

MURDER ON THE ERIE CANAL

A Novel



By Benjamin Alan Horwitz

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Prologue

David B. Cohen (B for Benjamin), and Holly J. Morgan (J for Julia), have known each other for just over 25 years. But they never married. That's not exactly an accurate statement. They never married each other. Between them, however, they have four marriages – split evenly, two apiece. Over the 25 years they've known each other – they were engaged to each other 25 years ago – they've managed to keep in periodic contact via an occasional telephone call and, more recently, via emails. But they never met in person. Never cheated with each other during their marriages. (But they had been tempted.) Today was different. Both had recently divorced for the second time. Holly about six months ago after her second attempt at a successful union failed – it lasted almost eight years; and David about a year ago – it too lasted eight years. Neither knew the other person was divorced because they had lost contact with each other several years ago. Holly changed jobs and thus changed her business email address – the one David had logged on his computer. And David moved to another state to start a consulting business as an engineer, changing both his phone and email address.

Holly tried to make contact with David first, just after her divorce, but to no avail. David Cohen left no forwarding phone number or address. And after several months of trying and failed attempts, Holly Morgan gave up and began dating a younger man.

Holly Morgan could have dated a much younger man than the one she seduced at her yoga class. (He was 35.) She had just turned 45 but looked 30, and had the proportions and physical appearance to make anyone believe she was 30. Practicing yoga most of her adult life – long before it became the trendy thing to do – was proof positive of its effect on the human body and spirit. Even giving birth to two children couldn't detract from a figure and form that looked like it came right off the cover of Vogue. Tall – five-nine, mostly legs – with a swarthy, Mediterranean, complexion and natural jet-black hair – cut short almost like a DA – she still turned the heads of both men and women, even at age 45. She wasn't drop-dead gorgeous. She was drop-dead attractive. There's a difference.

She worked for an investment broker in San Francisco. She recently changed jobs. She didn't peddle stocks. She was an analyst. She covered the energy industries and she had quite a reputation. Holly often traveled to the Middle East and Venezuela and was

becoming fluent in Arabic. (She already was fluent in Spanish and Italian – her parents’ native tongue.) She frequently appeared as an energy maven on CNBC because she was both smart and good looking.

David Cohen left Cleveland and his employer of 25 years and went back to his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he established himself as an engineering consultant. He had spent his entire career with the engineering and construction firm of Arthur G. McKee – an old-line Cleveland engineering and construction company started in the early 1900s. The last 10 years Dave was the manager of the Civil Engineering Department there. A new Vice President was brought in over Dave several years ago, and David Cohen saw the writing on the wall almost immediately. He was surprised he lasted as long as he did. He never much got along with McKee’s upper management, nor did he ever aspire to attain Vice Presidential status. Basically, David Cohen liked to do engineering. And he was damn good at it. He never really wanted to become the manager of the department. He realized managing 50 engineers would require most of his time and leave little time for designing and troubleshooting projects – which he thoroughly enjoyed. He would probably have been let go years before he left on his own volition, but he was too good an engineer and clients always asked for Dave to be on their project or at to least keep a critical eye on it. Eventually, the new VP became too much, and as he was pushing 50 – Dave was 48 – he decided the aggravation was starting to wear on him physically. So he gave his two-weeks notice and packed up and left for the city of his birth. Dave had always threatened to move back to Pittsburgh – a city he couldn’t quite forget. Seems like a lot of native Pittsburghers are like that. Always pining to return to their city of three rivers.

Both of Dave’s children were through college and on their own. Both his former wives – the first was a lawyer, the second an M.D. – had taken no-fault divorce settlements. So he felt free and clear of almost all of his major financial obligations and made the decision to see if he could make it on his own as a consultant – or as Dave liked to express it: see if he could live by his wits.

Their eventual reunion was quite a coincidence. Dave’s sister, still residing in Pittsburgh, attended a yoga seminar in Chicago that Holly Morgan attended and where she also appeared as a speaker. Her reputation from her frequent appearances on CNBC

gave her some additional visibility as a licensed teacher of yoga in the San Francisco area. Dave's sister recognized Dave's old girlfriend immediately and struck up a conversation after Holly's seminar. The rest, as they say, is history. Holly called Dave in Pittsburgh that night. They exchanged phone numbers and email addresses, and began corresponding almost daily by both methods.

It was Holly's idea for a bike trip. It was a little surprising to Holly that Dave had become a bike fanatic. During their early courtship Dave had no interest in either yoga or bicycling – two of Holly Morgan's passions. So when she found out Dave was a fanatic biker she was both pleased and surprised. Dave would often tease and rib Holly about her obsessive-compulsive behavior when it came to her biking and the condition of her bike – which she treated like a Porsche. If she heard the slightest, microscopic “click” while pedaling her Jamis, she had to immediately take the bike to her mechanic. Dave found this amusing and ribbed Holly incessantly about her obsession with the condition of her bike. Holly took it good-naturedly and could give it back to Dave with his softball obsessions – dealing with the condition of both his first baseman's glove and his bats.

Holly made the initial contact with Dave in the early spring. But they put off seeing each other. Two failed marriages apiece gave them pause, even though both their inclinations were to jet off to meet somewhere. But they decided to wait a few months before they leaped into bed. Holly had to make several trips to the Middle East and Venezuela, and ditch her younger boyfriend. And Dave's consulting business was beginning to consume more of his time.

Holly Morgan orchestrated and staged their initial meeting and the bike trip. The plan: Holly would fly to Pittsburgh where she would purchase a new carbon fiber Jamis bicycle. She picked out the \$4,500 bike on the Internet, and Dave's bike store, near his Shadyside condo, ordered it. They would spend two days in Pittsburgh getting reacquainted and testing out her new bike. And then the Friday before Labor Day weekend, they would drive to Buffalo, spend the night at the Adam's Mark Hotel, and begin the bike trip along the Erie Canal from Buffalo to Albany. Holly sent Dave all the literature from Parks and Trails New York, a non-profit private organization – only loosely connected to the state government – which consisted of several pamphlets and a

136-page brochure with maps detailing every mile of the 400-mile journey. Holly Morgan had everything planned down to the most minute detail. She even had the B&B's circled in the brochure in each canal town they would stop in for that night. This was her M.O. just as Dave remembered it. Meticulous planning. Dave was excited – almost childlike – in his anticipation of seeing his first true love and then going on a 400-mile bike trip with her along the Erie Canal.

Chapter 1

Pittsburgh: Wednesday, August 30, 10:20 a.m.

Dave got to the Pittsburgh International Airport an hour before Holly's flight from San Francisco was scheduled to arrive. He was both excited and nervous at the same time. He noticed the palms of his hands were sweating slightly while he was driving over to the airport from his Shadyside condominium. The same questions kept racing through his mind: "Will she recognize me after all these years?" "Will I recognize her?" "Does she look 'old'?" "Do I look 'older'?" The plane landed 10 minutes early. It was mid-week, and the airport was relatively empty that late in the evening. Suddenly small groups of people appeared down the concourse. Looking at the arrival board, he noticed two other planes landed within 5 minutes of Holly's San Francisco flight. So the groups of travelers could have been from one of the other recently landed planes. His heart was starting to beat faster and he thought to himself how absurd the entire scene was. He was acting like a 21-year-old college senior waiting for his girlfriend to arrive, secretly hoping he would get laid that very night. He was worried about that too. Getting laid that night. He was even a little pissed that Holly didn't catch an early morning flight, but she had to do a pre-taped interview with Maria Bartiromo for CNBC.

The first group of passengers scampering through the concourse must have been from one of the other planes. After several minutes, a second group came ambling through – some schlepping enough carry-on baggage to outfit a small theater group. The passengers seemed to move through the terminal in small groups or clumps rather than a steady flow. Dave, the engineer, referred to it as plug flow – an engineering term describing the intermittent flow of fluid through a pipe or conduit.

Dave saw Holly first. There was no mistaking her. Her five-foot nine-inch slender frame stood out above the group of passengers. She was wearing jeans and a heather gray t-shirt. Nothing fancy. But she stood out. The jeans were tightly wrapped around her shapely butt and hips. The soft cotton t-shirt was clinging to her ample chest. Giving birth to two girls didn't seem to have an unwholesome effect on her incredible figure. If anything, it may have even enhanced it, Dave thought. And just like Dave remembered when he took her out some 25 years ago, she was drawing stares from men and women

alike – from all directions. Some even did a double take as they walked quickly by her, turning back their heads to get a glimpse of her front side to see if she looked as good from the front as she did from the back. They weren't disappointed. Dave's first thought upon seeing her was "Jesus, she looks better at 45 than she did at 20."

Dave could see her scanning the crowd waiting for passengers behind the security barrier. She finally saw Dave and broke into a big smile and began to pick up her pace until she finally broke into a trot. They embraced but didn't kiss. The embrace was warm and long and firm and steady. Neither wanted to let go. Her scent of New West perfume instantly brought back fond memories and heightened all his senses –all of them. They drew a lot of stares, but neither noticed, because they both had their eyes closed. They finally backed away from each other and complimented each other on how good they looked. And they did both look good and more youthful than their actual age. Then they embraced again.

David Cohen was an attractive man. He maintained a healthy 180 pounds on his six-foot one-inch frame. He also had a swarthy complexion, stemming from his Sephartic Jewish mother, who, after the war – a Holocaust survivor – had left for a life in Israel, eventually marrying another European survivor and moving to Pittsburgh. Dave often described himself as a Holocaust-survivor-once-removed. His hair was dark brown and his eyes were blue, characteristics stemming from his father's European heritage. He had a muscular, slender build, which was not overpowering and not from any kind of weight-lifting routine. And Holly noticed his back was still strong and firm like she had remembered as she kept moving her hands over his long, sinewy back muscles as they embraced.

They backed off and stared at each other for a moment before Holly blurted out, "Jeez, Dave, it doesn't seem like 20 years, does it?"

"Twenty-five," Dave quickly replied. "But who's counting?"

