

CHAPTER 11

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O'Hare terminal 2 — gate B66 was packed with late afternoon travelers. Zach was slumped forward in the chair, his elbows rested on his knees, his brain in a downward tailspin. All the research and development for the last four years had just taken a nose dive. Regrettably the prototype panels not only collected sunlight they also gathered up television and radio frequency energy. The makeshift coat hanger antenna orientated at the television transmitter room on the unnumbered floor of the Sears Tower proved that now known fact. *Son Source will be broke in six weeks if I don't find venture capital or get a big contract. I'm back to ground zero with my small quad panels.*

"Mr. Slenski don't look up! Meet me in the restroom across from the Brookstone concessionary in five minutes," a recognizable voice firmly ordered. Zach waited a few minutes then picked up the aluminum instrument case and his overnight bag and headed down the concourse toward TSA security. There was a cleaning cart blocking the entrance to the restroom. The janitor pulled the cart back and motioned for Zach to go in.

CIA agent Calhoun approached. "Mr. Slenski we know that you have been in contact with the General Intelligence Directorate.

"What?" Zach was puzzled and alarmed. It looked like there was not anyone else in the restroom but them!

"The General Intelligence Directorate is the primary intelligence agency of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Our office traced a call from the GID in Saudi Arabia directly to Son Source and you took the call."

"What! The CIA can't spy on an American Citizen."

"We can if that US citizen is calling a foreign spy!"

"Prince Nasser is a friend of the United States and graduated from USC. He might even have dual citizenship," Zach argued.

"I know all that. I've been the lead agent watching him for more than fifteen years."

33 “Plus, I never did get in contact with the Prince. If I did, it would
34 have been a private business matter.”

35 “But you called the GID and you had a conversation with Mr. Obaid
36 Bin Naimi about Peter Craft.”

37 Zach rubbed at his forehead. “Peter Craft was a star basketball
38 player at USC at the same time Prince Nasser was enrolled there. He
39 also had short stint in the NBA.”

40 “Is that all that you told Mr. Obaid Bin Naimi?” Agent Calhoun
41 asked as he reached inside his jacket.

42 Zach rubbed at his head. “I don’t exactly recall. I found most of the
43 basketball information about him on the USC website.”

44 Agent Calhoun handed a stack of 4X5 photos to Zach. “Take a look
45 at these and tell me what you think”

46 Zach thumbed through the photos. “These are of a much younger
47 Prince Nasser. They must have been taken during his college days.
48 This one looks like the Prince and Peter at an old fashioned tent
49 revival.” Zack looked at the next photo. “This one is of people coming
50 forward to the stage to accept Jesus as their Savior.”

51 “You’re right!” Agent Calhoun quipped.

52 “Wow, that Peter is at least a foot taller than the Prince.” Zach
53 glanced at two more photos and then handed them back.

54 Agent Calhoun bent over and looked under the bathroom stall
55 doors. He stood back up and whispered, “Reverend Craft disappeared
56 on a mission trip to the Middle East to help Coptic Christians a year
57 ago.”

58 “What happened?” Zach asked.

59 “Nobody knows. He’s still missing. I pulled everything that the CIA
60 had on him including these college photos of him with Prince Amer
61 Nasser. Reverend Craft was listed as an international evangelizer.
62 Therefore he would have been an enemy of the Islamic State.”

63 “The Koran preaches death to all infidels,” Zach said with concern.

64 “Actually, the Koran states, death to unbelievers not infidels.”
65 Agent Calhoun corrected Zach.

66 “I remember a news clip of Coptic Christians in orange jump suits
67 that had black hoods pulled over their heads? They were told to kneel

68 down and denounce the Son of God. The news said that they were
69 beheaded for being infidels.”

70 “I was undercover in the Middle East at that time. That five minute
71 news clip emboldened the radical ISIS movement.”

72 “That five minute video taught the world to hate Muslims.”

