



Treason

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PROLOGUE

*Black Forest Café
Near the Limmat River
Zurich, Switzerland*

Abdur Rahman Ibn Auf checked his watch as the meeting adjourned. *Quarter to twelve. Good.*

Enough time for a little walk, maybe some sightseeing, and perhaps even lunch and a couple of drinks before summoning his pilot for the return flight to Riyadh.

He donned the jacket of his Armani business suit and stepped from the front door of Barclays onto the sidewalk beside Zurich's world-famous, charming Bahnhofstrasse. Squinting into the bright sunlight, he slipped on a pair of designer sunglasses. Around him bustled serious-looking businessmen speaking into cellular phones, young mothers—or perhaps au pairs; he could not tell the difference—pushing prams, laughing young lovers, and groups of beautiful women carrying smart bags from expensive clothing boutiques. On either side of the street, flower vendors displayed profusions of colorful bouquets, and halfway to the corner, a group of students crowded around a bakery window.

A cool breeze hit his face, and he closed his eyes, drawing the pristine Swiss air into his lungs. He breathed in, almost smiling at the invigorating result.

Why did Allah place the great cities of the faith in the middle of a scorching, God-forsaken desert rather than in a place like Zurich? At home, survival was impossible without air-conditioning. Here, nature provided it. But the Great Faith had spawned where it had, and Allah had his purposes. Perhaps to avoid distractions, which abounded here.

Abdur headed south down the Bahnhofstrasse by foot in the direction of the Arboretum and Bürkli Plaza on Lake Zurich. A traffic light stopped him just before he reached the Swiss National Bank Building, and he turned left toward Stathausquai, on the east bank of the Limmat River.

The deep blue waters of the river, fed by the melting snow from the Alps, flowed into Lake Zurich a few blocks to his right. Abdur never grew tired of this view. If paradise was like any city in the world, surely Zurich would be at the top of the list. He watched two tour boats churning south toward the lake.

The sounds of laughter—young and feminine—broke into his thoughts. He turned toward a sidewalk café across the street, on the bank of the river.

There were four in the quartet—or perhaps he might say the *bouquet*—of exquisite Swiss *fräuleins*. They sat giggling under an umbrella at a white wrought-iron table. He did not need to blink even twice to see they were blond, well figured, and perhaps in their midtwenties. They were all blue-eyed. They were Swiss; how could they not have eyes the color of a summer alpine sky?

One of the *fräuleins*, the prettiest, with shoulder-length hair and wearing a navy business suit, seemed to sense his gaze. She shot him a coquettish smile, tilting her head slightly toward an empty table next to hers.

The outdoor café on the riverbank would make a perfect spot for lunch and a cocktail. And who knew? Perhaps this was his lucky day. A successful business session in the morning. An unanticipated rendezvous in the afternoon before leaving the country?

Blond European women seemed to be inordinately attracted to clean-shaven Arab men in expensive business suits. This trend had been established, luckily for him, by the late Princess Diana of Great Britain and Dodi al-Fayed. Or so he had been told when he studied at Oxford.

Abdur sat at the table next to the foursome. They spoke German, which was no impediment to his eavesdropping. He was fluent in the three official languages of Switzerland—German, French, and Italian—in addition to having mastered English and, of course, his native Arabic.

Such were the privileges of an educational pedigree for which money had been no object.

He inched his chair closer to the pretty one, and now she was only a stone's throw from him. When the wind shifted, he caught a whiff of exquisite perfume. *Is it hers?* He couldn't tell.

As he listened, he heard her speak in a low, velvety tone as she announced she had ended her relationship with her boyfriend. She sighed deeply—for his sake, perhaps?—then went on to tell her friends she would have to take holiday this year in Monaco without him. “He deserved it. Such an unfaithful dog.”

An unfaithful dog.

Was that a calculated message, intended not only for her attractive fräulein companions, but also for his ears? Or merely coincidence?

Nothing is coincidental. Everything is calculated.