For a split second, the moment was a bit awkward. They just stood there holding hands facing each other as the other passengers in the terminal quickly rushed past the two.

“Hey, we better move out of here, we seem to be blocking the way. Did you check any luggage?” Dave asked as he grabbed her carry-on bag and they quickly headed down the concourse.

“Yeah, I had to with the new rules about lotions and toothpaste. But I just have one other small carry-on that I checked.” Holly replied, almost out of breath, trying to keep up with Dave’s rapid pace through the concourse.

They headed down to the baggage area and waited for the luggage to arrive from the flight. Holly was getting her usual number of stares from the other passengers waiting for their bags. Dave remembered how self-conscious he used to be when they (Holly) got the once-over from the patrons in a restaurant or a theater or any public place they happened to be. “Goddamn she looks good,” he thought to himself as they waited for the baggage conveyor to begin rotating.

Holly spotted her bag. Dave lifted it off the conveyor and they headed for the parking area. They still hadn’t kissed. But Dave couldn’t wait much longer. As soon as they entered the parking garage, before they got to Dave’s car, in what they thought was an isolated area, Dave stopped dead in his tracks and turned towards Holly; she likewise turned towards him. They simultaneously let go of the carry-on luggage they were dragging and embraced. Then backed away and kissed.

They were jolted from their reverie by some wise-ass driving by the scene laying on his horn. The cavernous concrete structure made the car’s horn sound that much more intense. They jumped back at the initial sound of the horn, laughed, then regained their composure and headed towards Dave’s Chevy Impala.

“Did you pick my bike up today from the bike store?” Holly asked. “I called them from San Francisco last week and they said it would be ready today.”

“I went down there this afternoon, but it wasn’t quite ready. They said to come back tomorrow morning. They open at nine.”

Dave opened the trunk of his car and put in Holly’s two bags. He turned around to walk Holly over to the front seat, but she was blocking his path and wouldn’t move. She looked up into his face and gently placed the palms of both hands on his chest. They kissed again and this time Dave slid his hands down Holly’s backside. She likewise slid her hands down around his backside. At first Dave felt a little foolish grabbing Holly’s

butt, like some sex-crazed teenybopper out on a first date. But he just let his natural instincts prevail. It started to get pretty steamy in that garage. Dave finally backed away, fully aroused.

“Hey, do you think we can at least make it to my condo first?”

“I doubt it.” Holly quickly replied.

They somehow navigated the intricate, poorly-marked path through the parking garage, paid the toll, and proceeded to the airport parkway, Route 60, which led directly to Interstate 279 and the Fort Pitt tunnel. This was Holly’s first trip to Pittsburgh, and the site of downtown Pittsburgh, framed by the three rivers and aglow in lights and bursting into view as soon as they exited the tunnel, was impressive. Most people’s impressions of Pittsburgh begin with a dark, hazy, colloidal pall hanging over the city and hills that surround the three rivers. This portrait of Pittsburgh stems from a 1950s era photo taken of the city around noon – showing that the street lights had to be turned on because of the pollution emanating from all the steel mills that lined the banks of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio rivers. That dark, smoky, noontime scene of the city had long been erased even before the steel mills were shut down, abandoned, and replaced with office complexes and parks. San Francisco may well have garnered the title of the most beautiful city in the country, but that sight of Pittsburgh at night, bursting into view as one emerges from the Fort Pitt tunnel, gives San Francisco a run for its money.

“God, Dave, I never knew how attractive a city Pittsburgh was.”

“You should see it from atop Mount Washington. It’s even more beautiful from there.”

“Where’s Mount Washington?” Holly was genuinely curious.

“Actually it’s almost directly above the tunnel we just went through.” Dave was now across the Monongahela River heading up the I-376 Parkway towards Squirrel Hill.

“Let’s go there.” Holly just blurted out.

“Go where? Mount Washington?” Dave paused slightly. “It’s almost midnight already.”

“So what? Where do you gotta go tomorrow? C’mon Dave. I want to see the city from Mount Washington.”

Dave quickly headed off the Parkway towards the Liberty Tunnel exit, crossed the Liberty Bridge and turned off to the right just before the Liberty Tunnel and headed up towards Mount Washington Park.

The road up the side of Mount Washington wound around the cliff, affording more spectacular views of the city. Restaurants lined the right side of the narrow two-lane brick-cobbled roadway – LeMont being the most famous and probably most expensive. Dave took several clients there. During his college days at Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie Mellon University), he dated a girl from Chatham College – a small women’s liberal arts college located on the old Mellon Estate in Squirrel Hill. And on special occasions they would dine at LeMont.

Within minutes they were atop Mount Washington inside the park, and Dave parked the car in a rather large parking area, presently populated by couples making out – or making babies, if the sounds emanating from some of the parked vehicles were any indication of the activities inside. They walked to the Mount Washington overlook just at the edge of the cliff overhanging the river to see where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers met to form the Ohio. They were about 400 feet above the Monongahela River. Now the view of Pittsburgh was even more dramatic than the site exploding from the exit of the Fort Pitt Tunnel. The lights of the city and those lining all the bridges’ superstructures seemed to be flickering – like thousands of candles.

Holly positioned Dave around and backed him against the steel railing protecting onlookers from falling down the 400-foot cliff into the river. She pressed up against him, looked up at him and kissed him. Dave held her tightly. “So much for worrying about if Holly would still find me attractive after 25 years,” Dave thought to himself after they slowly backed away from each other – both completely aroused.

“Let’s do it in the car, Dave.” Holly just blurted out.

“Do what? You mean make out? In the car?” Dave answered, taken aback by Holly’s directness.

“Make-out, whatever comes natural. Yeah. Just like all those people out there are doing.” She pointed out towards the parking area.

“Geez, Holly those people are probably half our age.”

“So what!” Holly was getting frustrated.

“Holly, I live only 15 minutes from here. I’ve got a beautiful, comfortable condo with a very large king-sized bed. Can’t we wait 15 or 20 minutes?”

“No.” She quickly answered rather emphatically, then continued. “Always the damn pragmatist. It’s that goddamn engineering background. Hey Dave, we’re not gonna build a bridge or a road. We’re just gonna have sex. Okay? Let’s just go back to your car and do it! Now!”

It was after one in the morning when Dave and Holly finally got to Shadyside and the comfort of Dave’s condominium and oversized king-sized bed. It would have been much more comfortable than the back seat of his Impala – although he was actually quite surprised at how much room they had in that back seat. Both were sweaty and overheated from the activity back on Mount Washington. Not to mention that it had reached 95 in Pittsburgh that day. It hardly cooled off at all, even in the early morning hours. It had been in the 90s all week in the valley. Dave hated air-conditioning at night. Could never sleep with the air-conditioning on. But he wisely left it on before he went to the airport to pick up Holly. The coolness of the condo felt good.

Holly unpacked. There wasn’t really much to unpack. Most of her clothes consisted of expensive biking apparel. She never wore much makeup. She didn’t require much.

“Dave, I’m gonna take a shower,” Holly called out from the bathroom, then started to run the shower.

Dave undressed down to his underwear, turned down the air conditioning, flipped on the TV, and laid down in his king-sized bed waiting for Holly to finish with the shower so he could get in there. He wasn’t paying any attention to the TV and toyed with the idea of getting in the shower with Holly, but decided against it. He marveled at how easy it was to be with Holly after a 25-year absence and a less than harmonious break-up. It was almost as if they were together just last week – not 25 years ago. “How could that be?” he thought to himself. His daydream was interrupted when he heard the shower stop running.

Holly was now using the hair dryer. It wouldn’t take very long to dry her short black hair. And within minutes she walked into the bedroom with just a large towel wrapped around her – barely covering her breasts and reaching mid-thigh down her long, tanned, shapely legs.

“The bathroom’s all yours, Dave.” She casually remarked as she loosened the towel, let it drop to the floor and sat down on the side of the bed, drying in between her toes, her bare back to Dave.

Dave started to rub her back gently, then got up off the bed, took off his undershirt, but left on his underpants, walked into the bathroom and ran the shower.

When he got out of the shower, he noticed it was rather chilly again and noticed the air conditioning was back on. He remembered Holly liked it cold in the bedroom. He decided he wouldn’t make a fuss.

He finished drying off and quickly put back on his underpants, wrapped the towel around himself and grabbed an old college sweatshirt he had hanging on a hook on the back of the bathroom door. That immediately took some of the chill away from his body. When he flipped off the bathroom light, everything was dark. Holly had turned off all the lights. He felt his way back to the bedroom and removed the towel and his underpants, but left on the sweatshirt. He remembered that Holly always slept in the nude – summer or winter.

Holly had her back to Dave when he slipped under the summer afghan, but she quickly turned towards him and embraced him and wrapped her long slender body around him like a coiled snake.

“You gonna wear that sweatshirt all night?” She asked

“Shit, it’s like an ice box in this room.”

“Well that’s certainly a familiar refrain. I almost forgot; you can’t sleep with the air conditioning. Go ahead turn it off.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, go ahead.”

Dave got out of the bed and turned the thermostat up until the air conditioning unit shut off. He took off the sweatshirt and got back under the afghan. Holly wrapped herself around him once again. Dave reciprocated, running his hands through her short black hair and down her back. Her warm body felt good and in little time they made love for a second time that evening.

“It sure doesn’t seem like 25 years. Does it Dave?” Holly just blurted out. They were both now lying on their backs staring at the ceiling, just holding hands.

“I was thinking the exact same thing.” Dave quickly responded.

Holly then turned on her side and nestled closer to Dave, putting her head on his shoulder, trapping his arm under her head and slowly cutting off the circulation. They both quickly adjusted to a more comfortable position. Holly now had her head more on his chest; Dave had his arm wrapped around her and was gently stroking her forehead.

“Dave, How come we never got married?”

“What?”

“Oh c’mon, you heard me. How come we never married?”

Dave withdrew his arm from around Holly and turned on his side facing her directly.

