy.”

Davis was caught off guard. He thought she, of all people, would understand the betrayal. Darrin Allis hadn’t only betrayed his country, but her.

“Althea, he’s not good. He’s a bad person. Probably a racist, judging by his background.”

“How can you say that?”

“You know, Indiana was a hotbed for the Klan while he was growing up. That’s probably where it started. There are also some links between him and Timothy McVeigh. They were both stationed at Ft. Riley, Kansas. He was a chaplain, McVeigh was a soldier. We know McVeigh was a white supremacist. We think Darrin Allis may have steered him that way.”

“Nonsense. That boy doesn’t have a racist bone in his body.”

“People aren’t always what they seem.”

“I’ve seen him, Davis. I’ve seen him sitting alone with a 75-year-old black man in a wheelchair when nobody was looking. Helping him eat. Then wiping his mouth off. I’ve seen him help clean up when the man had an accident with his Depends. I don’t know many of our people who would do that.”

Davis Northern shrugged.

“You’ve got a lot of theories and circumstantial evidence, but you don’t have the truth,” she said, her voice rising.

Michael reached over and placed his hand on her arm, trying to keep her calm.

“I don’t think you’d know the truth anymore. You’ve closed your eyes so much. You had to join those . . . those Republicans,” Althea added. She didn’t really mean to say it that way. But she was angry and hurt.

Davis decided that being polite wasn’t helping. And he knew she meant to hurt him with that last comment.

“You know, Althea, I’m a bit surprised. Somebody like me decides he doesn’t want to toe the line anymore. Tired of pickin’ cotton on the Democrat plantation.”

“That’s not . . .,” Althea said, trying to interrupt.

“Let me finish Althea. You don’t support me having some, I’ll admit it, conservative views. But half the country holds these same views. And a whole lot of Black folks, I might add. Now we have a strong case against a white man who seems to have some off-the-charts radical beliefs, and you think he’s a good boy. Talk about a double standard.” Davis looked over to Michael and shook his head in disgust.

“Uh, let me step in here for a moment you two,” Michael said. “I think you’re both mixing up your personal feelings a bit with the issue at hand.”

“I’m . . .,” Althea started. Michael squeezed her forearm firmly with his left hand. She was a little startled, then angry. She pulled her arm back and looked at him. He looked back at her, not giving an inch. She thought better of confronting him at that moment.

“Look, Michael, . . .,” Davis began. Michael held up his right hand and gave Davis a stare that made him stop talking.

“As I was saying, you two have differences of opinions on things. I love both of you. I don’t agree completely with either of you. But I understand both of you. You’re both entitled to your opinions. Now let’s put that aside. Let’s put the personal stuff aside.”

Althea and Davis looked at each other, then Michael.

“Now, let’s assume for the moment that Darrin Allis is not actively involved in helping al Qaeda. But maybe he knows something. What does he need to do to get out of this, Davis. Is there anything he can do? Or should ‘thea just get him a lawyer and be done with this?”

Michael always knew what it took to get the leverage in a situation. The last thing Davis wanted was for Darrin Allis to “lawyer up.” Manny Garza had filled him in on how Agent Barrett had assaulted Darrin. That would be the first thing out of the lawyer’s mouth. There would be an al Qaeda attack and the opportunity to stop it would be lost.

Davis Northern sat back in his chair and folded his hands on his chest.

“Let me say, that if he is involved with al Qaeda, nothing is going to save him from spending the rest of his life in prison. Maybe cooperating could keep him from being executed, but I couldn’t even promise that.”

“Understood,” Michael said. “But if he’s not actively involved.”

“If he could help us – and I mean significantly help us – in stopping whatever al Qaeda has planned in Los Angeles, it would go a long way.”

“All right. But that assumes he knows something,” Michael replied.

“Do I have your word, Davis?” Althea asked, stepping in. “If he tells you what he knows, you won’t prosecute him?”

“I need results, Althea. Tangible results. I need a plot to be broken up. I need arrests.”

Michael leaned forward. “That’s a tall order, Davis.”

“I’m confident in Althea’s power of persuasion, Michael,” Davis said with a smile. “She almost persuaded me to be a Democrat. Still think about it sometimes. But I’ve pretty much cast my lot.”

Althea smiled a little at that.

“Plus, Althea has a lot at stake here. We all know what it will mean to the Pico Avenue Assistance Center if Darrin Allis is arrested and goes on trial for aiding and abetting terrorists.”

Now Davis was exerting his leverage. Althea began to look very worried.

“I guess I would probably have to recuse myself. I’ve got an Assistant U.S. Attorney on this one who is hot to prosecute.” Davis knew that was an overstatement. But it wouldn’t hurt to overstate things a little. “I don’t think he’d have the same ‘big picture’ view of things that I have,” he added.

Michael decided his protégé had handled this one well. Set yourself up as the only one who could save Darrin Allis. Set the bar high for results. If anyone went wrong, rescue yourself. Then it wouldn’t be your fault – not Darrin Allis’s prosecution, nor the results of an attack. Leave it all in the lap of the career people.

“I think we all understand each other now, Davis. We’re all on the same team here. We all want the same things. Althea is going to help in her way, and you’re going to help in your way.”

As they left the office, Althea knew that her job was going to be the far more difficult one.

Chapter 86

That afternoon, Darrin walked past Althea's office on his way back to the kitchen.

Dinner would start in an hour. There were still things to do.

"Darrin?" he heard Althea call out from her office. "Can you come here for a moment?"

It reminded him of being a kid. He'd come home after a fight and his mother would zero in on him. She always knew when something was wrong.

"Hi Althea," he said from her doorway.

"Please come in and sit down. And shut the door."

He obediently shut the door and then sat down.

"You talked to the FBI yesterday, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Did you tell them what they want to know?" she asked, knowing the answer.

"I don't think so."

"Darrin," she said in a slightly judgmental tone.

"Althea, I'm not going to talk about this."

She reached across the desk for his hands. He hesitated. He missed his mother. Althea was the closest thing he had to one. He leaned forward to meet her hands with his. Her touch was firm, but loving.

"I can't help you if you don't tell me what's going on."

"You shouldn't worry about this. They let me go."

"They won't the next time. You know that don't you? The next time, they're going to arrest you. And they're going to parade you on T.V. Then they're going to spend a couple of years trying you. And if they find you guilty, they could execute you."

He hadn't looked that far down the road. That would be pretty ironic, he thought.
Executed for . . . for trying to do the right thing.

"Darrin, I know you believe in helping people. People you think might be getting treated unfairly. But these people . . ."

"What people, Althea?"

"These Muslim fellows."

"Go on. Tell me what you're thinking."

"It's like I said before Darrin. These boys need hope. They don't have it."

"I'm gonna disagree with you there, Althea. I think these guys have all kinds of hope. I think they've got hope in an afterlife. I think they have a lot more hope than most any religious people I've ever met."

"What makes you think that?"

He chuckled a little. "The U.S. Army sent me to some classes. And I spent a while living in their world."

"So now you're helping them?"

"No. No. I'm just saying that we don't have a good frame of reference for how they live. It's very traditional. Ancient. It's a religion that has worked for them for 1300 years. In the West, we've adapted a little more to modern times. They haven't so much."

"They treat women badly."

"Maybe we'd think so. But you'd have to ask the Muslim women that, I suppose."

"Dressing them up in burkas? My Lord!"

"The women might tell you they feel safer that way in a society where men are so sexually repressed. They don't want to be leered at."

“I don’t think you’re going to win this argument, Darrin.”

“I’m not saying it’s right. I’m just saying it is what it is. There’s usually a reason for why things are the way they are.”

“Nonsense. You think there was a good reason why Miss Rosa Parks was told to sit at the back of the bus?”

“No. You’re right about that.”

“It’s just one group of people disrespecting another group. In our country, it was white versus blacks. Over there, it’s men versus women.”

“I just think it is more complicated than that. But I agree about the problems with disrespect. I think that’s a big part of the reason we’re having so many problems with the Islamic world. It’s a lack of respect. This is a people with an ancient culture that predates the Western world. While my ancestors were in animal skins, they had a pretty advanced civilization.”

“Helping al Qaeda isn’t the answer.”

“Althea. That’s not what’s going on. I know the difference between true Muslims and those who’ve hijacked a religion for political purposes.”

“But the people doing the attacks”

“Should be brought to justice. I’m just saying you can’t condemn an entire religion because a minority of people do something bad. Just like you can’t judge Christianity by the Ku Klux Klan.”

“Well, to be honest, some denominations do”

“Now, now. Christianity. Judaism. Islam. They all have their crazies. We need to keep some perspective.”

“Darrin, you don’t need to protect me. I’m the only one who can help you. Trust me.”

He sat back and looked at the ceiling. *I’ve been here before with people I loved. Dear friends. And I talked. And now they’re dead,* he thought.

“Althea, I can’t talk about this. I just can’t. You know me. You need to trust me. I would never hurt another human being on purpose.”

“I know.”

“Sometimes people witness things they wished they hadn’t seen. But they know if they talk, things will only be worse. They didn’t do anything wrong. They were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

It sounded like the hundreds of L.A. residents who watched violent crimes being committed each year, but never told the police.

“What are you scared of, Darrin?”

“I’m scared that people are going to get hurt because of me – because of what I know. Because of what I say,” he said, surprised at how candid he was being.

“How can that be? Who are you protecting?”

“I don’t know anymore, Althea. I don’t know. I used to think I knew. But it seems like people get hurt if I don’t talk or if I talk. It’s just different people. But all of them are innocent.”

“Can you tell me?” she asked.

Tears came to his eyes.

“I want to. Believe me, I do. I know you’re strong. I know you would understand.”

“Then tell me,” she said, softly.

He thought about Hennessey, and Hennessey’s lawyer, and Johnny, and Glory. All either dead or insane. All because they were told something they shouldn’t have been told.