73 “Exactly, that was the intent. It emboldened evil. Hate of neighbor
74 is the message of most radical groups. The hate message also plays
75 into some Christian groups that practice fundamentalism. I’m tired and
76 disheartened after twenty five years of assignment in the middle east.”

77 A forced silence overcame the discouragement by a commotion at
78 the restroom entrance. A lanky dark skinned man with a gray scraggly
79 beard hurried across the tile floor. The traveler dropped an overnight
80 bag and rushed to the urinal. Agent Calhoun shoved the stack of
81 photos back into Zach’s hand and headed toward the exit.

82 Zach caught up with him. “What am I supposed to do with these?”

83 I don’t know? I’m retiring in two weeks. Prince Nasser’s fate is in
84 your hands. Let the Son be the source of your discernment.” Agent
85 Calhoun doubled his speed down the corridor toward the security gate.

86 When Zach made an about face three containers caught his eye.
87 There was a green container for recyclables, a blue container for
88 returnables and a brown container for garbage. He walked over and
89 had a discerning moment: *Should photos go in the garbage bin or the*
90 *recycle bin? Or should I keep them just in case?*

91 Boarded and with the instrument case stored in the overhead
92 compartment Zach closed his eyes. *Son Source is done if I don’t get*
93 *some investment capital. Who would have known that up in that*
94 *conference room the RF power from the television antennas was*
95 *generating more power than the sun? What an over site on my part.*
96 *The tinting was a waste of six weeks. Plus two trips to Chicago and a*
97 *bunch of overtime lab hours. I’m back to square one and...*

98 “Buckle your seatbelt!” The flight attendant ordered as he closed
99 the overhead compartment door. Zach followed the seatbelt order and
100 then reached out for the air phone on the back of the seat. “Leave the
101 phone in its cradle. I’ll make an announcement when it’s okay to make
102 an air to land call.” The attendant moved toward the back of the plane

103 shutting more overhead compartments.

104 It was about ten minutes before the seatbelt light went off. "You
105 can make an air to land call now," blared out from the small speaker
106 above. Zack reached for the phone but abruptly forced it back into the
107 cradle. *Sally doesn't need to hear more bad news. She already thinks*
108 *Son Source is a lost cause and that I'll never amount to much.* Zach
109 reclined the seat and day dreamed about blackmail and deception. The
110 dark thoughts stuck with him off the plane, out the airport and all the
111 way home.

112 The smell of microwave fish sticks didn't even register when Zach
113 entered the kitchen through the garage. The sound of two sets of feet
114 running down the hall begging for whisker man barely broke the dread
115 of being a total failure.

116 Sally followed the girls into the kitchen and asked, "How was the
117 trip?"

118 "A... Okay," Zach bent over and picked up Kendra and patted
119 Chelsea on the head. "It must be another sleep over." Zach rubbed his
120 chin against Kendra's neck; she squirmed and laughed.

121 "My Daddy is coming home next month," blurted out Chelsea.
122 "He'll do whisker man for me."

123 Zach looked down, smiled and said, "That's good news."

124 "My Mommy said my Daddy can work for you?"

125 Silence filled the kitchen; finally Sally replied, "We'll be glad to help
126 your Dad find work. I know an important man at a big church that can
127 help too."

128 The awkward moment was broken by the sound of skateboard
129 wheels on the concrete garage floor. The door flew open! "How was
130 your trip?" Ben asked as he made a beeline to the refrigerator. "Did
131 you have a meeting with the Queen of the Nile this time?" Ben took a
132 drink from the milk carton and then looked deeper into the bright
133 white interior.

134 "Ben, I've told you a thousand times to use a glass!" Sally
135 reprimanded in a tone of disgust.

136 "Mom, it's okay. I brushed my teeth this morning." Ben latched
137 onto a chicken leg behind a bowl of potato salad.

138 "Put that back! They're for your fund raiser." Sally quipped.

139 "Too late." Ben took a bite out of the chicken leg and shut the door
140 with his knee after his other hand latched onto an apple.

141 "You're gross," Kendra mimicked her mom's scolding.