“Boy, Holly, you haven’t changed one bit. I knew we would eventually talk about this. But I thought we would at least get a couple of days on the bike trip, first. But you couldn’t wait even a day – even a few hours. Ya know, this could end the damn bike trip right here in bed.”

“Yeah, it could.” Holly was now turned on her side facing Dave directly. “But we never did resolve it. This is as good a time as ever, Dave. I’m still confused.”

“Confused? Confused about what?” Dave was getting annoyed.

“About exactly what happened twenty-five years ago.”

“You know exactly what happened.”

“I do? Why don’t you tell me Dave? I’d like to hear it from you.”

“Well for starters, finding out you were sleeping with another man might have had something to do with the breakup. We were engaged, you know. I did ask you to marry me before you left for your new job in San Francisco. Correct me if I’m wrong but you did say ‘yes.’”

“Oh I did say ‘yes.’ I was ready to marry you David. In fact I remember the exact moment you proposed. It was in bed in a situation very much like the one we’re in right now. I just got the new job promotion to San Francisco. I didn’t want to go, but you convinced me to take it. You told me not to pass up the opportunity and you could easily find a job in San Francisco.” She paused a moment. “And by the way, that ‘man’ I slept with in San Francisco, almost a year after we were engaged and you still hadn’t found that job, turned out to be my husband and father of my two daughters. So don’t make it sound like I was sleeping around. Okay?”

“I wasn’t insinuating you were sleeping around. But when you’re engaged, you don’t get in bed with someone else.”

“Dave, we were engaged for over a year.”

“So what? What the hell difference does that make?”

“Well maybe I just thought that this marriage wasn’t ever going to take place. You hadn’t found that job and I wasn’t convinced you were really looking that hard.”

“Well I was.”

“Bullshit you were, Dave. C’mon you can come up with something better than that. My ‘infidelity,’ as you refer to it, wasn’t the reason we never got married and you know it.”

“Oh it wasn’t, huh?”

“No it didn’t have a damn thing to do with it and you know it.”

“Well then why don’t you tell me why we never got married.”

“Your mother.” Holly quickly answered back.

There was a moment of deafening silence.

“My mother was the reason we never got married? Are you nuts? How the hell did you come up with that theory?”

“David Cohen, there was no way you were ever going to introduce your mother – a Holocaust survivor – to your gentile fiancée.”

“And how the hell did you determine that?”

“Well, we were engaged for over a year, and you never introduced me to your parents or your brother or your sister. You met my family several times, but somehow I never met yours. And you came up with the craziest excuses.” She paused briefly, then continued. “How’s that for starters? You know Dave, when two people get engaged it’s customary to introduce your fiancée to your parents.”

Holly was getting sarcastic. Dave was silent so Holly continued.

“When I told my co-workers in San Francisco that I had never met your family, they told me you’d never get married to me – and that your mother was probably the reason.”

“You know Holly, my second wife was Catholic. That doesn’t fit very nicely into your theory.” Dave offered that as an excuse but he didn’t sound very convincing.

“Yeah, but you married her after your mother passed away.”

Dave pulled Holly closer to him. She came willingly and wrapped her leg around his body. He could feel her heart beating quickly.

“You were always much too quick at sizing things up, Holly Morgan. You always read people and their real intentions much too easily. You were damn good at it. And usually damn accurate. Much better than me. Much better than anyone I’ve ever known. It was a strength and maybe even a weakness. To see things so clearly and so quickly. Remember what I always used to tell you?”

“Yeah. I do. You thought I would make a great FBI agent. Or I should have worked for the CIA. You know Dave, telling your girlfriend she’d make a great spy is not necessarily a compliment.”

“Well that’s how I meant it, as a compliment. They both lay next to each other, their bodies just barely touching. They lay there almost motionless and silent, staring at the ceiling. At least 15 minutes passed. Then Dave abruptly ended the awkward stillness.

“You still ready to pedal the 400-mile Erie Canal?” The tense situation had calmed considerably and reached equilibrium.

“Let’s go for it!”

Chapter 2

Shadyside, Pennsylvania: August 31, 6 a.m.

Holly Morgan was up in bed in a lotus position beginning her yoga meditation. Twenty-five years ago, Dave used to make sarcastic remarks about Holly's yoga. He would try and talk to her while she was meditating, but Holly never responded, and admonished him on several occasions when he tried. He certainly didn't say a word this morning. He just lay there and watched her meditate. Here was a woman, 45 years old, who could have easily passed for someone half that age. If 25 years of practicing yoga contributed to that, Dave was ready to learn it for himself.

After her 20 minutes of meditation, she began certain positions and forms of exercise known as the Iyengar form of yoga. Dave had never seen her do this before, but according to her frequent interviews on CNBC, she was an expert in this form of yoga, having made many pilgrimages to Pune, (formally known as Poona) India, where this type of yoga and others were formally taught by the masters. She had attained a certain degree of mastery in this method and was an accredited, licensed teacher in San Francisco. Dave watched in amazement, as Holly and her incredible 45-year old body went through all the positions and exercises. Dave went into the bathroom; Holly continued with her Iyengar yoga positions.

Dave was cooking breakfast as Holly, properly suited up in her best bicycle attire, walked into the kitchen. He was in the process of creating Rocky Mountain toast – two pieces of white bread stacked together with a hole cut out of the center, an egg cracked and resting comfortably in the hole. Then the entire concoction was fried on both sides in gobs of butter, until the yoke of the egg became semi-firm. Cholesterol attack waiting to happen.

“Are you still a vegetarian?” Dave asked Holly as he heard her enter the kitchen. His eyes still focused on his Rocky Mountain masterpiece.

“Nope, not anymore. I gave it up after my first daughter was born. Besides my first husband, Douglas was getting a little tired of it. So whatever you're making, make two. It smells great.” Holly came up behind Dave, kissed him on the back of his neck, turned back towards the sink and began searching the cupboards for a coffee cup.

Dave took his eyes off the stove, turned around, and glanced at Holly in her designer biking ensemble, seeing her for the first time.

He stood there staring at her backside in disbelief. “Wow!” Was all he could come up with.

Holly quickly turned around. “What’s the matter?” Dave was still staring at her outfit.

“The matter? Nothing’s the matter. Where the hell did you get that biking garb?”

“I bought it last time I was in Europe. It’s Italian. You like it?”

“Yeah I like it. Hell yes I like it.” He turned back towards the stove to attend to the Rocky Mountain toast, then continued, “But I don’t think you can go out today and ride your new bike around the streets of Pittsburgh looking like that. You’ll cause a zillion accidents.”

“Oh c’mon Dave. I think you’re getting a little carried away.”

No he wasn’t. She was wearing a one-piece biking outfit. The kind they wear in the Tour De France. Its basic color was a bright canary-yellow, which was a great color for Holly Morgan and her naturally swarthy complexion. But it contained, in some random, attractive, geometric pattern, all the colors of the rainbow. It had a zipper that ran up the front from her mid-section to her neckline – left appropriately unzipped to just above her chest. It was made of Lycra and Spandex and all the proper synthetic fibers that allowed it to breathe. And it looked like she was just poured into it – fitting skin-tight, like scuba diving gear. In some ways, the outfit looked like those early 20th-century bathing suits women used to wear to the beach at Coney Island. But leave it to those Italian designers to tighten things up and breathe new life into that ancient look.

They finished breakfast and Holly was excited to get to the bike store and see her new carbon fiber Jamis bike. She had already sent her favorite bike shoes to the store so they could properly fit the shoes to the bike pedals. Dave went back into the bedroom and changed into his bike clothes. If Holly Morgan’s biking outfit could be properly described as Italian haute couture, Dave’s biking outfit was more Wal-Mart couture – which, in fact, it was. *Starter* polyester navy blue, swim trunk-like athletic shorts with sewn-in underwear. A loose-fitting, red polyester *Starter* athletic short-sleeved t-shirt. White athletic socks that reached mid-calf, and Black Merrill, moccasin-type athletic

jogging shoes. This ensemble was capped off with Dave's favorite biking fashion statement: Jockey, extra-long, boxer-type briefs that stretched tightly down to mid-thigh and were prominently visible, extending well below the navy blue *Starter* shorts. It was quite the view. Holly cast an inquisitive glance at the sight of Dave in his attire.

"What's the problem?" Dave questioned Holly's puzzled gaze.

"No problem, Dave."

Dave glanced down at himself from his shoes back up to his chest, tilting his head from side to side to get a proper view then he looked at Holly. "You don't like the outfit, huh?"

"Hey, Dave, some things never change. And would it make any difference?" She smiled, then went over and kissed him on the forehead. "C'mon I wanna see my new bike."

They went down to the garage where Dave had his bike, a Jamis Coda Comp, hanging off brackets attached to the rafters of the ceiling. It wasn't considered a high-end bike – not a low-end bike either – somewhere in the middle. Dave shared a double garage with another condo owner, so there was no room to park his bike in the garage. He backed his car out of the garage, parked it on the street, then took his bike down off the brackets, and drove his Impala back into the garage. The bike store was about a quarter of a mile away on Shady Avenue. It was nine in the morning. Dave and Holly walked down Shady Avenue, the bike between them, laughing and gently ribbing each other about their different approach to biking couture. It was all good-natured. Both could give as well as they could take. It reminded them both of their courtship 25 years ago. The slight fragrance of Holly's New West perfume left a sensuous trail behind them.

Shadyside Bicycles had been in business as long as Shadyside had been a haven for the up-scale yuppie types that lived there – over 50 years. It was unique for a neighborhood bike store, in that it catered to the high-end bike trade, rather than bikes selling for four hundred dollars and less. Its clientele were the dedicated fanatical cyclists of Pittsburgh and the surrounding area. The present owner, John Sweeney, son of the original owner, was a master bike mechanic and an enthusiastic cyclist himself. The shop was closed Sundays with a sign hanging on the front door – "Gone cycling."