He looked down at his shoes. New Balance sneakers. They used to be white. They now had that broken in, dingy brown look you get after about nine months of wear.

“I want to believe you,” she said.

He just shook his head without looking up.

Tears started to well up in Althea’s eyes. She gripped his hands as tightly as she could.

“Then I need you to do something else for me Darrin.”

“Anything,” he replied.

“I need you to pack up your things and take some time off.”

“But we’re starting dinner in less than an hour.”

“I have it covered.”

“But why do I need to”

“Darrin, I . . . we need to think of the Assistance Center. Our donors aren’t going to understand if you get arrested. Especially if you get arrested here.”

“Are you letting me go?”

“Not officially. Not yet, at least.”

“Oh, geez,” he said.

“Do you understand, Darrin? This is something bigger than us we’re protecting. This is the people who depend on us.”

* * *

"Out!"

Darrin didn't think anything was broken, but he laid there on his stomach for a moment concentrating. He slowly lifted his head to avoid breathing the fine brown Kansas dust up his

nose. He exhaled and then rested his chin on the ground. He could see a pair of cleats walking toward him.

"Nice one Chappy."

He pulled the baseball from his glove and flipped it upward toward Johnny.

"Darrin Duran! Hungry like a wolf! Ow woooo!" he heard a Major from an artillery unit howl while running in from centerfield. "Good game guys!"

Darrin stood up and tried to catch his breath. He always hated getting the wind knocked out of him. Diving for line drives and landing on your stomach could do that. You never quite knew when you were going to start breathing again. He dropped his glove and used both hands to wipe the dust off his chest.

"Might be getting too old for diving catches, huh?" Johnny asked.

"Maybe so."

They walked off the field together to high fives from their teammates. After shaking hands with the other team and seeing everyone off, Darrin motioned for Johnny to sit down next to him on the bench.

"What's up Chappy?"

"Sarge, I've decided I'm quitting."

"After that catch?" Johnny said smiling a little. "You can't quit now! You're at the top of your game!"

"No, no. I'm not re-enlisting. And, yeah, I might quit playing ball too before I get a rib puncturing my lung."

They both sat there for a moment without saying anything.

"Figured this was coming," Johnny said.

"I just can't do it anymore."

"I'm not going to be able to talk you out of this again, am I?"

"No, not this time."

They sat a little longer, looking out at one of Ft. Riley's best baseball diamonds.

"Lotta good times here Chappy."

Darrin nodded.

"I can see why that guy from Field of Dreams would say this is heaven. If this were heaven, it wouldn't be half bad would it?"

"No, not bad at all," Darrin replied. "Sometimes you get a hit. Sometimes you get out. Sometimes you're lucky. Sometimes you're not. But no matter what, it's still fun. And it makes sense. Whatever happens, there's a rule that tells you how to deal with it."

"You don't need to leave," Johnny said. "Look at Bryant. I don't think he ever believed in God. The men still respected him."

"But the expectations were mighty low there," Darrin quipped.

"Well, got me there," Johnny said, lifting his hands in surrender. "You know, they say that even if there wasn't a God, people would have to make him up."

"Isn't this worse, Sarge?"

"How so?"

"It's not that there wasn't. It's that there isn't."

Johnny took off his cap and used the front of his t-shirt to wipe his forehead. He still had six-pack abs and well-defined pecs that would make a 20-year old envious.

"How do we know it's even true, Chappy? It takes more faith to believe that than to believe at all."

"Look at what we have so far, Sarge. Gulf War happened on the date it was supposed to. Then the World Trade Center bombing. Then Khobar."

"It still doesn't mean everything is true."

"Do you know that refrain from the Dylan song 'how does it feel?' Well, how does it feel to you since that day in Saudi?"

Johnny tilted his head back.

"Not great. Like someone throwing a heavy blanket over me. How 'bout you, Chappy.

"Same. That's why I can't do it anymore Johnny. The men deserve something better. They deserve someone who believes as strongly as they do. I feel like I'm a doorman at a building that houses a dead religion."

They both stared at a couple of women in shorts walking across the outfield.

"I'd say those two asses have to be part of some perfect divine plan, wouldn't you?"

Johnny asked.

Darrin smiled and nodded his head.

"Sure this isn't about your wife?" Johnny asked timidly.

"Whadda ya mean?"

"You know. You two are split up now. Maybe you feel like you can't talk to the men about their marriages. Whatever," Johnny said, trailing off.

Darrin put his head between his knees. "Oh God," he groaned. "I think she would have broken me down if it weren't for the manuscript doing it first. No, that's not it. We had our own set of problems. We woulda had 'em even without Saudi. The manuscript . . . All that. Just made it happen more quickly."

"You seem to be dealing with it."

"You know how they say, "If you love something, let it go. If it was meant . . ."

"To be it will come back," Johnny said, picking up the quote. "And if it doesn't come back, hunt it down and kill it!"

They both laughed. *It feels good to laugh*, Darrin thought. "Hey, I'm at the point where I just want her to go and find her happiness. It's not with me. I know that."

"What about your father-in-law? How's that going?"

"Look, he predicted this day would come. I'm sure he's practicing his "told ya so" right now."

"It would be tough to eat crow from Glory's dad."

"Yep. Is every father-in-law that way to his son-in-law?"

"Probably."

"Hey Sarge, promise me that if something ever happens to me, you'll carry this on?"

"What's 'this'?"

"You know, trying to figure it out. Trying to keep people from getting hurt."

"Nothing's going to happen to you," Johnny said.

"Just promise me."

"It's bad luck. I'm not going to do it. Would you make that promise to me?"

"Yes. I promise," Darrin said.

Johnny shook his head, still refusing.

"Let me put it in terms you understand then Sergeant. I'm ordering you to stay on this and do whatever you can to keep people from getting hurt."

"O.k. O.k.," Johnny said with resignation. "I promise."

They worked on their plan for the next year. It was easier once Darrin left the Army. Darrin would research during the day and they would talk and email each other in the evening.

They finally nailed things down. Darrin would go to Dar es Salaam several weeks ahead of the attack.

“Johnny, in case I don’t come back from this,” Darrin said over the phone one evening.

“Come on Chappy. Don’t start.”

“Look. You’re the only other person in the world who knows what’s going on here.”

“You sure about that? I mean, there’s still Jibril. He has the notes.”

“It took us a solid year of work to figure out where this was going to take place. There’s no way Jibril could figure it out, even if he’d wanted to.”

“He seemed awfully interested in this stuff.”

“Why would he care about something so related to the Christian religion?”

“Because it’s Arabs who are doing this. He seemed almost . . . proud.”

“I think he’s a good man, Johnny.”

“He nearly killed you! What are you talking about?”

“Hennessey put him in a bad position. I put him in a bad position. We wrecked a family heirloom.”

“O.k. Well, if you see him there, be careful.”

“Johnny?”

“Yeah.”

“We need to have this talk, so be quiet a minute.”

“Go ahead.”

“I’ve got no clue about the next attack after Dar es Salaam. We know the date, but I can’t figure it. But that one won’t be in our country. The next one in our country will be September 11, 2001. We know it will be the same place as the World Trade Center bombing. We thought that one was Los Angeles. We know now we had it backwards. Wrong coast.”

“Got it. World Trade Center. 9/11/2001.”

“I’m not stopping the attack in Dar es Salaam. But I’m clearing the area. Let ‘em blow up an Embassy. As long as no one gets hurt, I don’t care. But we’re not stopping it.”

“So we avoid the curse.”

“That’s the plan, Sergeant.”

“So?”

“So. You study what happens if I don’t come back. If you have to handle it on your own, you learn from what happens. We’ve never done this before. We’re going to school on this.”

“I understand.”

“And if I get arrested, or something else, you know nothing about this. Understand?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t tell anybody anything, ever.”

“I know.”

“And if this doesn’t work out. If things get worse. Don’t do this the next time. It means we just need to stand back. We don’t want to be responsible for more people getting killed. Got it?”

Johnny didn’t respond.

“That’s an order. We’re not in this to get more people killed.”

“Last time I checked, I don’t take orders from you anymore, Chappy.”

“You know what I mean.”

“O.k., o.k., I understand.”

“Duty first, Sergeant.”

“Duty first,” Johnny replied.

* * *

“Duty first,” Darrin said.

“Yes, we have a duty,” Althea responded.

“I understand, Althea,” he said, squeezing her hands and letting go.

Darrin walked out and collected his things from his locker.

ONLINE VERSION

Chapter 87

Darrin weaved in and out of traffic on his bike. Rush hour had begun in West L.A. Traveling by bicycle was often quicker than traveling by car that time of day.

He stopped off at Pete's Coffee and chained his bike to parking meter out front. He grabbed a cup of decaf and a lemon poppy seed muffin. He took a seat near the back of the coffee shop, facing the street. The FBI was probably watching him. He wanted to make sure they didn't have a chance to overhear him.

He pulled a brand new cell phone out of his backpack, along with a prepaid calling card. He had received both of them in the mail ten days earlier. Along with a photograph of what was left of a burned manuscript with handwritten words in Greek.

The back of the picture had a phone number to call and today's date. No other message. There didn't need to be.

He dialed the number.

"Yes," said a voice on the other end.

"I got your message."

"I'm sorry, I have to be discreet. My family has many enemies."

"I understand."

"I have information that might interest you. About the manuscript."

"Okay."

"I would like to give you the information in person."

"Yes. That would be fine."

"I know where you live. Shall I come there?"

"Yes."

“When? Tonight?”

“No, not tonight. I’m meeting someone tonight.”

“I see.”

“Tomorrow night.”

There was a pause. Then a muffled voice, as if Jibril were talking to someone else with his hand over the phone.

“All right. It will be after 9:30. Is that acceptable?”