Abdur ordered a cocktail and contemplated his next move. Perhaps a round of complimentary cocktails for the fräuleins would attract their attention. Or maybe he would trail her home when she left.

“*Ahff wun, yah eff.*” The sudden deep sound of a man’s voice over his shoulder distracted Abdur. “Excuse me, mister,” the man repeated in Arabic. “Her name is Marta.”

Abdur turned, frowning. The man was handsome, Middle Eastern, and perhaps in his early thirties. He wore an expensive suit, tie, and shoes, all of which were white.

“You contemplate luring her to your hotel.” The man’s Arabic was flawless. “Except you did not reserve a room, because you had planned on flying back in your Cessna Citation this afternoon to report to Riyadh. But now, with the bat of her eyes, the scent of her perfume, the crossing of her legs, you are contemplating, shall we say, a slight change of plan?”

Abdur rose to his feet and met the man’s black eyes. The penetrating quality of the man’s gaze was instantly gripping, as if he had the power to hypnotize. Abdur felt a chill shoot down his spine.

“Do not fear, my brother,” the man continued. “And I assure you, my sudden intrusion has not compromised your opportunity with this Swiss maiden. You will have your opportunity, if it is what you want. She will cooperate. Trust me.”

“Do I know you?”

“I have been searching for you, my brother.”

“You look familiar.” Abdur frowned again, trying to read the other man’s expression. He was unsuccessful.

“I am Hussein al-Akhma of Kuwait.”

“*Un hum del Allah.* Praise be to God.” Abdur had seen Hussein’s picture in Arab newspapers. But this was the first time he had seen the man in person. “Of you I have heard much, Brother Hussein.”

“And I, of you.” Hussein inclined his head. “But then, we are a small brotherhood, are we not?” Hussein gave Abdur a friendly pat on the shoulder, and Abdur relaxed. But not much.

“When I was at Oxford, you were at the London School of Economics. But we never met.” Abdur was getting his voice back.

“An unfortunate crossing in the night. But Allah has his purposes *and* his timing. And this moment has to do with the latter.”

Abdur pointed to the chair across the table. “Please, be seated.”

He studied the mysterious man, rumored to be both a billionaire playboy and a stalwart man of the faith. Was this an oxymoronic combination? Perhaps not. Abdur felt the same tug-of-war within. The prophet Muhammad himself—*Peace be upon him*—certainly had felt the same struggles.

“Brother Abdur, though we have never met personally until now, I have known you for some time.” Again, a fiery, magnetic flash lit Hussein’s eyes.

“What do you mean?”

“You are searching for the purpose of life. I believe Allah has called you. Like me, you have been entrusted with much at a young age. But it is all meaningless unless we are called to a higher purpose.” Hussein’s voice was smooth, hypnotic . . . as if he saw through the windows of Abdur’s soul.

How can he see my struggles? My demons?

“Next to the prophet Muhammad—*Peace be upon him*—there had been no greater Muslim to walk the earth than the servant of Allah, Osama bin Laden,” said al-Akhma. “Not since the British burned the White House in the War of 1812 has a foreign enemy struck the heart of America. But one man on September 11, 2001, carried out what the Japanese, the Germans, and the mighty Soviets did not.

“Drew American blood.

“On American soil.”

“He was so bold. So daring, was he not?”

“Yes, he was, my brother.” Hussein smiled. “But even Osama was not perfect. The brilliant hero of 9/11 failed to realize that to defeat our great enemy, one must become invisible, blend in with their forces.”

Abdur studied his companion. “I do not follow you.”

“That was Osama’s Achilles’ heel. He and his cronies all looked and spoke Arabic. Of course, our Arabic heritage is glorious and to be embraced. But Al Qaida cast the perfect stereotype for the Zionist media

to beam over the airwaves into American homes and plaster on the front pages of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

“Al Qaida,” he continued, “gave the world the image of bearded-looking, turban-wearing ‘terrorists’ firing AK-47s into the air in frenzied jubilation whenever a bomb went off in Israel. Meaningless. What did we ever accomplish by blowing up a civilian bus on the streets of Tel Aviv? Nothing. Yet all this fueled the Zionist propaganda machine around which Christians and Jews wrapped their anger. It caused them to turn their political and military power against Islam.”