John was working on Holly's bike when Dave and Holly entered the store. There were already two rabid cyclists in the store impatiently waiting for John's deft touch on their bikes.

"Good morning John Sweeney, I sure hope that's my friend's bike you're getting ready."

"Keep your pants on David; I'm trying to adjust the release tension on the pedals. How much does your girlfriend weigh?" John Sweeney didn't see them enter the store; he was riveted on the bike shoes Holly had previously sent him and the pedals they were attached to.

"Why don't you just ask her that impertinent question yourself? She's right here – Holly Morgan, Mr. John Sweeney, bike mechanic extraordinaire."

John turned around, still in a stooped position, and looked up at Holly and Dave. He immediately stood up and apologized for not shaking hands, showing how grimy and greasy his hands were. He was a little taken aback by the towering sight of Holly Morgan in her Italian designer, one-piece, canary-yellow, biking outfit, but he regained his composure quickly.

"Well, so nice to finally meet you Miss Morgan – we've talked several times on the phone. I'm trying to adjust the tension on the release mechanism for your shoes. Why don't you give it a try; in fact, just take the bike out for a spin and see if you like all the adjustments. We'll have to adjust the seat height first; I didn't realize you were that tall."

Holly took the bike after the seat adjustment was made and walked it out to Shady Avenue and then took off down the street.

"Jesus Dave, why didn't you tell me you were dating a model from *Glamour Magazine*. You've brought some pretty good looking women into this store, but nothing like that!"

"Hey, John, just calm down a bit. Okay? And take a look at my bike; it's making a clanking noise in granny gear." In the city of Pittsburgh, granny gear was an important gear.

John took Dave's bike and put it up on the bike-stand and began adjusting and listening to the gears shift. The two other customers were getting a little pissed that Dave

was getting this immediate attention, but unfortunately neither was accompanied by a Holly Morgan-look-alike. In a few minutes, Holly came back into the store.

“How’s the bike?” John asked, still tinkering with Dave’s gear set.

“Great. Everything seems perfect. And my shoes break out of the pedals just about right. I guess he must have guessed my weight pretty closely.” She smiled at Dave.

“What’s the problem with David’s bike?”

“Oh your boyfriend’s driving me nuts. He’s constantly hearing noises with his bike. I’ve got his damn bike so quiet it’s almost like those stealth B-1 Airforce bombers.”

“Really?” Holly was bemused. “Geez Dave, all those times you ribbed me unmercifully about my bike when I complained about creaks and clanks. What was it you used to tell me: ‘Hey Holly, it’s not a Porsche,’ something like that.”

“Okay, John, just get the noise out of the granny gear and let me get out on the road. I think you’ve said enough. Thanks pal.”

John took Dave’s bike off the stand. Holly and Dave headed down Shady Avenue towards Fifth Avenue. This part of Pittsburgh was fairly flat, but as soon as you ventured towards the Monongahela River or up towards Bigelow Boulevard, the infamous hills of Pittsburgh tested your leg strength – and your gears.

Dave led the way on Fifth Avenue towards Chatham College. He turned off Fifth and headed up into the hills of the Chatham campus and into the community of Squirrel Hill. The hills were steep but not very long. The homes surrounding the Chatham campus were the homes of the scions and founders of the great Pittsburgh industries – Mellons, Scaiffs, Carnegies, Heinzes, and all their relatives and business partners. Most of the homes were Tudor mansions, 75-100 years old, and magnificent structures. Eventually Dave and Holly wound their way through the hills and neighborhoods surrounding the campus and headed back towards Oakland via Wilkins Avenue and through the Carnegie Mellon University campus – which was predominately flat.

Holly would occasionally pass Dave, not to show off her biking capabilities, but rather to test aspects of her new bike and different gear combinations. Holly was surely the stronger of the two cyclists, and Dave was not in the least bothered by her superiority. In fact, he was encouraged by it. When she took the lead he could see every muscle in her long, sinewy legs. Even the calf muscle was well developed. “San Francisco is a hell of a

place to train,” he thought to himself as he struggled at times to keep her pace. It was fun watching the pedestrians give Holly the once-over as she flew by. Dave got a stare or two from several attractive coeds they passed on the Chatham and Carnegie Mellon campuses. “Or were they really looking at Holly?” he thought to himself.

Dave took the lead and headed down through an area known as Panther Hollow. There was a paved bike path through this hilly, rather precipitous park-like area that led right through Schenley Park down to the Monongahela River. They continued to follow the path along the river to downtown Pittsburgh and Point State Park – a state park right on the Golden Triangle where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers meet to create the Ohio River. It was all relatively flat until they began their ascent out of downtown Pittsburgh. They returned to Shadyside from the Bigelow Boulevard side of the city, avoiding the busy, 4-lane Bigelow Boulevard by traversing parallel side streets. Holly wanted to have some minor adjustments made on the bike, so they returned to the bike store before they headed back to Dave’s condo.

That night Dave and Holly drove back up towards Mount Washington to dine at LeMont – a celebratory feast of sorts. Celebrating both their reunion and upcoming bicycle adventure. They would take off the next morning, Friday September 1, for Buffalo. They were both excited – almost childlike – in their anticipation of attacking the 400-mile Erie Canal towpath. The only pall hanging over their trip: the threat portended by Hurricane Ernesto.

That evening in bed, while they were watching the Weather Channel, the weather maps indicated that the remnants of Hurricane Ernesto were rapidly moving up the eastern half of the country with torrential rain and 60 mile-per-hour wind gusts. This weather front was predicted to cover upstate New York the very day Dave and Holly were scheduled to take off on the canal towpath. The counterclockwise rotational winds would smack directly into anyone cycling in the eastern direction. They both were hoping that by the time they reached Buffalo, the mercurial and unpredictable nature of these hurricane weather fronts would move off into the Atlantic Ocean long before they reached upstate New York. They would be disappointed.

Chapter 3

Bhopal, India: Thursday, August 31

The monsoons were finally beginning to break up in Bhopal. The hot season was hotter than usual; the monsoons were stronger than usual. The weather was steamy – the high humidity and wet surroundings kept everything and everyone in a perpetual state of dampness. It was unusually uncomfortable, even for people used to the hot season and the monsoons. It was Bombay (Mumbai) weather at its worst. The last few days the rains would come intermittently – mostly in the evenings. These were the first signs that the continuous monsoon rains were breaking up. Maybe another week or two of the intermittent evening rain showers at most. The afternoons were sunny, hot, and humid – temperatures reaching 100 degrees with 95% humidity.

Khalid Khan had arrived in Bhopal that morning on the train from Bombay. Earlier that week he had slipped across the boarder from Pakistan. He had left his home in Karachi and crossed the international border near the small nondescript town of Munabao. His destination was the Indian city of Jodhpur. Slipping across the porous Pakistani-Indian border was easier than crossing the Rio Grande from Mexico to enter the U.S. The Indians and Pakistanis were rather lax along this area of their boundary even though they were in a perpetual state of war in the north on the Kashmiri border. And besides, this was the heart of the Rajasthani desert, where for thousands of years nomads traversed these same ancient trade routes to and from the Kyber Pass. It was a desolate area, desert dry and virtually impossible to maintain any territorial integrity – on either side of the international border.

Khalid was dead tired. He had been in constant motion for almost a week. His journey started on the Afghan-Pakistan border in the Tribal region of Pakistan near the terrorist-infested city of Peshawar. He could have been smuggled across the border at a point closer to Peshawar, but it was too risky. Here, the Indian army was very active looking for this exact type of infiltration from Pakistan that caused the Indian rule of Kashmir grave concern. So Khalid, in consultation with Ayman al-Zawahiri, took the more prudent – although more exhausting – route back to Karachi and crossed the border in Rajasthan. From Munabao he traveled by bus to Ahmedabad by way of Jodhpur in the

state of Gujarat, then by train to Bombay. He boarded a first-class car on the Western Express in Bombay. It was a 16-hour train ride to Bhopal. He awoke in Itarsi around midnight, where his car was transferred to another train, and he stayed awake till he arrived in Bhopal early in the morning. He barely slept a couple hours that night on the train.

Khalid took a motorized three-wheeled rickshaw from the Bhopal train station up Hamidia road to the Pagoda Hotel. It was barely a mile from the hotel to the train station, and Khalid was only carrying a single small travel bag. But he was exhausted from all the trains and buses he had taken across Pakistan and India, and the hot, humid, weather seemed unbearable.

Even in the motorized rickshaw, it still took almost ten minutes to navigate the usual morning obstacles cluttering Hamidia road – every form of broken-down motorized transportation known to man sputtered along, with bullock carts, bicycles, and push carts, and the usual 10,000 Indians strolling or cycling along Hamidia Road. The rickshaw driver pulled up to the Pagoda, a rather shabby looking establishment, even by Indian standards. It once had a three-star travel rating, 50 years ago. Today it wouldn't even merit one star. But the Pagoda was lax in asking for credentials of any kind upon checking in unless you were a foreigner, and Khalid, born and raised in Karachi, looked as Indian as Gandhi. He spoke Urdu, which was the predominant language of Bhopal and the state of Madhya Pradesh; he had trained himself to shed his slight Pakistani accent several weeks before he crossed the border. Actually, the language of Bhopal was Hindi if you asked a Hindu what language they spoke. If you asked the same question of a native-born Indian Muslim, they would answer Urdu. It was, of course, the exact same language – a bastardized combination of both languages often referred to as Hindustani. Pure Urdu, which was used by scholars and poets, was quite different from the spoken, conversational Urdu.

Khalid checked in under the name of Hemant Shah, a surname as common in India as Smith was in the United States. He introduced himself to the desk clerk as a Gujarati businessman. Shah was the common name from the state of Gujarat, and while Shah may sound like a Muslim last name, in India, Shah is always associated with being a Hindu surname.