“Yes, it’s fine. I’ll be expecting you.”

He clicked the phone off and stuck it, the calling card, and the picture in the bag his muffin came in. He took a couple more sips of coffee, all the while watching the door. He dropped everything in the trash on his way out.

~ ~ ~

“I’m sure the woman will be with him tonight,” Jibril said to Ibrahim and the two men.

“Wait until she is alone, then take her.”

The men nodded.

“Do everything the way we have discussed.”

~ ~ ~

Darrin rode his bike the rest of the way up Barrington to his apartment. Kids were practicing ball at the park. *What a simple life, being a kid. You never appreciate what you have until you grow up*, he thought.

He wanted to settle down. Have kids he could play ball with. He didn’t know if that was going to happen. Judging by the dreams he kept having, something deep down in him didn’t

think it was going to happen either – that he wasn't going to make it. Always drowning, never reaching the surface.

He grabbed a shower once he got home. As he was drying off he noticed the scar on his thigh in the mirror. Still redder than the skin around it, and raised. The years hadn't really faded it.

He probably owed Jibril better than this for taking him to the hospital and getting him treatment in Dar es Salaam. Maybe he should've suggested a safer place to meet. But it was Jibril who suggested his apartment, so he figured that wasn't his problem. Or at least that's how he justified it.

He sat down on the couch and turned on Baseball Tonight. The Tigers were in the midst of a real live pennant race. A great thing about being from eastern Indiana is that you could pick from the Cubs, White Sox, Indians, Reds, or even the Tigers. He liked the Reds and the Tigers. When Sparky Anderson left the Reds and went to Detroit, it sealed things for him. He was in college when the Tigers won their last World Series. Now they had gone from one of the losingest to the one of the winningest teams in the Majors. That's what was so great about baseball. Nothing was predestined. Underdogs really could win.

His cell phone – his regular cell phone – rang.

“Hi lover,” he answered.

“Hello lover,” Stacy replied. “How about I pick up some Indian food?”

Boy she loves that stuff, he thought. Maybe it was the curry that was giving him the dreams.

“Perfect. I'll open a bottle of Zinfandel.”

“Gonna get me drunk and sex me up?”

“That’s my plan,” he said.

“Do your best then. See you in a bit.”

How could things be going so well with Stacy while the everything else was falling apart? Life was like that, he guessed. The good balancing the bad and vice versa.

“Hi honey, I got fired today from the job I love. Oh, and I’m probably going to be arrested by the FBI soon. How was your day?” he practiced out loud.

Didn’t sound so good. That should probably wait until later. Sometime after the cuddling.

Stacy arrived and they had chicken curry with Zinfandel. Good match. They digested their food while watching a rerun of Lost.

“Boy, that Sawyer would give you a run for your money, honey,” Stacy said.

“I don’t know, Evangeline Lilly . . . I think we were meant to be,” he replied in kind.

“You’re more like Jack, I think.”

“Not a bad looking guy either. Nice save after the Sawyer comment!”

“So is this purgatory or something? I still don’t get it,” she said.

“The producers say it isn’t. But they control the pen. Hopefully, it’s not some outer space alien thing going on.”

“Darrin?”

He noticed she said his name more seriously than usual.

“Yeah.”

“What do you think heaven is like?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Come on, you must have some idea. You were a minister.”

“I thought I did. Once. I don’t really know.”

“Did ever see that Robin Williams movie? The one about heaven? Cuba Gooding, Jr. was in it. His kids die. He dies. His wife dies. He ends up saving her.”

“I remember. Good movie. Max von Sydow was in it. That guy’s something. ‘What Dreams May Come,’” he said snapping his fingers as he remembered.

“I think heaven is like that. I think it’s what you have in your heart. I think it’s being with the people you’ve loved.”

Darrin nodded. “I hope you’re right.” *What am I going to say? That there’s nothing?* he thought.

“Don’t you think you’ll see your mom again one day? Or your friend that died?”

“I hope so Stacy.”

“Yeah, I think you’ve got to build your relationships with people here to see them in heaven,” she said, looking back at the T.V.

They finished the bottle of Zin, then started to make out. They undressed on the way to the bedroom. As he made love to her he thought about heaven. He thought about being like this with her forever. Not the sex – but that would be great too. The love. *Maybe that’s one of the things God left behind*, he said to himself.

As they laid next to each other afterwards, exchanging small kisses, his cell phone rang. He normally would have let it go to voicemail. But he was worried about getting a call that late.

He looked at the number and saw the Indiana area code. “I better get this,” he said.

“Hello?”

“Darrin? Is that you?”

His heart started to race. Bad timing. He got out of bed and walked away.

“Yes. Yes. Just a minute, o.k.?”

He looked for something to put on or wrap around him. It was bad enough to get a call from your ex-wife after having sex with your girlfriend. But there was no way he was going to have a conversation with her in front of his girlfriend without any clothes on.

“Darrin, are you there?”

Stacey could tell it was a woman’s voice. Some people spoke so loudly you could hear them across the room. She sat for a moment on the bed, then walked to the bathroom.

Darrin found some shorts and put them on.

“Becky, what are you doing calling me? And calling me so late. It’s got to be after 2 a.m. there!”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“Can’t this wait until tomorrow?” he whispered angrily.

He walked out into the kitchen to continue the conversation.

“I had to wait until Gary went to sleep before I could call you. I’m at a payphone at the 7-11. I don’t want him to know that I called you. You know how suspicious he is and if he sees something on the phone bill to Los Angeles”

“Yeah, o.k., Beck. I get it. What’s going on?”

“A couple of FBI agents came to the house today and were asking questions about you. A lot of questions. Who all your friends are, where you have been traveling, whether I had ever seen you with any Middle Eastern looking men. And they wanted to know about any guns that you own, or whether I had ever seen you get violent or talk about hurting people. They wanted to know why we got divorced - whether you ever hit me - and I told them we just grew apart and

that you were a nice man. And they wanted to know about money - whether you ever got a lot of cash. Then it got bad”

“What do you mean?”

“Gary came home and wanted to know what they were doing there. They said they were just talking to me and would be finished in a few minutes and he started to get belligerent with them. I told him it was ok, they just had some questions about you. Then he really went off. He told them if he ever sees you around he was going to kill you. Then one of the agents took him to the side and they were talking. I couldn't hear everything, but I think they were talking about when you and I went away that weekend and he found out about it.”

“One of the agents asked whether you and I still talk and I told him that I hadn't spoken to you in over two years. That was true.”

“Then the agent asked me about whether you ever talked about the Gulf War and being in Saudi. I told them that you had some friends that you served with but that a couple of them had passed away. They were really interested in Johnny Duran -- but I told them that I didn't talk to him after we were divorced in 1998.”

“They also asked about the trip you took to Africa. I told them we were divorced by that time and that all I knew was that you got injured while you were there, had a reaction to some anesthesia and that someone had mistakenly called me as next of kin. They seemed to be very interested in that. I told them you ended up with a scar on your leg but that you recovered.”

Until it rains the next time, he thought. Something - must be the drop in air pressure -- always made his leg hurt before it would rain. That's one of the reasons Southern California was good for him. It usually only rained in the winter time. It was dry the rest of the year.

“D, did you do something wrong? I feel so bad about us. I feel terrible that I wasn't there for you. I just never grew up, you know. Before I had Kimberly I was just a kid myself. Having a kid of your own gives you perspective. I should have helped you through things. I should have been strong for you. You always carried me, and when it was my turn, I guess I let you down.”

“Beck, what happened happened. Sometimes things are just meant to be a certain way. You've got Kimberly now and you need to focus all your energy on her and your marriage.” He would never mention Gary by name - just “your marriage.” It was so awful how people got caught in bad marriages and then had kids and couldn't get out without really hurting innocent people who had no part in their decisions.

“You were always too good to be a minister. Too good for me. You were meant for great things but you settled because of daddy and everything.”

“Not true, Beck.”

“I gotta go. If he wakes up and I'm not there. I gotta go now.”

Stacey was standing there when he hung up.

“I think I'm going to go,” she said.

“No. Stay here, babe.”

“Look, I think it would be better for me to go right now. I'm a little confused. Confused and upset and I just think I should go,” she said slowly. “I've got to work in the morning.”

“Why are you upset?” he said, emphasizing the “you.” *Probably not the right question, and not the right way to ask the question,* he thought right after he said it.

“Oh, I don't know. We have sex. Then you jump out of bed to talk to her. I guess that was your ex-wife. Unless there is someone else you're not telling me about.”

“I’m sorry. It was an Indiana number. My dad’s there. I get scared when I get phone calls at night. I wouldn’t have answered if I had known it was her.”

“Well, you seemed to be pretty nice there at the end. You’ve got quite a touch with the ladies, Darrin. Mr. Sensitive. Maybe she’d let go of you easier if you told her to go to hell.”

“It’s not . . . it’s just complicated.”

“Why is she calling you?”

He didn’t respond.

“O.k. Fine. Fine. I need some time to think about this.”

He grabbed her arm as she started toward the door.

She turned back to him. “You know, you’re such a little baby about the guys I used to hang around with. But you’ve got a woman you were married to for like 10 years. And she thinks it’s just fine to call you at 11 o’clock at night. What is it you two might talk about then? Hmmm,” she said, holding her index finger to her chin.

He shrugged.

“For God’s sake, she’s got a kid Darrin!”

“Stacy, I need you to stay,” he said.

“It’s late, this is probably none of my business,” she said, tears welling up in her eyes.

“No. I don’t want you to go.”

“Then I need the truth.”

“You’ll get it. Sit down.”

She tossed her bag on the floor and took a seat on the sofa.

“Start with why she was calling. Then the rest.”

“O.k. The FBI was at her house today questioning her about me. They think I’ve got something to do with some terrorists.”

“Terrorists? What terrorists?”