142 Chelsea so much wanted an active family like Kendra had. She
143 quietly hoped her Dad was like Zack. Maybe someday she would have
144 a brother like Ben?

145 Zach was half tuned out to the normal family antics. He was
146 thinking about not making payroll next week and wondered if Sally
147 had kept up on his life insurance premiums. His dark thoughts were
148 jolted when Ben whispered in his ear. "Dad, I have something real
149 important to ask you. If you're going to be at the shop tonight can I
150 stop by?"

151 "Sure, I'll be working late tonight," Zach answered.

152 "What are you two up to?" Sally asked from over by the sink.

153 "It's man stuff Mom." Ben blurted and headed for his bedroom.
154 Sally was in the kitchen at the counter making Deviled eggs when
155 Zack pressed up against her and kissed her on the neck. "I'm going to
156 go down to work for awhile. Should I wake you up when I get home?"

157 No, I'm taking the girls to ballet first thing in the morning. Don't
158 forget we have Ben's fundraiser tomorrow night."

159 "I thought that was on Sunday?"

160 "No Pastor Tom changed it to Saturday night. He didn't want Bingo
161 to be competing with his collection on Sunday."

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163 Zach was at his desk thumbing through the black and white
164 surveillance photos when he heard the employee door open and then
165 skateboard wheels on the concrete warehouse floor. It had been a long
166 time since he heard that sound. The rolling sound came down the
167 hallway and Ben skated right into the office. He jumped off and
168 somehow made the skateboard flip up into the air and then snatched it
169 one handed out of midair. "What are you looking at Dad?"

170 "Oh, these are some old photographs of that Saudi Prince I told
171 you about."

172 "Really let me see." Ben tossed the skate board in the chair and

173 snatched two of the photos. "What are these old spy pictures? They're
174 not even in color."

175 "I think so. An old retiring CIA agent gave them to me."

176 "Yeah, right Dad." Ben tossed the two curled up 4 x 5 pictures and
177 tossed them on the desk. Then he looked directly at Zach. "I need you
178 to get Mom to sign some enlistment papers. I'm not going to go to
179 college. I want to serve our country as an Army Ranger!"

180 Zach dropped the photos. He'd never been the dad that preached
181 service for country. He'd never served and probably would have failed
182 boot camp. Actually, he was somewhat jealous of Ben's natural
183 athleticism—something not in his own DNA.

184 "I'll be eighteen in August and can join without her consent."

185 In silence Zach walked around his desk toward the office door and
186 stopped. "Let's go get some coffee and talk about this."

187 It was three thirty in the morning when Zach finally put his hand
188 over the cup to keep the waitress from refilling their cups. The early
189 morning father son conversation was on par with all the years of their
190 late night campfire rituals. But, this was the deepest heart to heart
191 they ever had. It compiled seventeen years of a young kicking baby
192 that had matured into a young strong man. **Army Ranger** are words
193 that deserved respect and honor. Words that should be tagged on the
194 boy down the street or in the next town. Service for country and the
195 world has a high price tag. Zach was now tasked with telling a mother
196 that her own flesh and blood felt called to be a peacemaker.

197 They snuck through the garage into the kitchen and made sure not
198 to turn on any lights. Ben made it past Kendra's bedroom and plopped
199 down on his unmade bed. A tightly put together bed was one of the
200 first things he'd learn in boot camp, immediately after the five AM
201 wakeup call to order.

202 Upstairs Zach gently pushed open the door and saw two additional
203 humps in his bed. Kendra and Chelsea had stuck a claim on his side of
204 the king size bed. Back down in the hallway he knelt down, bowed his
205 head and prayed just outside of Ben's door. Kendra's bed was way too
206 short but after two days in Chicago followed by Ben's enlistment curve
207 ball his brain and body needed rest. Both Zach and Ben slept through

208 the early giggles of two ballerinas getting dressed for ballet class.