Khalid had no intention of staying at the Pagoda. His hectic schedule required he leave that evening at eight o'clock on the Dukshin Express for New Delhi. He had to catch an international flight to New York Friday morning. But he had to get an Indian passport to travel on, and his contact for that was a member of a terrorist cell located in Bhopal. Besides, he had to kill 12 hours in Bhopal. And a shower along with a few hours of sleep would be a welcome relief from the past week's frantic travel schedule.

He paid for the room, grabbed his travel bag, and walked up the three flights of stairs on a stairwell attached to the outside of the hotel; then he walked along an outside balcony till he got to his room. The room was spartan, but what could you expect for 100 Indian Rupees (about three bucks U.S.)? It had a separate cement shower room and a small separate bathroom with the standard Indian toilet – a single stainless steel unit built into the floor containing a central hole and two foot pedestals on which one placed their feet as they stooped over the hole. No toilet paper, just the standard water pipe running down the wall with a simple faucet. Under the faucet was a metal cup. Khalid, having lived in the United States for 20 years, had brought a roll of toilet paper with him.

The main room had a chair, table, and bed – an Indian bed, called a *charpie*. No mattress or springs, just four wooden posts connected with a rectangular wooden frame. The bedding surface consisted of a canvas weave. A flimsy cotton afghan was folded neatly at the edge of the bed. Khalid had slept on a similar bed in Karachi while growing up, so it certainly wasn't foreign to him. He placed his travel bag on the chair, removed his dust-laden clothing, and immediately headed for the shower. There was no hot water in the shower, but the water was warm from sitting in the storage tank on the roof all day. He stayed under the shower for a good 30 minutes, dried off as best as one could in that weather, turned on the ceiling fan directly over the bed, lay down and almost immediately went to sleep.

The telephone rang and abruptly startled Khalid out of a deep REM sleep. It was one of those old black, Bakelite telephones that weighed 800 pounds, was indestructible, and, back in the 1950s, used to rest comfortably on your night table. India was rapidly attaining the reputation of a modernized society – experts in writing software. All the high tech companies from the US had tremendous representation in India. Evidently the

management of the Pagoda Hotel hadn't kept pace with all that high tech razzmatazz. Khalid shook off the cobwebs, looked over at his wristwatch resting on the table within reach of the bed – it was 3 o'clock – and answered the phone.

“Mr. Shah, you have a visitor.” The desk clerk turned towards the visitor to ask her name, then continued, “A Miss Benazir Cossar is here to see you.”

Khalid knew his contact in Bhopal was a woman, but he was somewhat startled to see a woman as young as Benazir waiting near the front desk. “Maybe she's 25,” he thought as she extended her hand.

“So nice to see you again Mr. Shah,” she spoke in Urdu, leaving anyone within earshot the impression that she had met Khalid before.

“Good to see you too Miss Cossar, sorry I couldn't make it in yesterday. Meetings in Bombay were poorly scheduled. I hope I didn't hold things up. How far is it to the Heavy Electricals plant?”

“Just a few miles. It's in Govindpura. My car is parked just outside. We should be there in 15 minutes.”

“Good then. Shall we go?” Khalid changed to English.

They left the dimly lit, stuffy Pagoda lobby and headed for Benazir's white Indian Ambassador sedan, parked just in front of the hotel but headed in the opposite direction of the plant. Several men waiting in the lobby gave Benazir the once over as they left. She was quite attractive and at least a head taller than Khalid. Very light skinned, a trait considered beautiful on its own merit all over the Sub-Continent, Benazir also had that perfect angular Aryan facial bone structure. If she were white and blond, she would have immediately been identified as being of German or Scandinavian descent. She was tall, five-feet seven or eight, and had a terrific figure that even a sari and 9 yards of material couldn't hide. She also wore it well, exposing more of her hip than was usually exposed by most of the conservative Indian women who wore them.

They were not a very attractive couple. Khalid was a short but powerfully built man. His face was severely scarred from a life-threatening case of smallpox he had as a child. He too was light-skinned, also an attractive trait for a man, but in Khalid's case, the light skin only accentuated the pockmarks on his face from the smallpox. He was self

conscious of his looks, especially in the company of such an attractive woman as Benazir – where the contrast was rather apparent.

Khalid put his travel bag in the back seat and quickly inspected both the outside and inside of her car. He seemed suspicious. Benazir put her rather large purse in the back seat. She started the Ambassador and effortlessly turned the car around right in the midst of the myriad of moving obstacles Hamidia Road presented. It required the constant, almost incessant honking of her horn, but she seemed quite experienced at driving and maneuvering under these conditions. They headed for the large Heavy Electricals Plant in Govindpura.

“Do you have my passport?” Khalid immediately asked as soon as Benazir headed the car in the right direction. He spoke in Urdu. His tone was rather brusque, almost antagonistic. A complete reversal from their initial brief cordial exchange back in the hotel.

“We’ve had some difficulty along those lines,” she answered in English. She tried to continue but was immediately interrupted.

“What do you mean, ‘difficulty’? And talk to me in Urdu!” Now his tone was downright rude and mean-spirited. He used the familiar instead of the respectful Urdu verb endings. Benazir didn’t like the tone of the conversation but held her comments and answered back calmly and politely in Urdu, purposely using the more formal, respectful verb endings.

“Our contact for these matters was arrested last week in New Delhi. It was too dangerous to try and contact someone in the New Delhi cell. We had to find someone else for the work. We were referred to a chap from Indore. He is supposed to be quite reliable. He is sending someone to deliver the passport later this afternoon. He is coming by bus. We have to go back to Hamidia road when his bus arrives in about an hour. He will call me at my brother’s chemical plant located in the Industrial Estate just across from the Heavy Electricals Plant as soon as he arrives. That’s where we’re headed now.”

“Your brother’s chemical plant! Can your brother be trusted? There’s too damn many people involved in this already!” Khalid was almost shouting, half in Urdu, half in English. Benazir was visibly annoyed. There was a moment of silence before Benazir spoke.

“Mr. Shah I do not...”

“Call me Khalid.” He interrupted her for a second time.

“Mr. Shah.” She continued. “I do not appreciate your tone of voice or your hollering at me in this fashion. It is quite rude, you know. If you can’t speak to me in a civil respectful tone, then I suggest we end this conversation right now.” Benazir spoke calmly and respectfully with that perfectly clipped British upper crust accent that comes from four years of finishing school in London and a four-year Oxford education. She would not be trifled with or intimidated by Khalid Khan, regardless of his reputation within the Jihadist movement.

Khalid was taken aback by the polite but rather stern admonishment. Even though he had resided in the United States for almost 20 years, he had a tendency to treat women like most Muslim men, as second and third class citizens. Moving back to Pakistan after 9/11 had only reinforced that behavior. And he certainly didn’t expect his important contact in Bhopal to look or act like Benazir. He hesitated for a moment before he answered.

“I’m sorry, Benazir. But you know the importance of what we are about to try to accomplish. The more people who know about our mission, the more are the possibilities it could be exposed. Now you tell me we’re going to your brother’s plant. I don’t know about your brother or whether he can be trusted. And now you tell me the passport is possibly coming from a new untested source. I’m very uncomfortable with this. These changes are not the norm. You should know that. You have a reputation that belies this type of sloppy work.”

Benazir let Khalid sermonize for several more minutes without interruption. She listened attentively, patiently. He was talking now out of a nervousness just to keep talking to settle himself down. Without saying a word, she seemed to be gaining the upper hand. She was calm; he seemed excessively nervous – a complete role reversal from their meeting at the Pagoda. She knew of Khalid’s reputation. He was brilliant. He was resourceful. He was ruthless. And he was dedicated. But she could sense he was intimidated not only by her good looks but also by her self confidence – her assuredness.

Benazir Cossar could not have been created and crafted into a more perfect terrorist if she had been totally fabricated as part of a Hollywood *James Bond* flick. No one could possibly look at this woman and think – terrorist. Especially after she spoke a few words with that perfect British accent. Born into a wealthy, powerful and influential Muslim family, whose roots could be traced back to the many Begums who ran the Princely State of Bhopal well before Partition and Independence. The Cossar family owned acres of prime farmland all over the state of Madhya Pradesh. Their vast holdings stretched into real estate and several chemical industries. Their wealth only increased when the government of India had to pay large sums of money to all the Maharajas, Maharinis, Newabs and Begums for their princely estates after they were incorporated into the country shortly after India's 1947 independence.

Benazir Cossar was born and raised in this lap of luxury. She had already spent half her 25 years on the planet in London. Sent away early to London for schooling, she had returned to Bhopal three years ago with an Oxford degree in history. She was well known and well respected throughout the city. She was engaged in all sorts of philanthropic activities. She donated her time freely to every civic-minded organization that requested her presence. She was often asked by movie agents in Bombay to get into acting. They assured her that her good looks would capture and captivate Bollywood – Bombay's answer to Hollywood. This was all the perfect cover for her work in the Jihadist movement and her free movement not only around India but also around the world.

And with all this charm and good-will surrounding Benazir, she was as cunning, as clever, as resourceful, and every bit as ruthless as the man sitting to her left. Her reputation within the movement was legendary. She was involved in the recent bombing of the commuter trains in Bombay that had killed hundreds. (Who would have suspected that such a beautiful, charming, and graceful young woman could ever possibly leave a package of explosives under her seat?) She helped to smuggle arms on the trains to northern Kashmir. She smuggled back to the movement incredible sums of money on her frequent trips overseas. Khalid Khan was aware of all of Benazir's activities and her reputation. But he still felt uneasy being reprimanded by a woman.

They pulled into the Industrial Estate where her brother's acetylene factory was located. Benazir had an office at the plant. After meeting her brother, Khalid remained in Benazir's private office. Benazir returned after a trip to the bathroom and waited for the call to come in from their contact at the state transport, ST bus station. Benazir and Khalid waited in Benazir's office and read some magazines she had stacked on her desk. Their occasional conversations were muted. There was absolutely no talk about their mission or their work.