“Al Qaeda.”

“What? That doesn’t make sense! Do you?”

“No. I’m not working with any terrorists.”

“Does this have to do with Tanzania and with 9/11?”

“Yes.”

“Well, is it any wonder the FBI is asking questions?”

“I guess not. No.”

“Are you helping them?”

“They want me to.”

“And you’re going to, right? You’re going to help the FBI?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“What the hell does that mean? Why wouldn’t you cooperate?”

“Because I don’t want things to end up being worse.”

“And not helping them? How does that make it better? I don’t get it.”

“It’s a long story,” he said, sitting down beside her.

“I got nothin’ but time, mister.”

He ran his hands through his thinning hair. There are moments in every relationship that you just feel are turning points. Turn toward each other, or turn away from each other.

Moments you know are going to change everything. She was about to turn away. He wasn’t going to let that happen. He wasn’t going to be alone anymore. He was done.

Chapter 88

Darrin was up most of the night on February 22, 1991. He was reviewing and re-reviewing his notes and analysis to date with respect to the scroll. It was all surreal to him.

St. John, after seeing the horrible judgments that were coming for mankind and the end of the world, pleaded with Jesus to keep it from happening. “Teacher,” John said, “some of these little ones you would judge have lived only half of a life span. How can a man be judged based only on half of a life? You did not call me until I was 30 years old. I would not have been chosen to sit at your side if my life had ended earlier. Do not damn these souls, Teacher.”

Jesus seemed to be moved by John’s request. To John, it was sweet like honey that Jesus would spare all the living, non-believers from judgment and would not bring the world to an end.

But then came the bitterness in John’s stomach. Jesus showed John what would happen if John’s request were granted -- the history of the world from then on. A history with persecutions, and wars, and famines, and suffering. A history that sounded like it was straight out of one of Darrin’s high school books back in Muncie. There were what appeared to be references to the persecution of early Christians, the rise of the Christian Empire in Rome, the rise of Islam, the Crusades, the discovery of new worlds, the Spanish Inquisition, the rise of the British Empire, the Ottomans, and ultimately the rise of the United States. Although spanning nearly 1800 years of history, the descriptions took up less than twenty pages.

In addition to being far more specific than the Book of Revelation, there was an added element – what scientists might refer to as a “validator.” Each of the major events had a date associated with it. As a result, even if the references to events or people were unclear, the corresponding dates confirmed the actual events and people. Darrin thought the system was ingenious. Instead of using a less accurate Julian calendar -- which was introduced in 45 B.C. by

Julius Caesar and was the predecessor to the Gregorian calendar used in most of the world today -- the dates used were from the Hebrew calendar. Which also made sense because St. John was Jewish.

The Hebrew calendar was in existence long before the birth of Christ and is still used in the Jewish religion. On average, the Julian/Gregorian calendar is about 11 minutes too fast per year, causing the calendar to gain a day about every 134 years. The Hebrew calendar, on the other hand, is far more accurate – losing only an hour about every 600 years. Not bad at all for the first couple of thousand years at least.

The general rule Darrin recalled from his study of Hebrew was that subtracting 3,760 from the Hebrew year should roughly yield the Gregorian year, at least after 1178 A.D. “Roughly” because sometimes you had to subtract 3,759 due to the Hebrew year beginning in Autumn instead of January.

So, the epic battle of the crusades between individuals who, based on the manuscript, sounded like King Richard and Saladin, occurred in the Year 4951 on the Hebrew calendar and the manuscript and the discovery of the new lands – which must have meant the Americas – occurred in the Year 5252. The dates would have been 1191 A.D. and 1492 A.D. on the Gregorian calendar.

For Darrin, it was like looking at a script for a multiple act play. A script that was written long ago, for a play to be acted out by untold generations of mankind. And not just a play. A production. A production timed down to the day and -- even with the calendar “drift” over the centuries -- to within a few hours on a given day.

If the manuscript text had stopped with the rise of the United States of America – the “Greater Son of Tarshish” to distinguish it from Britain, which was the “Great Son of Tarshish”

– it would have been remarkable. But probably a text whose authenticity would be debated since it could have been written as late as the early 20th Century based on when it was provided to Jibril’s family. Carbon dating and other methods might have concluded otherwise, but the “chain of custody” wouldn’t have begun until the early 20th Century. There always would have been the chance that an old scroll was written on with more modern ink. It would have set up another debate similar, perhaps, to that surrounding the Shroud of Turin.

But the text continued on. On through World War I, the Armenian Genocide, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of Hitler, the horrors of the Holocaust and World War II, and to the fall of the leader of Persia (the Shah of Iran), and one who would arise in the land of Babylon. One who would war against the Persians (the Iranians) – with help from the Greater Son of Tarshish (the United States). One who styled himself after the great Muslim warrior of the Crusades – Saladin -- but was not. One we would know as Saddam Hussein, but not named specifically in the text. One who would be defeated by the armies of the many nations arrayed against him – led by the Greater Son of Tarshish in the Year 5751 of the Hebrew calendar, or 1991. A war that would begin just after sunset on the 10th of Adar, 5751. According to Stu Weinberg, that would be the next evening.

And then a chronology of attacks by the “Lions of the Sons of Ishmael” – which is how the manuscript described some of those who followed Islam -- against the Greater Son of Tarshish at various times in his own land and in other lands – 1993, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001. For example, an attack against the emissaries of the Greater Son of Tarshish that would occur in the Hebrew year 5758, or 1998 in the Gregorian calendar. An attack that would take place in the land where the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba had died. And a final war against the false Saladin. And also attacks against Tarshish (Spain) and the Great Son of Tarshish (Britain).

All with specific dates from the Hebrew calendar. But not just years – months and days and sometimes even times of day.

Although fascinating, there were some extremely troubling things, though. First, the reason for the “script.” It seemed the story was being provided to John to show him not only this alternate version of history – one John could choose -- but also to assist John in doing the task he would be agreeing to in such an event: acting as the “comforter” for those who would later follow the ways set forth in the Scriptures. People who would need a comforter because -- in this version of history at least – God would gather the faithful Christians and Jews who were alive at the end of the First Century and would take them away. Away to a place where those who had died before God’s coming – whether good or evil -- were judged. The good would enter eternal bliss, the evil (including the devil and his host of minions) would enter eternal damnation. And then, in the blink of an eye, Planet Earth, and the Universe for that matter, would no longer be a place where God existed. Mankind would be on its own from that day on – the day that God left.

Darrin knew well the Baptist version of the Rapture and Second Coming of Christ – he had studied it in Sunday School, heard about it in Pastor Chuck’s sermons, and mastered the ins and outs of it in seminary classes. And this version wasn’t that version by any means. The more Darrin thought about it, this was a much sadder version for people of faith who were alive today. A world without God. And not like the world as viewed by atheists or evolutionists – that there never was and never will be a God. Rather, a world that God created and then abandoned. Like an ant farm that a child might put together from a mail order catalog, but then leave somewhere out in the woods. They would be on their own. Their creator gone.

Darrin nodded off at 3 a.m. while still sitting in his office – his chin on his chest. He dreamt not of the history in the manuscript or of the war that was supposed to begin in less than 24 hours. Instead, he dreamt of standing at the pulpit at First Bible Baptist Church in Muncie. He opened his Bible to give the sermon and the pages were blank. He looked down at this sermon notes, and they were blank as well. He tried to remember what he wanted to say to the congregation, but he couldn't. One by one, the people stood and walked out. After a few moments, he was all alone.

“Come on Chappy, time to go,” Johnny Duran said, grabbing him by the arm. “We have work to do.”

“There's nothing left, Sergeant. It's all gone,” he replied.

He opened his eyes to see Johnny looking him in the face. “Come on Chappy, wake up,” Johnny said. “Were you here all night or something?”

Darrin could feel dried drool crusted on the side of his mouth. His breath tasted like stale coffee. His head hurt.

“Chappy, why don't you head back to your quarters and grab a shower. I'll hold things down here,” Johnny said.

“Yeah, must have dozed off. What time is it?” he asked.

“0800, sir,” Johnny said.

“O.k., let me go get a shower and change my shorts,” Darrin said groggily.

He returned 45 minutes later, shaven, showered, wearing pressed clothes and holding another cup of coffee.

Hennessey was there by that time.

“Man, Chappy, you are a machine. Where do you get the energy? I would fall asleep about 5 minutes into that book or whatever it is,” said Hennessey

“Just trying to keep good relations with our hosts, Private,” Darrin said.

“You said you’d let us in on what it says today,” Hennessey reminded him.

“Yes, I did. And I will. I need a few more hours and then I’ll give you the overview,” Darrin replied.

His notes from late the preceding night didn’t make quite as much sense in the morning light. Hennessey grabbed him some lunch from the mess hall and Darrin ate it at his desk. By 2 p.m. he was as ready as he would ever be. He had the notes and analysis done not only through what the manuscript would describe as the current year, 5751 in the Hebrew calendar, but 15 years into the future, 5766 – 2006 to most of the world.

“There,” Darrin said, as he set his pen down.

“O.k. Chappy, let’s hear it. What’s the manuscript about? I see a bunch of dates you’ve written down in your notes there,” Hennessey said.

“Oh, it’s certainly some interesting stuff. I’ve got an apocryphal book here that didn’t make it into our Bible.”

“Apocryphal?” Hennessey asked.

“Yes, today it means ‘false,’ or ‘bad,’ or ‘heretical.’ But originally it literally meant ‘those things hidden away.’ And from the shape of this manuscript, I think it has been hidden away for a very, very long time.”

“So what’s it say?” Hennessey asked, urging Darrin on.

“Well, I don’t know if you want to hear it,” Darrin replied half seriously.

“Why?”

“Seems somebody noted here on the front page that there would be a curse on anyone who hears the words.”