“It does make sense,” Abdur said.

“I am recruiting a new, more sophisticated breed of Islamic fighter. A fighter who can blend into the Western landscape with fluency in English, with the ability to instantly ditch his turban for a business suit . . .” Hussein’s black eyes glinted, drawing Abdur in. “A fighter with the willingness to don a U.S. military uniform for the cause of Allah. These characteristics will epitomize Council of Ishmael operatives.

“Know thine enemy,” Hussein quoted in Arabic. “Allah has laid it upon my heart, Brother Abdur, to assemble a council of twenty rulers to govern this new breed of fighter and to advance this unprecedented worldwide organization.”

Goose bumps crept up Abdur’s neck, and he sat forward.

“All who have been called to this council are wealthy beyond earthly measure—among the wealthiest men in the various Islamic nations they represent. All are British- or American-educated. All are fluent in English and fervent in their devotion to Islam. All loathe the three great enemies of Allah—Israel, America, and Christianity.”

Hussein put his hand on Abdur’s shoulder, paused, then met Abdur’s eyes. Something supernatural seemed to hold Abdur in his chair.

“Allah has told me, Brother Abdur, that you are one of the chosen twenty.”

Chills shot down Abdur’s spine.

“One of his coveted Council of Ishmael.” Hussein seemed to caress each word as it passed from his lips. And then he stared at Abdur, silent.

The sounds of summer in a busy European city returned to Abdur’s ears: car horns honking, birds chirping, trolley bells ringing, the wind blowing off Lake Zurich. All provided a surreal backdrop that Abdur felt was somehow divine.

His gaze wandered to the table next to them that was now empty. Sometime within the last few minutes, Marta had left, and he had not

even noticed. He turned again to his companion. “I feel, Brother Hussein, that this is a divine moment. An appointment with destiny preordained by Allah himself. Beyond that, my words have left me.”

Hussein’s smile was gentle. Abdur noticed his teeth were nearly as white as his suit.

“Abdur, you need not give up your lifestyle. You are not called to poverty. Only to glory. To use all you have been blessed with—your language abilities, your educational background, your resources—for the glory of Allah. You were born for this day. You were blessed for this reason. Very few Muslims the world over possess your combination of talent, skill, and resources.

“Say only this: that you will come, that you will follow me. That you will say yes to Allah’s call. That you will become an adopted son of the Council of Ishmael.”

***Femme du Monde School of Modeling
International Headquarters
North American Division
Madison Avenue, New York City***

Diane Colcernian ran her hand through her hair and took a swig of bottled water. She was standing near the elevated runway down the center of a mirrored room that served as a combination lecture hall and practice studio. Four other models lolled against the runway, listening to Monica, the agency’s artistic coach, deliver another of her dull lectures on the importance of runway posture.

Angelica, a long-legged blond, rolled her eyes toward Diane, and dark-haired, gamine Corrine snickered. This brought a glare from Monica, who then continued her delivery in her pseudo French accent.

“Next she’ll show us an example of her runway work in Paris,” whispered Sybil. A moment later, Monica, dressed in designer warm-ups, did exactly that. She floated up the runway stairs and signaled the technician to start the strobe lights and music. Then, head back, body thrust forward, she moved along the runway, her long legs in a fashionable strut. She snapped into a turn and returned to where her young students waited by the runway.

“Now, your turn,” Monica said above the music. The women lined up at the stairs, and Diane, who was first in line, climbed up, ignoring the snickers of “Teacher’s pet.”

Monica made no secret that she was grooming Diane to step onto the runway as a world-class supermodel, just as Monica herself had done twenty years earlier. Diane suspected it was her wavy, flame-colored hair—which, according to photos she'd seen, was much like Monica's in her youth—that endeared her to the artistic coach. Their physiques were similar: tall, lithe, long-limbed, with an almost liquid manner of movement. Because Monica had chosen Diane as heir apparent, she was often harder on her than on all the others; her expectations were greater.