209 Sally had yet to hear about Ben's plans. The Saturday evening
210 fundraiser went on as planned; although it now looked to be a mute
211 point. Only about half of the people she had planned for showed up.
212 Ben called out Bingo numbers and Zach took a chair next to the
213 Kurtz's family. Not even ten minutes into the Bingo callouts Dr. Coreen
214 received a page from Dallas Memorial Hospital.

215 "She's on call this weekend." Karl said to Zach as Coreen exited
216 the church auditorium to make a call.

217 "I can give you a ride home if she has to leave." Zach offered.

218 "That would be great," Karl replied and put a bean on the N32
219 square on his Bingo card. "I'd sure like to win that rod and reel up
220 there." Karl pointed at the table of prizes Sally had gotten donated.

221 "You like to fish?" Zach asked.

222 "Not really. But I need my luck to turn around. I lost thirty five
223 Bitcoin last week."

224 "How'd you do that?" Zach put a bean over B17 on his card.

225 "Online gambling." Karl quipped and then quickly shut up when
226 Coreen came back to the table.

227 "I need to go in to the hospital. One of my young patients needs
228 palliative care.

229 "Okay, Mr. Slenski said that he'd give me a ride home. They
230 brought two cars."

231 "I might be all-night." Coreen bent over and kissed Karl on the top
232 of his head. "Don't forget to give them our check."

233 "I won't," Karl replied in a somewhat annoyed tone. The thousand
234 dollar check could be better spent paying down his gambling debt.

235 "Must be hard on you with a wife on call all the time?" Zach
236 offered.

237 "Not really. I do a lot of stuff on the internet when Coreen is at
238 work."

239 "Oh..." Zach didn't care nor want to hear anymore about Karl's
240 internet and bitcoin activities.

241 Zach, Ben and Karl folded up tables and then loaded up the Prius
242 with the leftover food. Sally locked up and said she'd be home after

243 she dropped the key off with Pastor Tom.

244 It was at least two hours later when the red roadster wheeled
245 around the corner and darted across the cul-de-sac. Ben and Zach
246 heard the garage door motor and rushed into the kitchen. They were
247 prepared! The motor on the garage door opener went on again, the
248 BMW motor shut off and then the kitchen door knob turned.

249 The door wasn't even fully open when Ben blurted out, "Dad has
250 something to tell you!"

251 Zack glanced over at Ben then back over at Sally. "Why don't we
252 all go out in the front room and have a family meeting?"

253 "Just tell me what you need. I'm tired! All my work and we only
254 raised eighteen hundred dollars. More than half of what we raised was
255 from a thousand dollar check from the Kurtz family."

256 "Well then you'll like my news!" Ben blurted out with a big smile.
257 "I'm not going to need money for college!"

258 "We already had this discussion! You're not putting off college!
259 Sally tossed her keys and purse on top of the table. "I'm going to go
260 take a shower."

261 "You'd better hear him out," Zach inserted. "Ben wants to enlist in
262 the army."

263 "He can't do that without my consent!"

264 "Yes he can. You held him back a year so he'd have an advantage
265 in sports. He'll be eighteen this summer."

266 "That's right mom. The Army recruiter told me they'll pay for my
267 college after six years of service." Ben pulled some forms from behind
268 his back and laid them on the table. "It's called the Montgomery GI
269 Bill."

270 "I can't deal with this!" Sally left the kitchen and stomped up the
271 stairs.

272 "I'll join up with or without Mom's consent," Ben told Zach.

273 "Your Mother is scared and so am I. The military has risk."

274 "I know that. But what would this world look like if it were not for
275 the United States Armed forces?"

276 "You're right... I'm proud that you want to serve. I'll talk to your
277 Mom."

278 "She's always talking up Pastor Tom about him being a Green
279 Beret and all. Tell her to give me that same respect that she gives to
280 our Pastor."

281 "Ben, you came from her. She gave birth to you. The maternal
282 bond that a mother has to her own flesh is something men can never
283 experience."

284 "Our bond is just as strong. You're always there for me."