“Wooooo. Scary. Well, I'm from Brooklyn. We don't scare easy. Plus, we've been cursed for 40 years since the Dodgers moved to L.A. Can't be a Yankees fan, and even though I got saved at Shea Stadium, the Mets are for the boys from Queens,” Hennessey said.

“Who's a queen?” Johnny Duran said as he walked in, catching the last part of the conversation. “Bryant left me specific instructions that ‘queens aren't allowed in this man's Army, Sergeant’” Johnny said, changing his voice to sound like Bryant in order to emphasize the quote.

“Chappy says Jibril's given him some lost scroll there. Only it has a curse,” Hennessey said.

“Wow, sounds like ah, Indiana Jones, you know ‘Raiders of the Lost Ark,’” Johnny replied.

“Except that was Ark of the Covenant, Sergeant. It held the Ten Commandments. Old Testament. This is the New Testament,” Darrin said.

“I know, I know. But wasn't it cool when the Nazis melted?” Johnny said.

“Yeah, that was a pretty cool scene,” Darrin agreed.

“So let's hear it, Chappy,” Johnny said.

“Ok, but let me give you the warning again before you decide,” Darrin said. He looked for the paragraph in his notes, and then started to read, “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.”

“Greater is he who is in me,” Hennessey said, quoting a verse from one of St. John’s writings. Nothing is going to hurt me when God is on my side. Not unless He lets it happen.”

It was typical for Hennessey to toss out a Bible verse – applicable or not – when he encountered something he didn’t understand. Darrin thought it was a way for Hennessey to avoid having to really think about new things.

“How about you, Sergeant?” Darrin asked Johnny Duran.

Johnny didn’t seem to be phased by the warning either. “Hey, I’m a Catholic. I spent my whole time as a kid getting the ‘stink eye’ curse from my grandmother, you know. A little more of a curse ain’t going to hurt me. Nothing scares me as much as a hunched over old Mexican lady swinging a cane,” he joked.

“Go ahead, let’s hear it Chappy,” Johnny said.

“Yeah, we’re not sissies, we can handle it,” Hennessey said mockingly.

It will be good practice to run through this once before the meeting with Jibril, Darrin thought to himself as he started the explanation.

“This manuscript lays out a vision that the Apostle John had. It starts with some verses from the Book of Revelation, but then goes in a different direction.”

“Alright! I like that prophecy stuff. The Rapture. The Great Tribulation. The Anti-Christ,” Hennessey said.

“O.k., I feel like I just tuned into Pat Robertson on the 700 Club,” Johnny said. “I’m not up on this stuff, so take it slowly.”

“Yes, good point. Slowly,” Darrin agreed. “Let’s take a step back. First, the Apostle John, also known as St. John the Divine, was one of Jesus’ closest disciples. In fact, he is described in the New Testament of the Bible as ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’ They were

really close. He was part of Jesus' 'inner circle.' And they were so close, that he asked John to take care of Jesus' mother, Mary, after Jesus died."

"Wow, so he trusted this guy enough to take care of the Virgin Mary," Johnny said.

"After Jesus rose from the dead, and appeared to John and the other disciples, Jesus went up to heaven. John went on to be a leader in the Christian church," Darrin said.

"I was always taught that Peter was the first Pope," Johnny said.

"Well, Peter was the leader of the Jewish branch of the new Christian movement. And Paul was the head of the Gentile – or non-Jewish – branch."

"O.k., that's Peter, Paul and Mary, but what happened to John?" Johnny asked.

"Well, while Peter and Paul had their arguments about how the Christian movement should be organized, John was focusing on more spiritual things – God's spirit and God's love. There are four gospels – or books in the New Testament that discuss Jesus' life on earth – and John's is the most spiritual of the four."

"He wrote John 3:16," Hennessey added "For God so loved the world that He gave his only son . . ."

"Right. Eventually, Peter and Paul were executed. So were the rest of the 12 apostles – all except for John. He lived to be a very old man. For about 30 years, he was the leader of the Christian movement. And you have to understand, the reason the apostles were all killed was because there was a great religious persecution by the Roman Empire at that time. Not just for Christians, but for Jews as well. The Romans ended up destroying the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and slaughtering as many Jews as they could get their hands on. The Jews ended up being dispersed throughout the rest of the Mediterranean area."

“When John was over 90 years old, God gave him a vision of the end times – of the triumph of good over evil. It was a vision meant to comfort the early Christians who were being persecuted. Essentially, it said ‘Hold on, God will return soon. You will be rewarded.’ It wasn’t much different than the things that were taught by other New Testament writers – God would come to the rescue one day. In fact, they all thought that God was going to return any moment.”

“And that’s what people believe today. Well, evangelicals at least,” said Hennessey, qualifying things a bit.

“So what happened then, why didn’t God come and rescue them?” Johnny asked.
“Sounds like they sure needed rescuing.”

“Nobody knows. God’s timing is apparently different than our timing,” Darrin replied.

“But all those early Christian leaders thought God was coming back for them?” asked Johnny, trying to pursue a point.

“Yes.”

“Did Jesus say anything about it, or just the church leaders?” Johnny asked.

“Well, Jesus prophesied about the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and made it sound like that would be the end. Obviously, it wasn’t,” Darrin said.

“I just think it’s funny that all those people who knew Jesus and ran the church back then thought that the world was going to end and it never did. Sounds like they missed the boat. I mean, maybe you could be off a few years. You know, maybe God was busy or something. But if I told Glory that I was going to pick her up for a date, and didn’t show for 2,000 years, she wouldn’t wait,” Johnny said.

“With the Lord, a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day,” Hennessey said, quoting a verse from one of St. Peter’s letters.

“O.k., I can understand if you didn’t know when the end would come. But God would know that. If it was going to be another 2,000 years, why would he want people back then to think something that wasn’t true?” Johnny asked.

“I don’t know Johnny,” Darrin said. “I guess he wanted people to always be ready.”

“Doesn’t make sense though Chappy. Look at what we have here around us in the desert. We have hundreds of thousands of soldiers ready to go kick Saddam’s ass. This is the most powerful army ever assembled in history. But we all know that we can’t keep them sitting in tents forever. The forces will degrade. They will eventually need to stand down. To rest. They have other things to do. So, someday soon, we will have to fight or go home,” Johnny said.

“But our spiritual fight has no end Sergeant, it will continue until we die or Jesus returns.”

“Yeah, I understand what you are saying, but I think maybe God is a better general than that,” Johnny replied.

“But what’s the manuscript say, Chappy?” Hennessey asked, trying to get back on topic.

“Well, it’s actually more like what Johnny is saying,” Darrin admitted. “God isn’t some general who kept his troops out in the desert forever. Instead, He came back. He took his troops. And He left. Except that one person stayed behind – John.”

“I guess they weren’t Marines,” Johnny quipped. “They never leave a man behind.”

“But John volunteered to stay behind and watch over mankind,” Darrin explained. “And God left him directions – this manuscript.”

Darrin went on to explain the timeline beginning around 95 A.D. “It’s like a history of things - some good, mostly bad -- that will affect Christians and Jews throughout history. I’ve gotten through about half of it. Its amazing. And the dates -- well the years at least, I don’t know much about Hebrew days and months -- are dead accurate.”

He finished walking through the highpoints up to the rise of the United States as a world power in the early 20th Century. Johnny and Hennessey both had odd looks on their faces -- looks that Darrin took for confusion.

“I’m not explaining this very well. I’m riding about five hours of sleep in the last couple days. I know this sounds like history to us, but that’s because most of the stuff I’ve read in here has already happened. But when this was written almost 2,000 years ago, none of this had happened.”

“I understand. You’re saying this is a prophecy,” Johnny said. “One that has been fulfilled.”

“Exactly,” Darrin replied.

“Wow, like that Noster Dame guy,” Hennessey said.

“Nostrodamus, yes,” Darrin replied. “Only this has actual dates that line up with the text. And something starts happening with things as we run up to Hitler and World War II. The manuscript starts going into a lot more detail. The Holocaust. The concentration camps. It’s like the things before that over the past 2,000 years were important, but not that important. Some major stuff, but more like signposts to get somebody to the modern day. There are about 20 pages covering 1900 years of history. But then events start taking on more detail. And the timing is more specific.”

Darrin went on to bring them up to the events for that day – and turning back the forces of the false Saladin.

Hennessey was quiet.

“You o.k., Private?” Darrin asked.

“Does it say whether we win Chappy?” Hennessey asked solemnly.

“Yes. We do,” Darrin replied.

“Does it say how many of the men die?” Johnny asked.

“No, it doesn't,” Darrin replied.

“It isn't just that though, Sarge. There's more. Otherwise, Chappy wouldn't have told us about the curse.”

Hennessey's instincts were very good.

“No, that's not all. This looks about as good as it gets for a while,” Darrin admitted.

“You mean we lose wars in the future?” Johnny asked.

“Well, I've only read the next 15 years, up as far as 2006. It's not so much that we lose -- but we get attacked a lot. We fight to a standstill as far I see so far,” Darrin said.

“You mean here - in Saudi?” Johnny asked

“Sometimes, yes.”

“By Saddam?”

“No. We turn him back starting today and then we defeat him for good in another 12 years.”

“Then who attacks us?” asked Johnny.

Darrin was silent.

“Who attacks us Chappy?” Johnny asked again.

“Looks like some of our Arab allies,” Darrin said.

“Why would they do that?” Hennessey asked.

“Religion. Revenge for the crusades. They want to kick us and the Israelis out of the Middle East,” Darrin explained.

“They can have this sand, Chappy. I don't mind going home,” Johnny said.

“But we can't go home, Johnny. For the same reason the manuscript says we're going to fight Saddam tonight. These people are sitting on oil. And there's nothing that is going to allow us to abandon the oil,” Darrin said.

“We are fighting Saddam tonight? Has the order come? How do you know of this?”