The call came about four in the afternoon. The contact identified himself by a single first name – Sajjan – and described himself – what he was wearing and precisely where he would be waiting. Khalid and Benazir were back in the car driving back towards the Pagoda. Within 15 minutes they were back on Hamidia Road just in front of the ST bus station. Benazir slowed the Ambassador to a crawl. Khalid immediately identified the contact sipping tea in a tea stall on the side of the road. Once both parties made visual contact, it was agreed upon that Benazir would park the car further down the road. Khalid would then return to the stall on foot and make sure the contact was who he said he was on the phone. Then Khalid and Sajjan would walk back to Benazir's car and the three would take off back to the chemical plant in Govindpura. Everything was going as planned.

Sajjan – neither Benazir nor Khalid believed that was his real name, but they couldn't care less – was a rather muscular young chap with movie star good looks. Upon entering the back seat of Benazir's Ambassador, he could hardly help giving the attractive Benazir a rather lengthy once-over. This visibly annoyed Khalid. Benazir noticed Sajjan's good looks and lengthy stare but hardly acknowledge his presence. She let Khalid do all the talking as they drove back to the Industrial Estate. They spoke in Urdu. Khalid was all business.

“Do you have the passport?”

“Do you have the money?” Sajjan quickly replied.

Khalid opened his travel bag sitting on his lap and removed very secretly, without divulging the contents of the bag to anyone in the car, 5,000 U.S. dollars in crisp, new, 100-dollar bills. Sajjan opened his smaller travel bag and handed the Indian passport

over to Khalid. Khalid examined the passport; Sajjan began to quickly start counting the money, but stopped.

“I trust all 5,000 is there, Mr. Shah. Mr. Hemant Shah.” He repeated Khalid’s fake alias the second time quite sarcastically. Then he made the mistake of continuing to talk. “I’m sure that’s not your real name, but quite frankly I could care less.” He continued to chuckle and finished counting the 5,000 dollars. Both Khalid and Benazir remained silent but stiffened slightly because of Sajjan’s comments and behavior.

“It’s all there, Sajjan, and my name is of no concern to you. Is it?” Then Khalid paused for dramatic effect. “Nor is yours to me.”

“Like I said, Mr. Shah, I couldn’t care less.”

Sajjan then tried to engage Benazir in conversation, coming very close to hitting on her, but received no encouragement. She answered all of his questions with one-word answers. Khalid immediately began to talk in English.

“Tell me Sajjan, how long have you been in this line of work? You look very young.”

“Long enough to know that you’re probably going to use the passport to help our cause.”

“And what cause might that be, Sajjan?” Khalid wanted to see just how much Sajjan knew about his plans.

“Jihad of course Mr. Shah. Islamic domination of the world.” His answer was rather flippant and sarcastic. He smirked as he re-counted the money. Khalid turned around and saw the smirk on his face. He turned back and continued with the interrogation.

“Are you of the Muslim faith Sajjan?”

“Well let’s put it this way. I was born a Muslim, but I’m not a very religious person.”

“Not the right answer.” Benazir thought to herself.

“May I ask then, Sajjan, why are you in this line of work?” Khalid pursued the line of questioning.

“Like everyone else, Mr Shah, for the money. Just for the money. Like you probably. Right?”

Khalid remained silent.

“Again the wrong answer,” Benazir thought and quickly spoke up. “When do you plan to head back to Indore, Sajjan?”

“Well, I thought I’d have dinner in Bhopal, maybe stay the evening and return in the morning. I’ve never really seen the city. Been here a couple times but only passed through.”

“Hey, I’ve got an idea. Mr. Shah has to catch a train to New Delhi this evening. Why don’t I give you both a quick tour of our lovely city? Take Mr. Shah to the train station. Then maybe you and I can have dinner together later this evening.”

Sajjan was beside himself with glee. And he accepted the invitation to both the tour and dinner immediately.

Benazir began her tour of Bhopal spouting interesting facts about the city, its history, and its architecture like a professional tour guide.

“The city of Bhopal, like Rome, is built on seven hills. Seven hills that surround two lakes. The Upper Lake and the Lower Lake as they are known. The Upper Lake is the larger of the two lakes and was built by damming up several streams and tributaries that run off the surrounding hills. It was built in the 12th century by one of the Mogul Afghan warriors that conquered the region. The lake is several miles long and almost a mile wide at its widest point.

“The lower lake was created by a dam in the later part of the 18th century by the Muslim Princess of the time, who controlled the region and was referred to as the Begum of Bhopal – an ancestor of the Cossar family, incidentally. The lower lake is much smaller than the upper lake – maybe a half-mile at its longest point and is used mostly for washing clothes and bathing water buffalo. The Upper Lake is used for boating and recreation and is the main source of potable water for the city.

“The two lakes and the seven hills make Bhopal a rather picturesque city. Don’t you agree? Unfortunately, Bhopal is known principally for the worst industrial accident to have ever taken place. The Union Carbide disaster of 1984 put Bhopal on the map forever. But since that tragedy, Bhopal has used its notoriety and infusion of money to create a rather attractive tourist location. Don’t you agree?”

“Bhopal, as you know, is the capital of the State of Madhya Pradesh. Its population is a little over one million. Prior to Partition, when the British Raj broke the territory up into Pakistan and India, Bhopal was a predominantly Muslim area, run on a day-to-day

basis by the Begum of Bhopal. India is the second most populous Muslim country in the world. Which I'm sure you're both aware of. I'm starting to feel like a tour guide. Anyway, we have a ten percent Muslim population in India, almost 100 million Muslims; almost double the population of Pakistan. Bhopal, because it was a Muslim Principality before the Instruments of Accession were signed and independence was granted in 1947, had a Muslim population close to fifty percent. Today it's closer to forty percent."

Benazir continued with her tour of Bhopal, captivating both Khalid and Sajjan. She could have been the tourism minister for the city. Her mastery of the history of Bhopal was total. And that marvelous, upper class British accent made anything she said that much more scholarly. After about an hour of driving around the city and along the Upper Lake through an upper-class suburb known as Shamla Hills, she suggested that they take a quick pontoon boat ride on the Upper Lake. She made the boat ride that much more exciting by informing Sajjan and Khalid that the south end of the Upper Lake actually bordered the Van Vihar National Park – all of India's major wildlife, tigers, panthers, crocodiles and the like – have been viewed in the park.

It was almost five in the evening when Benazir pulled the car near the boat rental dock. It was beginning to cloud over, and the evening monsoon rains would soon be pouring down. No one was waiting to rent a boat at this time of day. But Benazir asked Sajjan if he wouldn't mind driving her car over to a parking lot near the steps of an Indian temple about a quarter mile from the boat livery. The steps of the temple led right down to the lake. She said that she and Mr. Shah would ride the pontoon over there and pick him up. It seemed like a strange request, but he quickly agreed to do it and started up the Ambassador and drove out of the parking area over to the temple. Benazir and Khalid went down to the boat livery and rented the pontoon boat.

Benazir seemed to be quite familiar with the area and the pontoon boat and even dressed in her sari, she started up the ten horsepower outboard motor with ease. She obviously had done this before. Khalid put his travel bag and Benazir's large purse on one of the two metal benches that lined the two sides of the pontoon boat. They headed for the steps of the temple to pick up Sajjan.

Sajjan waved as he saw the boat coming towards the steps. Benazir and Khalid both waved back to signal they saw him. It was getting darker and more overcast by the

minute as the monsoon clouds quickly began to thicken. It started to drizzle lightly. Sajjan got on board as they headed towards the southern end of the Upper Lake near the border of the National Park.

It took almost an hour to get to the end of the lake. You could look back to the north and see the lights of Bhopal beginning to flicker. It was indeed an attractive city, just as Benazir had said it was earlier in the day. Benazir navigated the boat to about 100 feet off the shoreline. It was darker near the shoreline, which was lined with trees. It was still light enough to see out over the lake, but daylight was fading rapidly.

“Come out here much?” Sajjan was genuinely inquisitive. He was leaning out over the railing in the front of the boat; his back was to Benazir. Khalid was standing next to him looking out at the shore. Khalid thought he saw some sudden movement along the shoreline, and indeed it was an alligator or crocodile, agitated by the movement of the pontoon.

“I said do you come out here often?” Sajjan repeated his question and turned around to face Benazir who was looking for something in her purse. She was startled because she wasn’t paying any attention to Sajjan or the question he asked twice. She was concentrating on the contents of her purse.

“Yes quite often, as a matter of fact. Sometimes even by myself. It’s quite isolated and peaceful out here on the southern end of the lake.”

“Yes peaceful and romantic.” He turned back towards the shore.

Benazir found what she was looking for in her purse and quickly attached the silencer. It made a final click, which made both Khalid and Sajjan turn around and face her. Sajjan couldn’t quite make out what she held in her right hand down by her side partially covered by the folds in her sari.”

“What the hell is that?” Sajjan asked her.

“It’s a .22 semi-automatic pistol with a silencer,” she calmly replied.

“What the hell is that...” Sajjan never finished.

With lightening speed, Benazir raised the gun and put two bullets smack dab in the center of his forehead. Sajjan lurched backward against the railing, then fell forward onto the metal deck of the boat with a dull thud.

“Throw his ass overboard, Khalid.” Benazir ordered, her cultured British accent losing some of its charm.

“He’s pretty heavy; I might need your help.”

They both dragged Sajjan’s body to the back of the pontoon and pushed him into the water.

“Shouldn’t we be sure he sinks? They’ll find his body floating in the lake tomorrow. Too many questions. I don’t like it Benazir.”

“They will not find a damn thing tomorrow, Khalid. Trust me.”

Just then they heard two large splashing sounds from the shore. Within seconds, Sajjan’s torso was in the grip of the mouth of a large amphibian, maybe two; it was difficult to tell in the darkness. One got the better of the deal and began the familiar death roll. It wasn’t really necessary. Sajjan was already dead. And soon he would be dinner at the bottom of the Upper Lake.