Modeling had been Diane's dream since she was a teenager. She'd thought it would be glamorous—bright lights, public adulation, photographs on the cover of *Glamour* and *Vogue*. But in reality, it was excruciatingly hard work. Monica monitored every bite she and the other girls ate. If she gained even a half pound, lunches and dinners consisted of iceberg lettuce and low-fat yogurt. She spent hours with studio makeup artists, still more hours with the studio hairdresser as he twisted her tresses into extreme—and sometimes painful—designs. Then there was her personal trainer who put her through a tortuous daily workout to keep her body toned. And the hours spent under bright, hot lights often left her with a migraine. When she and the others went out on the town, it was only to be seen. Not to be real. Not to enjoy real conversation with real people. Not to laugh and talk about books and world affairs.

She missed that. Her father had brought her up to think for herself, to enjoy stretching her mind with the classics, with art and music, to debate politics and world affairs. His dream, especially after her mother died, was for Diane to go to college, to continue to stretch her mind. To practice law.

But in a fit of rebellion, she'd announced that she planned to follow *her* dream—no matter what he said. She was going to New York. Her words had broken his heart. She hadn't cared.

Now Diane looked up at Monica, who frowned as she gestured for Diane to join her on the runway. With a sigh, she took her place beside the artistic coach and struck a ten-point model's pose, pasting on the traditional hollow-cheeked, bored expression. Oh yes, she was almost there. She had almost reached her dream.

Why did she feel so empty?

The music throbbed as she slithered down the runway. *Seven liquid steps, then snap to a turn. Seven more, turn again . . .*

The studio door burst open, and the office manager, Janice Jeffers, a plain but pleasant woman, stepped into the studio. Her heels clicked

and echoed like tap-dancing shoes against the polished hardwood floors as she crossed the room.

“Diane, telephone call!” Janice almost shouted to be heard above the runway music.

Diane halted midstep; Monica signaled the engineer to turn off the strobes and music. “Can’t it wait?” She shot Diane a glare, then looked back to Janice. “As you can see, we’re just beginning the exercise.”

“Sorry, Monica,” Janice said. “It’s an emergency.”

“It better be,” Monica snapped, then frowned at Diane. “Make it quick, honey.”

Diane hurried down the runway steps and jogged to the door, where Janice put her arm around her. “You can take the call in my office.” She led Diane down the long hall.

“Who is it?”

“Your father’s aide. He said it was urgent.” Janice opened the glass door to her office and gestured toward the telephone on her desk.

Diane lifted the receiver to her ear. “Hello?”

“Diane, this is Lieutenant Commander Wilson.”

“What’s going on, Mitch?”

He hesitated a moment—though it seemed like an eternity—before answering. “Your father’s in the hospital. I think you should catch the next flight down here.”

Her heart pounded. “What happened?”

“Maybe you should wait until you can talk to his doctor.”

“I’m not waiting. Tell me now, Mitch!”

Another hesitation. “Diane . . . the admiral has had a stroke. It’s serious . . . I’m sorry.”

This isn’t happening. This is a bad dream.

“Diane?”

“Is he going to make it?” She blinked back the sting of tears.

“The doctor thinks so, but it’ll be touch and go for the next few days.”

“Where is he?” She sank into the swivel chair by the desk.

“Portsmouth Naval Hospital. He’s getting the very best treatment the Navy can provide. Listen, I’ve arranged for your plane to fly into Oceana Naval Air Station. I’ll meet you there in two hours.”

They said their good-byes, then Diane dropped her head into her hands.

“Diane?”

She felt Janice’s arm ease across her shoulder.

“I’m sorry . . . Your father’s aide didn’t want me to tell you. He called us thirty minutes ago to discuss transportation arrangements so you didn’t have to worry with them yourself. Mr. Rochembeau is in Paris, but I called him on his cell phone. The company jet will fly you to Virginia Beach.”