It was Jibril. Darrin wasn't sure how long he had been at the door listening.

Chapter 89

“Hello Jibril, I didn't hear you come in,” Darrin said.

“You are discussing the manuscript are you not?” Jibril asked.

“Yes,” Darrin admitted.

“And the manuscript says we will fight Saddam?” Jibril asked.

“Yes.”

“When?”

“According to the manuscript, tonight, after sundown,” Darrin said.

“And will we be victorious?”

“Yes.”

Jibril smiled. “I knew the manuscript was important. I could feel it in my heart. And my brother always thought that. There was a reason God wanted us to meet Darrin Allis. I must go and tell the faithful. Many of them are so scared. When I tell them we will be victorious . . .,” Jibril stopped. “Why are you not as joyful as I am?”

“Well, according to the manuscript, today looks like kind of the highpoint for us. Then it looks like the people – the Lions of the Sons of Ishmael -- who fought the Russians in Afghanistan decide to attack the United States. It doesn't look good for future relations,” Darrin said.

Jibril didn't seem surprised. “Well, maybe there is a reason for this. Maybe your country does something wrong.”

“Something wrong?” Hennessey asked. “We are sitting here with the heart and soul of America – our fighting men and women - out in the middle of your God forsaken desert trying to protect your people. What is ever going to justify your people attacking us?”

Jibril took offense immediately. "I will not be spoken to like this by a lowly foot soldier," he said, pointing his finger in Hennessey's face.

"O.k., o.k., let's hold on here," Darrin said, taking a step between Hennessey and Jibril.

"I think I should take the manuscript and go now. I do not feel comfortable having something so important in the presence of . . . infidels," Jibril said, looking at Hennessey.

"Infidels? Infidels? You know, I've sat here for months taking down notes of all your bullshit complaints. You people are living in the Middle Ages. You know that, right? I don't know why we are catering to you like this. We should have just let Saddam run through here and then split up the oil with him," Johnny said.

"Sergeant, that's enough," Darrin shouted.

"And that's what it has always been about. Just as Darrin Allis said earlier. You are here for oil. Were it not for that - and the Jews in Palestine - you would have no interest in this 'sand' as you call it," Jibril shot back.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen. Let's slow down here. First of all, we don't know the stuff in this manuscript is even true," Darrin said, trying to restore some order.

"Have you found anything inaccurate so far?" Jibril asked.

"No."

"Then the writer must have been moved by God," Jibril said.

"Or the devil," Hennessey mumbled to himself. He didn't like the thought of handing the manuscript over to somebody like Jibril. No good could come from that. Even if this stuff were true, it was "dirty laundry" – Christian dirty laundry. Jibril would probably like nothing more than to use it as propaganda against the few Arab Christians in his country.

At that moment, a U.S. Army lieutenant from the First Infantry Division walked in. “Chaplain Allis, I've been told to notify you that we are moving out in a few hours. The 1st I.D. will be going into Iraq. The troops are going to start saddling up. The Mechanized units move against Saddam at 0100 tomorrow. The Special Ops units go in tonight, right after sundown. If you could spare some time with them, it would be appreciated. They are understaffed chaplain-wise. Here are the units,” he said, handing Darrin the orders.

“Of course. Thank you, Lieutenant,” Darrin said, taking the orders and turning to set them on Johnny’s desk because the manuscript and notes were spread on his own desk.

“My God! It’s true!” Johnny exclaimed, looking at the orders.

Jibril looked at the papers and fell to his knees, bowing forward in an act of worship.

Hennessey saw this as an opportunity and took it -- literally. He gathered the manuscript like a football and ran for the door.

Darrin saw Hennessey out of the corner of his eye, and heard the flurry of boot steps, but it took him a moment to notice that the manuscript, and Hennessey, were gone.

“Private, come back here!” Darrin shouted.

“Where did he go?” Johnny asked.

“I think he just took off with the manuscript!” Darrin exclaimed.

Johnny ran for the door shouting, “Hennessey where are you going?”

Jibril stood to his feet, utterly confused. “What . . . ?” He stopped as he looked over to where the scroll had been. “Where . . . ?” He turned and ran to the door.

By the time Darrin, Johnny and Jibril got to the bottom of the three-story building that housed the liaison office, Hennessey was gone.

“You are responsible for this Darrin Allis!” Jibril screamed. “Now get my scroll back! There will be serious consequences if anything happens to it! I can promise you that!”

The three men split up and searched the base for Hennessey for nearly an hour. Darrin rounded the corner of a supply warehouse and Jibril was standing there with his right hand on his forehead. Like someone who had just lost a family member. Or perhaps like someone who would become a lost family member.

Anger flashed in Jibril's eyes as he turned and saw Darrin. In an instant he pulled a pistol from his robe and pushed Darrin against the wall of the warehouse, his left forearm against Darrin's neck. He shoved the pistol under Darrin's ear.

"Do you realize what you have done to me Darrin Allis? It isn't just that I will be humiliated in front of my family for being a fool. For trusting a crusader and an infidel. God had given that manuscript to my family for a reason. My brother is one of the Lions of the Sons of Ishmael described in that manuscript. I know in my heart this is true. God wanted us to know the words of that manuscript," he said pressing the pistol harder into Darrin's flesh.

Darrin could see his own face in the pupils of Jibril al-Salam's eyes. He looked small. He stopped struggling against the robed forearm pressed against his windpipe. With the pistol burrowing ever deeper into the soft flesh below his left ear, just letting go of consciousness seemed easier. He tried. He tried again. Giving up wasn't so easy either.

He felt something trickling down his neck. The Army buzz cut hadn't protected him from the ribbed metal wall of the supply hut. At least not after the third or fourth time his head had been slammed against it.

He could see Jibril's mouth moving. The sound coming out was loud. But the words weren't registering.

He wondered what Becky was doing. *Is it daytime now back in the States?* The lack of oxygen to his brain wasn't allowing him to process the time difference. He was certain he was going to die now. *Will Becky feel something the moment my heart stops beating? Is our connection that strong? No. No it isn't.*

"Hey Jibril, it's over here," someone shouted in the distance. It was Private Hennessey. "Come on over here," Hennessey said, waving his arm.

Jibril's head snapped to the right. He tucked his sidearm back into the pocket that was sewn into his flowing white robe. He released Darrin as an after-thought. Darrin fell to one knee, palms to the ground. He struggled to take a breath. Hennessey kept waving for a moment longer and then disappeared behind a building.

Jibril began sprinting toward the spot he last saw Hennessey. Darrin stood up, staggered, got his bearings, and then raced to catch up. Jibril's left arm was pumping as he ran, but his right hand was pressed against the pistol in his robe. The white kaffiyah on Jibril's head flapped behind him. His sandals clapped a steady rhythm on the asphalt roadway.

Darrin soon smelled the smoke. Jibril froze once he cleared the corner of the building. The setting sun didn't allow Darrin to see Jibril's face until he was only a few feet away. Jibril looked helpless, like an injured toddler before he lets out an ear-shattering wail. It took Darrin only another few steps to see what was tormenting Jibril.

There was Hennessey, standing next to what little was left of the smoldering manuscript. Beside him were two U.S. Army military policemen, both holding M-16 rifles. Jibril began to pull the pistol from his pocket, but then drew his hand back as the men simultaneously leveled their M-16s toward him.

"These M.P.s were just helping me figure out who was burning trash out here in the middle of the base. I told them the best way to deal with it was to just let it burn itself out," Hennessey said.

"Fool!" Jibril hissed.

"Hennessey! Put it out now!" Darrin croaked, his throat still feeling like it had a Brillo Pad in it.

"Yes, sir," Hennessey said, smiling as he stomped on the remains of the manuscript.

"No!" Jibril shrieked, pushing Hennessey aside and diving on the pile of ashes. He started putting out the last few flames with his hands.

Darrin could see that only part of the first page of the manuscript was still intact. When the scroll was rolled up, the first page was the innermost. Which meant it was the last to be scorched by the flames. The handwritten words in Greek were

και πικρανει σου την κοιλιαν

"It will make your stomach bitter," Darrin said under his breath.

A tan Humvee screeched to a stop next to them. Johnny Duran jumped out and began to assess the situation. Darrin looking dazed. Jibril, on his knees, frantically trying to extinguish burning scraps of paper. And the handle of a pistol sticking out of his robe. Hennessey standing next to him, smirking. Two M.P.s with rifles.

Johnny stepped in, putting himself between Jibril and Darrin. He grabbed Hennessey by the arm and pointed to Darrin. Hennessey got the message, and he kept himself between Darrin and Jibril while shuttling Darrin to the other side of the Humvee.

"Corporal," Johnny said to one of the M.P.s. "I need to get Captain Allis to a meeting A.S.A.P. Private Hennessey is coming with me. Please help our Saudi friend back to his area of the base."

"Yessir, Sergeant," the M.P. responded.

Johnny stepped back toward the Humvee, keeping the kneeling Jibril in sight at all times. He climbed in and ordered the young driver to go. The man seemed a little confused.

"Come on, go." Still nothing. "Vaminos!" Johnny yelled at the driver, all the while watching Jibril in the side mirror of the Humvee to make sure he didn't reach for his gun.

When they got a few hundred yards away, Johnny turned around to check on Darrin. It was only then he noticed the blood on the chaplain's hands. "What happened?" he asked.

"Hit my head, I guess" Darrin muttered, looking at his crimson palms.

"Pull over!" Johnny said.

As the Humvee stopped, Johnny scrambled around the back to get the first aid kit. In a couple of moments Darrin had a thick, gauze compress to hold against the gash on the back of his head. "Double-time it to the base hospital," Johnny ordered.