Benazir steered the boat back to the rental dock. It was almost seven when they walked over to the Hindu temple and got in Benazir’s Ambassador. Sajjan’s travel bag with the five grand was still in the back seat. Khalid had an 8 o’clock train to catch for Delhi, but during the monsoons the chance of any train being on time was slim.

“I never would have left Bhopal knowing that asshole was still alive.” Khalid sounded relieved, speaking in Urdu, but saying the word ‘asshole’ in English.

“I knew he was a dead man as soon as he opened his mouth in the car after we picked him up at the tea stall near the bus station. He kept on giving the wrong answers. I knew that either I had to kill him or you did, and I didn’t think you were carrying a gun.”

“I wasn’t,” Khalid answered. “But I would have killed him with my bare hands if I had to. I knew your plan as soon as you suggested the boat ride on the lake. He sure was a dumb son of a bitch. He never would have lasted another month in this line of work. I can’t believe he agreed to take that pontoon boat ride. Maybe he should thank us.” Khalid laughed.

“He thought he was going to get laid tonight, that’s why he got on the boat, and he can’t thank us now.” Benazir pulled up to the train station and let Khalid out of the car. He grabbed his travel bag from the back seat.

“Good luck in the States,” she said.

“And good luck to you. I’ll see you there in a few days. Allah Akbar!” He whispered the last sentence.

“Allah Akbar!” She whispered back.

Chapter 4

Pittsburgh: Friday, September 1

Dave could have taken the faster route to Buffalo following the two legs of a right triangle: Interstate 79 north, then Interstate 90 east. But instead he chose the more direct – and more scenic – route straight north on Route 8 to Butler, eventually working his way to Route 62 through the Allegheny Mountains and following the Allegheny River upstream to Warren, Pennsylvania. So far the weather was holding up. It was much cooler than it had been the past week, but the sun was shining brightly with a few puffy cumulus clouds lingering overhead. The remnants of Hurricane Ernesto were still moving north up the East Coast; the fringes of the weather front most likely causing the 20-degree drop in temperatures they were experiencing that morning. Dave and Holly were still hopeful that the brunt of the storms would pass out into the Atlantic. “So far so good,” they thought as they continued heading through the Allegheny National Forest.

Earlier that morning, when they were packing and getting ready for their bike adventure, Dave was securing both bikes to the bike-carrier attached to his trunk. He noticed how much lighter Holly’s new carbon fiber bike weighed and commented that he thought she would have an unfair advantage on the trip once they got on the canal towpath and playfully suggested she carry some extra weight to even things up like they do in horse racing. “I didn’t realize this was a competition,” was Holly’s quick reply.

The trip through northeastern Pennsylvania was slow but pleasant. They stopped for coffee in Franklin, where they picked up Route 62 and headed north following alongside the Allegheny River. They stopped again for a Diet Coke, at Holly’s request, in Warren. Dave had forgotten about Holly’s insatiable appetite for caffeine in the forms of both coffee and Diet Coke. She was quite particular that the large Diet Coke had to be from McDonalds.

From Warren they headed straight north to the New York State Line. It wasn’t even a 30-minute ride. A few hundred yards from the state line they saw two State Highway Patrol cars with their flashing lights blinking and several officers standing in the road waving Dave to slow down and stop. Two of the State Patrol officers were carrying

shotguns; one was carrying a high-powered rifle. Dave brought the car to a gradual stop and lowered his window. The patrol officer looked into the car, backseat and front.

“What’s going on officer?” Dave asked.

The highway patrolman handed Dave a sheet of paper with a picture of a bearded fugitive named Bucky Williams. “Have you seen this man today?” The officer asked them both after they perused the photo.

“No officer.” They both answered almost simultaneously.

“Could you please release the trunk?” the second officer standing on Holly’s side requested.

Dave released the trunk and a third officer asked if they had to remove the bikes first before lifting the trunk open. Dave said the bikes would be okay. They inspected the trunk, then closed it gently. Then an officer walked around the car with a device that had a mirror attached at right angles to view the undercarriage of Dave’s Impala.

“Jesus this must be serious.” Dave whispered to Holly. Then he questioned the officer nearest him, “May I ask what this guy did, officer?”

“He killed a State Police officer, and critically wounded another. If you see this man, please call the phone number on the bottom of the picture.” The patrol officer nearest Dave’s window replied in a somber tone. Then he waved Dave through the roadblock.

Dave quickly raised both his and Holly’s windows halfway and took off towards Buffalo.

“Well that’s a hell of a start for our little adventure,” Dave commented. “Let’s hope this is the most excitement we’ll see for the next week.”

“That sure as hell was. This Bucky character must be one bad-ass dude. I sure hope he’s not a bicycle enthusiast.”

Just then, not five miles from where they were stopped by the New York State Highway Patrol, they saw three makeshift signs placed about one hundred yards apart like the old Burma Shave signs you’d see out in the country in some nondescript cornfield. Each sign had one word written on it, and the three signs in sequence said: “GO” “BUCKY” “GO.” Evidently, Bucky had several wacko supporters in this area of New York and Pennsylvania.

Route 62 led them all the way into downtown Buffalo. After a few wrong turns on the downtown Buffalo streets, Dave pulled into the large open parking area in front of the Adam's Mark Hotel.

The Adam's Mark Hotel was a rather large edifice – 400 rooms – located just a stone's throw from the Niagara River. It looked to be the biggest hotel in downtown Buffalo, but just several blocks away was another 400-room hotel – the Hyatt Regency. The Holiday Inn, another 400-room giant, was just a few blocks from the Hyatt. Dave commented to Holly that it was rather strange that Buffalo, a city considerably smaller than Pittsburgh, had what appeared to be a much larger hotel base. Holly thought Buffalo's proximity – 26 miles – to Niagara Falls had something to do with that.

Dave removed both bicycles from the bike-rack and balanced them along a makeshift snow fence protecting the Adam's Mark flowerbeds which were decorating the front of the hotel entrance. It was only early September, still officially summer, so it seemed a little premature to be erecting snow fences. But then this was Buffalo, New York.

Holly transferred her biking apparel, toiletries, repair tools and rain gear from a small overnight bag to her two saddlebags, which she attached to a contraption over the rear wheel of her carbon fiber Jamis bike while Dave held the bike steady. Then Dave transferred his one other change of biking apparel and lime-yellow rain jacket to a rear rectangular, box-shaped canvas bag and attached the bag, with dimensions that fit almost perfectly, onto his rear carrier. Inside this bag Dave also stored two spare inner tubes, his repair tools, and four 16g CO2 cartridges. He had a smaller bag attached to his front handle bar, where he stored assorted maps, his wallet, his cell phone, his car keys, several medicines, toothbrush, and toothpaste, all kept in a double-sealed Zip-Loc bag. Holly brought a long-sleeved biking shirt, but Dave had faith that the weather would remain warm enough to leave any cold-weather clothes back in Pittsburgh. Holly thought that was a mistake.

Once they were both sure they had everything transferred to their bikes, they walked the bikes over to the main entrance of the hotel. They entered separately through the continuously revolving door and walked up to the reception desk. Dave held both bikes while Holly checked in.

“Welcome to the Adam’s Mark. How can we help you?” The receptionist greeted Holly and Dave as Holly removed her credit card from her wallet.

“I have a reservation for two for tonight for ‘Morgan.’”

The young, attractive female reservation clerk – a recent college graduate from Buffalo State University, one of the two major universities in Buffalo – began to scan the computer to confirm Holly’s reservation.

“Yes Miss Morgan, you’ll just be staying one night. Is that correct?”

“Right.”

Just then Dave reminded Holly to ask the clerk if they could pay with two credit cards.

“Oh, would it be possible to pay with two credit cards?” Holly politely asked the clerk.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” The clerk quickly responded. “We can only charge one credit card per room.”

Dave looked pissed and acted like he was ready to say something. Holly quickly gave him a look to knock it off.

“That’s all right, just charge the room to my card.”

The receptionist ran Holly’s card through, returned it, and then asked, “Two room keys or one?”

“One should be enough.”

“Enjoy your trip down the Erie Canal. I assume that’s where you’re headed tomorrow.”

“That’s where we’re headed,” Holly said, and turned away to retrieve her bike that Dave was steadying. “I just hope the weather cooperates.”

“Do you get many bikers staying here before they take off on the Erie Canal towpath?” Dave asked the receptionist.

“Quite a few during the mid-summer months. It falls off pretty fast this time of year, but two guys just checked in with their bikes about 15 minutes before you did.” The receptionist replied, then continued. “You know the towpath starts just a quarter mile behind the hotel right near the river.” She pointed to the other side of the hotel lobby.

Dave and Holly walked their bikes through the lobby to the elevators. One of the six elevators was ready and waiting. They maneuvered both bikes into the elevator, one at a time, and headed for the 12th floor.

Holly and Dave wheeled their bikes through the narrow doorway of their 12th-floor room then leaned them against the wall. Dave immediately turned on the television to get a weather report from the Weather Channel. Holly checked out the bathroom. It was almost four in the afternoon. Dave opened the curtains and took in the incredible view. It was a spectacular panorama of the graceful Peace Bridge arching towards the Canadian shore and the turbulent Niagara River racing north towards the Falls. The sky was completely overcast. Not a good omen, Dave thought.

The television came on with a local channel, a bulletin flashed across the bottom of the screen:

“Bucky Williams has wounded another New York State Highway Patrolman. All roads leading into New York State from eastern Pennsylvania now have roadblocks, including the New York State Thruway, Interstate 90. Be prepared for some delays on the roads.”

“Looks like this Bucky Williams character is causing a real commotion.” Dave said, as he progressed sequentially through the channels with the remote.

Holly was removing several items from her saddlebags, paying little attention to the TV. Dave finally landed on the Weather Channel. It didn't look promising. It looked rather ominous from the weather map. Typical counterclockwise winds from Hurricane Ernesto were approaching northern Pennsylvania. If the winds followed their present course, they were expected to hit Buffalo around midnight.

“Shit!” Dave exclaimed.