285 "Thanks Ben." Zach grabbed Ben and pulled him against him, their
286 hearts beat in rhythm. "I'll talk to your Mom." That talk was delayed
287 until Sunday afternoon after Sally helped wrap up Pastor Tom's video
288 blog

289 By the end of the arduous weekend Sally was exhausted and
290 reminded Zach that he wasn't Ben's real father and that she'd do
291 whatever was needed to prevent Ben from enlisting. She had
292 mentioned Ben's desire to be an Army Ranger to Pastor Tom and he
293 agreed to share with Ben the hard facts about being a war hero.

294 Zach was hurt and the beat down by the truth. He wasn't Zach's
295 biological father and he wasn't a war hero; in fact he hated war and
296 had never even fired a weapon. That Sunday evening emotionally
297 drained and upset Zach went down to Son Source to be alone. After
298 hours of looking over spreadsheets and financial papers he laid down
299 out on the office couch. He hadn't slept more than two hours when a
300 knock on the office door woke him. Zach swung his bare feet down
301 onto the cold tile floor. "What's up Birch?"

302 "While you were in Chicago two Rag heads stopped by. They'll be
303 back today. It was kind of scary; they showed up in a black limo with
304 an armed bodyguard driver. Only one spoke English."

305 "Okay." Zach rubbed at his eyes. "Anything else?"

306 "Yeah, a tattooed biker came in looking for you. He said you tickled
307 his daughter and needed to talk to you. At least that's what I thought
308 he said. He was scarier looking then the Arab bodyguard driver."

309 "Anything else?" Zach yawned and massaged at his neck.

310 "Since there are no new orders to fill do you want me to get back
311 in the lab running tests on the quad panels?" Birch wanted to work in
312 the lab, not filling orders or in the warehouse or doing assembly work.

313 “Not today. I need to rethink the quad panel design. The readings
314 up in Chicago were skewed by the television transmitters on top the
315 Sears Tower.”

316 “Oh?” Birch’s face showed disappointment.

317 “Birch, if you want to take a few days off this week that would be
318 great. Could let the rest of the crew know also? If anyone wants
319 unpaid time off, now would be a good time to take it.”

320 “I’ll go do that.” Birch didn’t take the news as hard as some of the
321 other workers. He had work to get caught up on his Mom’s horse
322 ranch, plus he didn’t have a family to feed.

323 Zach stayed in his office. The ‘Give us this day our daily bread’
324 prayer was always a repeated mantra for his family and employees.
325 Forgiving his debts would never happen. In fact, he’d been on the
326 phone trying to get a credit extension to meet Friday’s payroll. Ben’s
327 college account was the last resort but was now a consideration. Not
328 owning a gun kept his two-hundred and fifty thousand dollar life
329 insurance policy out of reach—but it had been a thought more than
330 once.

331 By three PM the building was almost empty, the last shipment was
332 on the loading dock ready for pickup. Birch knocked on the door.
333 “These are the men I told you about.”

334 The contrast of a tall pale albino towering in front of two dark
335 skinned men with tunics in the doorway halted Zach’s phone
336 conversation. Without hesitation or an invitation the Arab men pushed
337 Birch to the side and approached Zach’s desk. “I’ll have to call back in
338 a few minutes,” Zach hung up.

339 The man with a red and white checkered tunic spoke. “Can your
340 company supply us with some of those solid solar panels? We want
341 them for awnings around swimming pools and over cars in our new
342 luxury hotel parking lots in Dubai. We do not want to use the polka
343 dotted ones.”

344 “You’re talking about amorphous designed panels. They are not as
345 reliable as the standard series cell configuration but are more pleasing
346 aesthetically.”

347 “We agree. Dotted panels from a thousand balconies at the new

348 Grand Burj Hotel will be too much.

349 Zack retrieved the instrument case he had taken to Chicago. He
350 opened it and took a panel out. "You would like solid looking panels
351 like this?"

352 An energetic discussion in Arabic irrupted followed by a question in
353 English, "Can we order gold panels just like that one?"