As they sped along, Johnny turned and glared at Hennessey in the back seat. "You ever do something like that again Private, and, God is my witness, I will snap your neck. You have one job – protect the chaplain. Look at him! He's got blood all over him! And probably a concussion! You're derelict mister," Johnny said, thrusting his finger toward Hennessey.

"I'm sorry, Chappy," Hennessey said, putting his hand on Darrin's shoulder and trying to ignore his Sergeant.

"And you burned the thing! What were you thinking?" Johnny continued with his tirade. "I suppose pissing on the Koran while standing inside a mosque would have been worse, but this

was a close second. I should have had the M.P.s lock you up. You're confined to quarters, you understand?"

"It's not right to know that stuff, Sarge," Hennessey replied.

"What'd you say?" Johnny said, putting his meaty right hand on the back of the driver's seat and pulling himself toward Hennessey.

"The stuff in the scroll. Nobody should know that. Least of all, Jibril."

"Don't matter. It was his, and you torched it! There's gonna be hell to pay!"

"You saw the look on Jibril's face when Chappy read the passages out loud. I couldn't let him keep it."

"Wasn't your decision, Hennessey. You got me?" Johnny asked, now turned completely around, straddling the front passenger seat and leaning to within inches of Hennessey's face.

"Yes, sir . . . Sergeant, sir," Hennessey replied, turning to look out the window.

Chapter 90

Darrin set up the meeting with Jibril as General Robinson had ordered. The next day, Jibril was in Darrin's office. Jibril was far calmer than Darrin anticipated. He actually seemed to be asking for something fairly reasonable.

"My family will be satisfied if you give me your notes and specify the dates that relate to the Lions of the Sons of Ishmael," Jibril said.

"Why those dates?"

"We have our reasons."

"The dates are in Hebrew years," Darrin replied.

"In that case, you will translate the dates for us," Jibril demanded.

"But these dates are in the future. I don't have access to a computer program that would translate these dates in our calendar."

"That is not my concern. You are responsible for this problem. You will fix it," Jibril said, with the wave of a hand. "You have 24 hours. If everything is not ready by then, we will demand that the infidel Hennessey be turned over to our justice system," Jibril said coldly.

After Jibril left, Darrin immediately picked up the phone with Stu Weinberg.

"I've got a booklet here with the next 5 years worth of dates that the Jewish holidays fall on, but I wouldn't be able to get you a specific date in the future after that," Stu said apologetically. "Maybe back in the States, but not here. I can make some phone calls if you give the dates. What's going on?"

"You wouldn't believe it if I told you. Thanks Stu. I'll fax the dates over to you," Darrin said, hanging up.

Darrin had the dates the next day. He plugged them into a page he had created to go along with a copy of the notes.

When Jibril returned, Darrin told him, "I've rewritten the dates down on this piece of paper, and added the heading 'Date References.' Each date has a number assigned to it. One through ten. Then I went back to the other notes and added the corresponding number in the text. So where you see "1" in the text, you go to the Date References and you see the "1" with a Hebrew date and the date from the Gregorian calendar. I've underlined those."

"Now, is this everything?" Jibril asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, these pages look like copies," Jibril said.

"They are."

"No, no. I need the originals too," Jibril demanded.

"Why?"

"Because they belong to my family. I never gave you permission to keep copies of anything," Jibril said.

"But they're my notes!" Darrin objected.

"Notes from my family's manuscript! Now give me the originals as well!" Jibril shouted.

Darrin crossed his arms.

"Give them to me, or I will make sure that the blade used to behead the infidel Hennessey is dull and requires his head to be hacked off with many strokes!" Jibril threatened.

"Here!" Darrin said disgustedly, handing him his file of original notes. *You can't erase my memory*, Darrin thought to himself. *Or the original of what Stu Weinberg faxed to me.*

“Very well then. We will withdraw the charges. Good bye, Darrin Allis. I enjoyed working with you until this unfortunate . . . incident. I wish things could have been different.”

“Same here,” Darrin replied.

Johnny escorted Jibril to a large, silver Mercedes parked next to the building. The darkly tinted window in the back seat was rolled down far enough for him to see the eyes of a man looking out. Eyes that seemed peaceful, but at the same time sinister. The window rolled up a second after the eyes noticed Johnny looking at them. Jibril rounded the front of the car and got in the backseat on the other side.

“Well, that’s over,” Johnny said as he walked back into the liaison office.

“It’s never over until it’s over,” Darrin said, quoting Yogi Berra.

“What do you mean?”

“Jibril doesn’t realize yet that I only got through half of the manuscript. One day – maybe a long time from now -- he’s going want to know what else happens. Unfortunately, because of Hennessey, we’ll never know.”

“I don’t think we were meant to know the future, Chappy. Just like I don’t want to know the day I’m going to die. I just want to enjoy life without seeing that coming.”

“I agree. Well, as I recall, the next date on the list is February 26, 1993. Something is supposed to happen in the great city on the Western Sea with the foot of a northern tower. We’ll have to remember to watch the news and see how Los Angeles does.”

“February 26, 1993. I’ll remember that like my mother’s birthday,” Johnny promised.

Chapter 91

There, in the living room of his apartment, Darrin went on to tell Stacy the rest of what had been bottled up inside him for over 15 years. How although he had kept Hennessey from being turned over to the Saudis, but couldn't keep him from being discharged from the Army. How Hennessey had spiraled down into coke and heroin binges. How, just before he jumped from his apartment balcony, he had specifically sent an email to Darrin, telling him not to worry if he didn't hear from him anymore, he would be ok. And thanking him for trying to help Hennessey "see the light."

How the WTC bombing locked in the reality of the scroll for him. How he had spent the next several years trying to figure out where the next target was - Tanzania. How he had written the notes where the son of Sheba and Solomon died.

How he had been wounded there in Dar es Salaam. How he remembered seeing Jibril standing over him. How Jibril must have picked him up off the sidewalk and driven him to the hospital. How he felt a hand on his forehead and had heard a voice. How he spent a week in the hospital, almost dying not from the wound but from the anesthesia they had given him.

How, for two years, he didn't think about the scroll or about Saudi. How he had moved to Los Angeles and stayed with Rod.

How his father and mother had forwarded a letter that Johnny had sent to their home. He had not spoken to Johnny for two years. How he started remembering Dar es Salaam and being wounded and why he was there. And Jibril. How it all started to come together again for him. Like he mentally blocked it out. How it hit him that day those people in Nairobi were dead because of him. Because he interfered.

How he had spent hours and hours talking with Johnny about 9/11 and what they could do. How he had borrowed the money from Rod and invested it, thinking that if he couldn't stop the horror, he could help the victims.

How he had chased Johnny to New York, but arrived too late. How he found his friend's body, gray with dust and twisted under a pile of debris. How he saw thousands of other people, wondering around, looking for their loved ones. How he had taken his friend's body back to Illinois and how Glory never recovered.

How he decided to give his life to helping others and volunteered at the Assistance Center.

How he had circled the date of the Iraq War and then later reinvested the 9/11 money in oil futures, knowing the War would not end. Knowing that the instability would drive up oil prices.

How he had circled the Madrid and London bombing dates. How he had cried watching the video of the victims.

How he had wrestled with what was coming in Los Angeles. And how he didn't know if he could stand by this time.

Darrin put his face in his hands.

"God, that's quite a story," Stacy said. She pulled him to her chest.

"Why didn't you just tell people from the start? Why couldn't you say something? Make it somebody else's problem?" she asked.

"Tell 'em what?" he said, sitting up and facing her. "That I found a magical scroll that foretold the future? But wait, I can't really prove there was a magical scroll because it was

conveniently destroyed? Nobody was going to believe that. I didn't even really believe it. Or at least I didn't want to."

"You could have at least told the people in your church."

"I tried. It didn't work. Even the people I thought might understand didn't."

* * *

"So where's all this coming from?" Professor Graham Bixby asked.

"Just questions," Darrin replied.

Bixby turned to look out his office window. It was springtime in Texas. In his opinion, the only good time of the year to be in Texas. Finals were in two weeks and once he finished grading papers he would take a short flight from Austin to Dallas and then board a 9-hour flight from Dallas to Heathrow. He'd spend the summer writing and researching in the English countryside.

"So you're asking whether the Revelation of St. John is the only way that things could end."

"Yes. I mean, is it just a warning? Or is it pre-ordained?"

"Well, I think you know what we believe Darrin. It's the literal way things will end. A great tribulation. An anti-Christ. Christ returns."

"But doesn't God give us a free will?"

"Of course."

"So how can God be sure this is the way it will happen?"

"Because God knows the future."

"But wouldn't that negate free will? Couldn't somebody change their mind at the last minute?"

Bixby shrugged.

“Then could God change his mind, maybe?”

“I suppose God could do anything. But why would he want to?”

“I don’t know. It seems he did that in the Old Testament. What about Jonah? He went to tell the people of Ninevah that God was going to destroy them, right?”

“Yes, but only if they didn’t repent.”

“Then why is Revelations different?”

“Look at the world around us, do you think it’s going to change Darrin?”

“I want it to. I want it to be better. I want people to make peace with each other. Help the ‘least of these’ like Jesus taught us.”

“It’s been 2,000 years – the world only seems to have gotten worse.”

“Yes, it’s been 2,000 years. But the world has gotten better in a lot of ways. You look at the average person today versus 2,000 years ago, and it’s better for them.”

“Better how? Where’s the faith in God?” Bixby asked.

“There are more people who believe today than at any time, aren’t there?”

“That’s only because there are over five billion people on earth.”

“Do you ever wonder why miracles don’t happen anymore, Professor Bixby.”

“But miracles do happen. The miracle of life happens every time a baby is born.”

“I mean real honest miracles like Jesus and the Apostles did. Healing the sick, raising the dead. Loaves and fishes. Water into wine. What happened?”

“The Bible says that when that which is perfect comes, the miracles would pass away. That perfect thing is the Bible. We don’t need miracles to impress people and make them believe. They have God’s word. They have the Bible now.”