Two hours later, the *Femme du Monde* Lear jet touched down at the Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach. Diane put on dark sunglasses to conceal her red-rimmed eyes, long since washed free of makeup by her tears. She stepped from the jet into a sunny Tidewater afternoon.

Her father’s aide waited, his expression lined with concern. When she reached him, he took her by the arm and guided her to the admiral’s staff car. He returned to the plane for her luggage, placed it in the trunk, and slid into the driver’s seat.

Before he turned the key in the ignition, she touched his arm. “How bad is it, Mitch?”

The aide hesitated and then let his hand drop to his lap. “He’s paralyzed on the left side of his body. He drifts in and out of consciousness. Both times he regained consciousness, he whispered your mother’s name.” He met her gaze. “And yours.”

“My mother was a wonderful woman. I wish you had known her.”

“The admiral has often said you’re just like her. Strong, smart, resolute.”

“I don’t feel so strong and resolute right now.” She pulled out a tissue and dabbed her eyes, praying for a dose of the same strength she remembered in her mother. Most of all, she prayed for her father. And tried not to think of her regrets.

***U.S. Naval Medical Center
620 John Paul Jones Circle
Portsmouth, Virginia***

As the car approached the main gate outside the huge Portsmouth Naval Hospital, Diane still fought to control her tears. A few minutes later, her father’s aide steered the car into the flag officers’ parking spaces near the front entrance of the hospital.

He came around to the passenger side and opened the door. "Your father is the strongest man I know," he said as Diane swung her legs out of the car. "The sound of your voice will give him strength."

Diane and Mitch got off the elevator at the sixth deck. A slim officer in a khaki uniform, wearing the silver eagle of a Navy captain pinned to one collar and the gold oak leaf and silver acorn of the Navy Medical Corps on the other, stepped forward and greeted them. "I'm Captain Ornsbee. Lead physician in charge of your father's treatment."

"Is he going to be okay, Doctor?"

"It's still early. These next few hours will be crucial. We're worried about the possibility of an aneurysm. We're giving him blood thinners and watching him constantly."

"May I see him?"

"Yes. I'll take you. But be prepared. He's had a massive stroke. The left part of his body is paralyzed. He may not recognize you."

"I want to see him."

He gave her a solemn nod and then led her down the corridor, past the nurses' station, to a hospital room on the other side.

She halted midstep, stunned. The proud body that was once Vice Admiral Stephen Colcernian lay in a helpless form attached to wires and tubes. "Oh, Daddy." She swallowed the tears at the back of her throat, willing herself not to cry.

The doctor's voice was low. "Your father may be able to hear you. I know it's hard, but try to stay strong."

"Okay." She wiped her eyes, took a deep breath, and moved closer to take her father's hand. "I love you, Daddy. You'd better not leave me. Not now. Please. You're so strong. You're going to be fine." *Please, God. Let him hear me.* "I came as soon as I found out. Bob has been great. You'd be so proud of him. He arranged to have a plane take me from New York to Oceana. He's a great admiral's aide, Daddy."

Nothing.

Please, God . . .

"Squeeze my hand if you can hear me, Daddy."

Was it her imagination?

"Daddy, can you squeeze it again?"

It was faint, but this time, definite.

Thank you, Lord.

"Daddy, I'm leaving New York, coming home to be close to you. And when we get you up and on your feet, I'll go to UVA so I can come see you on the weekends."

Another squeeze.

She drew in a shaky breath and cleared her throat. “I know how much it means to you to have someone in the family uphold our Navy legacy. I want it too, Daddy, not just for you, but for me. And I was thinking on the plane coming down here. I’m going to go to UVA, and then I’m going to apply for law school. And then I’ll apply for a direct commission in the Navy JAG Corps. And I’m going to be the best JAG officer the Navy’s ever seen.”

This time, it was different. The squeeze was still faint, but twice as strong as the others.

“I won’t let you down, Daddy. I promise.”