354 "That's not gold, its bronze." Zach handed the quad panel over the
355 top of his desk. "And yes we could supply you with gold looking
356 panels. Sun Source is the only company offering tinted panels."

357 Another discussion in Arabic was longer and more intense. Finally
358 a question in English that could make or break a deal. "We like these
359 gold tinted panels. They would be used as shade awnings over our
360 parking areas and around all our swimming pools."

361 The revelation that all this was part of the bigger plan exploded
362 inside Zach's head. He had to share even more good news about
363 they'd be saving the planet. "If you mount the panels over the
364 swimming pools the cooler air underneath will help the panels
365 generate even more power."

366 "Why would we do that?"

367 "You would get more wattage per panel. Your energy efficient
368 rating would be a lot higher. It would be better for the planet."

369 "We don't care about better for the planet or the green deal crap
370 the United States is pushing. We want these panels because they'll
371 blend in aesthetically and will add elegances. Our guest's want to
372 experience self indulgence, not guilt."

373 "What about your guests who want to feel like they're doing their
374 part of saving the planet? We're all part of the green deal?"

375 "That's what the solar panel awnings are for? We'll advertize that
376 we're doing our part."

377 "Well then you should consider the Son Source full size, non tinted
378 panels. They have the highest wattage per square foot ratio than
379 anything on the market."

380 "Mr. Slenski, for an American you're not a very good business man.
381 You should not be telling a potential customer what they want or what
382 they should do. Oil exports are almost eighty percent of the Middle

383 East GDP. We are not interested in high powered solar panels. Just like
384 an automobile engine that gets a hundred miles to the gallon. Both of
385 those innovations could turn the Middle East economy upside down!”

386 A wake up and shut up revelation popped in Zach’s head. “Is Prince
387 Amer Nasser a friend or family?”

388 “We are competitors, not friends. He’s a Saudi and he was the one
389 that told me about your solar panels.”

390 “What do you mean that you two are competitors?”

391 “We both breed camels for racing. We talked at the camel race in
392 Australia last month. That’s where he told me about your solid more
393 aesthetically pleasing panels.”

394 “Camel racing? I’ve never heard of it.”

395 “You’ve never heard the derogatory words, ‘Camel Jockey’?”

396 “A...” Zach rubbed at his head.

397 “Camel racing is more popular around the world than horse racing
398 is. We race camels at the Al Marmoon Racetrack, October through
399 March. You should come to one of our resorts.”

400 “Yeah, maybe.” Zach quit rubbing his head. “So the Prince didn’t
401 send you here to buy me off.”

402 “No! But, he did say that you’re an idealist and not a deal maker.

403 “Solar energy will save the planet,” Zach argued.

404 “I doubt that. My family has been involved in turning Dubai into an
405 opulent tourist destination since the 1973 oil embargo. That’s when I
406 studied international business at NYU. My faith training journey started
407 at Loyola High School on the upper east side of New York City.”

408 “That explains why your English is so good.” Zach glanced back
409 down at the photos. He didn’t really know that much about the Middle
410 East; especially their culture. But a photo of an Arab coming forward
411 at a Christian revival could be a problem. Zach casually pushed the
412 photos together and then turned the stack over.

413 “Let me know if we can put a deal together before Jumu’ah prayer
414 time this Friday.” The well spoken Dubaian handed Zach a black
415 business card. In gold ink was a number for the Grand Burj Hotel
416 office in the United Arab Emirates.

417 “That sounds good. What time on Friday is your prayer time?”

418 "Jumu'ah prayer starts at noon. Dallas Texas is about half a day
419 behind Dubai time. To be safe call on or before Thursday."

420 Zach flipped the business card over and wrote: **Call before**
421 **Thursday.**

422 A somewhat heated discussion started up in Arabic. It seemed as
423 though the man with the solid white headscarf won the argument. The
424 Dubaian with the red and white checkered Ghutra looked back at Zach.
425 "One final stipulation. If we do business the trademark **Son Source**
426 cannot be anywhere on the solar panels or on the shipping
427 containers."

428