“Is it possible that God already returned? That he took away the Christians and the 144,000 Jews they talk about in Revelations and just left everybody?”

Bixby was struck at the how specific the questions were.

“No. Well. No. That’s not possible. Think about it, why would we have had a church for almost 2,000 years if God had already returned?”

“Maybe there was no other choice for people. They just clung to what they’d been taught.”

“But that would mean we’ve all been led astray on a massive scale.”

Bixby started to enjoy the challenge Darrin was presenting.

“Plus, God promised he would judge the wicked and create a new heaven and new Earth. We don’t have that, do we?”

“That assumes that the version of Revelations in the Bible is true. But assume it’s not. Assume that God just took everyone away. Isn’t that more like what the Apostle Paul had to say. The story of the great tribulation only comes from Revelations.”

“Look, there are some allegedly ‘Christian scholars,’” Bixby said with fingers in quotes, “out there who don’t believe that the Revelation of St. John is literal. Some may even question Jesus’ divinity. But nobody is saying that it was all true. That Jesus lived and died and rose again and then, 60 or 70 years later came back and took the Christians and Jews away. That it just ended without anyone knowing.”

“But wouldn’t it be consistent with what the Founding Fathers of America thought? Jefferson? Franklin? Washington? They were deists. They believed God created the world and then left. He was like a watchmaker. He created the watch, wound it up, and then he left. Who’s to say that didn’t happen?”

“I don’t think they knew the story you’re telling, though.”

“Maybe not. But it’s just that their timing was off. God walked away, but the Bible was fulfilled first.”

“Hmmm.”

“But just assume, hypothetically, that that were the case,” Darrin said. “What would it mean for the church? What would it mean for the world.”

“O.k., o.k. Hypothetically, God takes everyone away. Where do they go?”

“Another universe. Someplace else.”

“O.k. And so the devil is left to run the world.”

“Nope. Assume the devil and everyone else that had died up to that point in history was judged by God. Sent on their way to wherever the bad souls go.”

“So no God. No devil. Just nonbelievers.”

“Or the not-quite believers. Whoever didn’t make the cut. Alive at the time of Christ’s return, but not a believer.”

“And, hypothetically Darrin, when would this have happened.”

“Let’s say it was 100 A.D.”

“O.k., so since 100 A.D., the world’s just been . . . people. No God in heaven. No devil in hell.”

“Yep.”

“But here’s where it breaks down, your hypothetical. The church thrived after 100 A.D. The Bible wasn’t put together until after 300 A.D. Are you saying that a bunch of people back then knew there was no God, but kept acting like there was one?”

“Maybe they didn’t know. Or, yes, maybe some did and just didn’t say anything.”

“But how could hundreds of thousands of people disappear without people knowing?”

“There was persecution then. Maybe they thought the Romans had taken them away and killed them.”

Professor Bixby sat back in his chair and put his hands behind his head.

“Well, it’s interesting, I’ll grant you that. It might also explain why I, a British evangelical, have to come to Austin, Texas to find common cause with likeminded people. Not a lot of us left in Britain or on the Continent. But I can tell you why it’s poppycock.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because I know what I feel in my heart. I know God’s there because I know he changed me. He walks with me and he talks with me, as the song goes. Isn’t that what faith comes down to anyway? Hoping? Believing in things we can’t see?”

Darrin felt a sinking feeling. If Graham Bixby, the stiffest most, well, British guy he’d ever met, had to resort to feelings to prove his point, then the manuscript might well be true. And if the manuscript was true, then attacks or whatever was coming to the United States, would pale in comparison to a much bigger truth. A truth that nobody would believe – Christians, Jews, Muslims, or atheists. There was a God – but he left.

* * *

“Darrin, you have to tell the FBI. You didn't ask for this information. Why do you feel responsible if something worse happens?”

“Because the scroll said that the misery would be multiplied if anyone hinders what has been written. I did it in Dar es Salaam. I may have actually saved some Americans there - but Tanzanians died in their place, and a second bomb killed even more people in Nairobi. When I didn't interfere - because I didn't know how to - bombings happened, but nothing like Nairobi.

Then we knew it was coming back to New York. Exactly the same place as the WTC bombing. We decided not to do anything but try to help the victims. But Johnny couldn't do it. He couldn't stand by. He took off for New York after he put me on a plane to L.A. I caught the next flight I could and was too late. Thousands of people died because Johnny tried to interfere - and Johnny was killed. I was almost decapitated by the fender off a truck in Dar es Salaam, and what did hit me - an inch or so over and I would have bled to death. I can't take that responsibility this time.”

“But the FBI can stop it. They can warn people to stay in their homes.”

“But I don't know what 'it' will be. And why are they going to listen to me tell them about a scroll. They think I did these things or at least helped plan them. They think I am part of this.”

“When is it going to happen Darrin? I will tell the FBI for you if that is what it takes.”

“No. No. I am not going to get you involved or let you get hurt.”

“In case you hadn't noticed, I am sitting with a man who says he has known the date and time of every major al Qaeda attack over the last 13 years. The lives of 12 million people in Southern California - including me - are in your hands. I'm already involved. And let me tell you something else - I'm not leaving this city until whatever is supposed to happen, has happened. So if it is bad, you better believe I am going to get hurt. If that is what it takes, that is what I will do.”

“Don't say that.”

“And what about Jibril? Do you know where he is?”

He didn't respond.

“Jesus, Darrin! Why are trying to protect this guy? Just turn him over to the cops.”

“He’s just a bystander. Like me. I told him some stuff I shouldn’t have. I’m not going to hang him out there. It wasn’t his fault.”

“Do you really believe he’s just a bystander. Hell, you said he was there in Dar es Salaam. Why do you think he was there?”

“He saved my life.”

“So what! He’s bin Laden’s brother!”

“Half-brother.”

“Whatever! Are you too stupid to see what’s going on here?”

No response.

“Let me spell it out. You wrote some shit down. And Jibril has made it a reality. There’s nothing mystical about that!”

“That’s not true. Jibril didn’t have anything to do with the Gulf War starting or any of the other things before that. This isn’t happening because of Jibril.”

“The hell it’s not. Look, I don’t know about all that other stuff you read. But it seems to me you’ve gotten twisted up here between what you think is destined and what isn’t and it’s . . . it’s just messed up.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!”

"Let me follow this," she said putting her hands on the sides of her head. "God decided that all this would happen. You tried to stop it, and it got worse than you thought it would. You almost died. Your friend tried to stop it, it got way worse than you thought it would - it was 9/11. He died. You knew stuff was going to happen in London and Madrid. You did nothing. No warnings, no nothing. People died. But you think it's ok, because not as many people died as 9/11. I wonder if the families of the victims would understand that?"

No answer.

“So now, something is supposed to happen in L.A. You are willing to stand by and let that happen -- let people die -- because you don't want something worse.”

He nodded.

“Ok, that's screwed up. But let's for a moment think about the rational explanation for all this. Isn't this Jibril using your notes to help his brother plan attacks? I mean, this doesn't prove that any of this is real. He just took your notes, planned attacks, and got lucky.”

His reaction was to deny.

“He didn't start the Ground War in the Gulf in 1990. That happened without him. The other stuff, I don't think”

“You don't think what?”

“He's a good man. He saved my life. He didn't have to. He's probably going through the same stuff I am.”

“You know, I appreciate that you look for the good in people. I really do. But this guy is here to kill people. And you have to stop him. You have to tell the FBI what you know.”

“I've been there before. I tried to stop people from going into an Embassy. Two embassies got blown up. Johnny tried to stop people from going into the World Trade Center. Both Towers got blown up and the Pentagon got attacked. Another flight went down in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Do you see? If you try to stop it, it only makes it worse.”

“I just don't believe that.”

“You don't believe it because you haven't had this . . . this weight on you for 15 years. It's real. I wasn't meant to know this stuff. Johnny wasn't meant to know it. Hennessey wasn't

meant to know it. Neither was Jibril. I have a feeling he wants to stop this as much as I do. But he doesn't know what to do."

"And now I know it. And if you don't tell the FBI . . . if you don't try to stop this, I will."

"You can't," he said weakly.

"Why? Because the curse will get me? Do you know how stupid that sounds?"

"Don't make fun of things you don't understand."

"Look, you didn't read the whole thing. You said it yourself. Maybe it said that this would all be stopped by you. Or by me."

"I don't think so."

She shook her head.

"You - a minister - have built your own religion out of al Qaeda attacks? Only they do it because they think God wants them to. You think it's because God hates us and decided to leave?"

"Not hates us. Spared us."

"And cursed us?"

"No, not all of us. Just those who hear this - who hear the truth."

"I'm supposed to believe what? There's nothing? That's not a religion."

"Atheists believe it."

"No. No. They believe God doesn't and didn't ever exist. You've picked the worst elements of religion and atheism. Jesus, Darrin!"

She looked in his eyes. He could see the pity. She did love him.

“This is a lot to process. I’m going to go home. I want you to get some sleep. You call me tomorrow morning and let me know you’re going to talk to the FBI.”

He didn’t say anything. Just looked at her with those sad eyes. Like an old Springer Spaniel she used to have as a kid.

“If you don’t, I will. You’ve gambled with people’s lives Darrin. And thousands of people died. I’m not sure I know what to do with that. But I know you just can’t do that again. You can’t.”

She kissed him on the forehead, picked up her bag, and left. He knew she meant it. She’d go to the FBI if he didn’t.

He flipped on the TV. Jimmy Kimmel was still on, cracking wise with a young sitcom actress. He needed something to stop the conversation playing over and over in his head.

If he hadn’t done that, he might have heard a very muffled scream and a van door sliding open and shut. The van pulled away. A moment later, a man drove off in Stacy’s Z-3.