“What?”

“We're gonna get smacked tonight with all that hurricane crap.”

“So if it's too bad we'll just wait in Buffalo for another day. Maybe take in Niagara Falls,” she didn't seem as disturbed by the forecast as Dave.

Holly went into the bathroom to shower. Dave called the front desk to get a recommendation on a good Italian restaurant near the downtown area and find out when

the hotel restaurant opened for breakfast on Saturday – 6 a.m. Holly started to dry her hair with the hair dryer and Dave ran a bath.

Holly changed into another biking outfit. This time it was a more standard two-piece design rather than the one-piece yellow ensemble she had worn in Pittsburgh. She sat down on the side of the king-sized bed with her cell phone and called her younger daughter, who was a sophomore at Columbia University in New York. Then she called her older daughter in California who was a senior at Berkley. She flipped on the TV, which Dave had turned off in disgust with the weather report, and waited for Dave to finish his bath. She wasn't paying much attention to the television, but rather perusing the New York Parks' *Biking the Erie Canal* brochure evaluating the route to Albion, New York, their planned destination Saturday, provided the weather cooperated. It was approximately 62 miles from downtown Buffalo. With very little climbing, it would appear to be a comfortable ride for both their biking skills.

Dave finished drying his hair with his towel, put back on the red Starter boxer shorts that he wore that day in the car and sat down on the bed next to Holly.

"Did you call your kids?" Dave asked.

"Yeah. Kim is going to come up from New York on a train and meet us when we get to Albany next Saturday. Okay?"

"Great. I hope we get there by Saturday."

"Quit worrying Dave. We'll get there. It doesn't really look that bad outside."

"Italian restaurant tonight, okay?"

"Absolutely. Carbs. Carbs. And more carbs. Right?" Holly looked up and smiled.

"You got it. Hey look up in that brochure for bike stores near downtown. I think I better get a long-sleeve biking shirt. I might need one on this trip. We can stop at a bike store before we eat."

"I already found two just a few miles from the hotel."

"See, I told you. You should have joined the C.I.A."

Holly forced a smile.

It was almost six when Dave and Holly got back into Dave's Impala and headed for one of the bike stores listed in the brochure. Dave headed out of the Adam's Mark outdoor parking lot and took a right on Church Street, then another right.

"No, Dave, a left, not a right," Holly seemed annoyed.

"I know; I just want to see where the bike path is."

They found the path just like the receptionist said, not even a half mile from the hotel. Dave headed for Main Street. Downtown Buffalo was deserted Friday evening. It was a little after six, but the streets were already abandoned. It looked like a neutron bomb hit downtown Buffalo. Main Street had a Metro Rail line running down the middle of the street that ran all the way from the Niagara River to Buffalo State University. It was a charming, deliberately antiquated-looking trolley line, but no one was riding the Metro.

When Dave finally got to the bike store it was closed, so they drove over to Elmwood Avenue where the second bike store was located. It was also closed. But Elmwood Avenue was bustling with activity and the traffic was single lane, bumper to bumper. Stores and boutiques and restaurants lined both sides of the street. Lots of college-age students were wandering aimlessly about mingling with older more affluent couples sitting in some of the sidewalk cafés sipping cappuccino. It was a very lively area and quite a contrast to the gloomy scene downtown Buffalo offered.

Holly suggested that Dave park the car. But that was easier said than done. After a twenty-minute search for a parking space, they parked right in front of an Italian restaurant – not the one suggested by the receptionist, but one that looked to be more than adequate and quite popular – even at that early hour. That was a good sign, they both agreed, and decided to get their fill of pasta and load up on carbs right there at Amici Ristorante.

They spent two leisurely hours over dinner and coffee. Filling in some of the gaps about their two marriages and details of their children's lives that they hadn't discussed in Pittsburgh. They arrived back at the Adam's Mark parking lot at nine. Walking into the hotel lobby, they spotted two bicycles leaning against the receptionist counter; the owners of the bikes were nowhere in sight. Dave and Holly, curious about the bikes and the owners, walked over to the bikes and inspected them rather closely. One was a

Specialized, a carbon fiber bike. The other looked to be a custom-made bike of titanium construction.

“Looks like a couple of serious bikers,” Holly said

“Very serious. This bike is titanium.” Dave said, as he closely examined the details of both bikes, like only an engineer can do.

Just then two foreign nationals walked over to the reception desk.

“Excuse me,” the taller of the two spoke first with that Indian-British accent. “We’d like to get our bikes.”

“Oh I’m sorry,” Dave said, startled by the stealth approach of the two foreigners. “We were just admiring your bikes. Are you going on the Erie Canal towpath?”

“Yes,” was the one-word curt reply of the shorter of the two.

“Well maybe we’ll see you on the path tomorrow,” Holly cheerfully added, trying to cut the slight tension.

“Possibly,” the taller one replied. And the two foreigners walked their bikes through the lobby to the revolving door and outside the hotel.

“Friendly sons-of-bitches,” Dave sarcastically remarked. “Where are they from, India?”

“India or Pakistan. I’ve been to both countries. It’s impossible to tell.”

Chapter 5

Newark International Airport: Saturday, September 2

Khalid Khan's plane landed one hour late at the Newark International Airport on a Continental Airlines flight direct from New Delhi, India. It was a 16-hour flight and Khalid slept, on and off, almost the whole 16 hours. He'd arrived the day before in New Delhi early Friday morning. He got off at the train one stop early at the Nizamoudeen Station rather than the main rail depot, because it was much closer to the Delhi International Airport. He'd had almost four hours before his plane left for New York. The scheduled departure time was 11:45. The Continental Airlines flight from New Delhi was one hour late taking off due to some early morning fog and monsoon rains. He passed through Indian customs and passport control as Mr. Hemant Shah with no problems. He still had his Green Card from working for 20 years in the United States. It just had to be forged for Hemant Shah, not Khalid Khan.

He debated whether or not to take the Green Card. He thought it could be a weak link in the chain because it had to be changed for Hemant Shah. If the forgery was discovered by either U.S. Passport Control or Indian Passport Control, it could sabotage the entire mission. But Khalid determined it was worth the risk since the Green Card allowed unquestioned passage back and forth from the U.S. Especially since it showed he'd had a Green Card for over 20 years.

Khalid Khan was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan into an upper middle class family. His father was a government servant who worked in the Ministry of Justice as a lawyer. The family were observant Muslims, but not zealots. Khalid had two younger sisters, both living in London and married to British citizens of Pakistani origin. Khalid attended the prestigious Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Applied Technology, Pakistan's answer to India's IIT, Indian Institute of Technology, and obtained his degree in electrical engineering. He was an outstanding student and was accepted to a graduate program at Cornell University, where he received a Masters degree with honors. His professors wanted him to go on for a doctorate, but Khalid received an offer from Bechtel Engineering and Construction, the largest engineering/construction company in the

world. He worked in their corporate San Francisco office for 20 years. He married an American – a rather homely woman – whose chances of getting married were diminishing rapidly. She was eight years older than Khalid. It obviously wasn't an “arranged” marriage. Nor was it a “love” marriage. Basically it was a “Green Card” marriage of convenience. They had three children. The children were brought up as Muslims.

Six months before 9/11, he was laid off as a result of a worldwide slowdown in engineering and construction. He was quite bitter about the layoff and thought Bechtel was discriminating because of his Pakistani nationality. He sued. He lost. He became more embittered. He returned to Karachi with his family several months after the Twin Towers fell, and his bitterness and vengeance found an outlet with al-Qaeda. They, in turn, found in Khalid a brilliant electrical engineer, with 20 years of engineering and construction experience with the world's largest E&C company; it was a perfect marriage. Not to mention, Khalid had familiarity with the United States, a Green Card, an American wife, and three children all born in America and thus, American citizens. And better yet, he had no previous affiliation with any terrorist organization.

Khalid left his wife and children frequently to train in the lawless regions of Pakistan near the Afghan border. Here his bitterness and vengeance towards Americans and Jews found ample sustenance and encouragement. His electrical engineering knowledge and experience helped to train the terrorists in explosives and IED's. His exploits along the border and in Afghanistan itself were the stuff of legends. He showed the terrorists how to use a cell phone or garage door opener from high up in the mountains to explode devices placed on the mountain roads and in the valleys below. He was involved in all three failed attempts on President Musharraf's life. He planned the kidnapping of Danny Pearl, the *Wall Street Journal* reporter who was beheaded on TV. Khalid Khan was the actual executioner, but al-Qaeda thought Khalid much too valuable an asset, so they purposely offered up another terrorist and leaked the name and actually even helped the Pakistani government capture the wrong suspect.

Khalid again easily passed through U.S. Customs and Immigration. His first order of business was to rent a car. He retrieved his single piece of luggage from the baggage area

and hailed a taxi. He could have waited for the Budget Rental Agency limo but decided to take a taxi instead. He went off the airport site and rented from a Budget Car Rental agency several miles south of the airport on US Route 1. He was quite familiar with the New York/New Jersey area, having worked on an assignment for Bechtel in the region for over a year. The taxi driver was also a Pakistani – not much of coincidence in this area of the country – so they conversed in their native Urdu (Hindustani?). When asked by the driver why he had come to America, Khalid explained he had lived in America for 20 years and was visiting friends. Khalid did not encourage the conversation, keeping his answers short.

It was only a ten-minute ride to the Budget Car Rental agency. Khalid gave the driver 20 bucks for the abbreviated ride.

“Allah Akbar!” The taxi driver shouted out to Khalid as Khalid grabbed his bag and exited the taxi, making the assumption Khalid was a fellow Muslim. They never exchanged names. Had they, the driver would have immediately recognized the surname ‘Shah’ as a non-Muslim, Indian, last name. “Did the taxi driver detect a Pakistani accent? I thought I had that well concealed,” Khalid thought to himself as he opened the taxi door.

“Thank you for the ride. Sorry it was so short. It was nice meeting you.” Khalid responded in English, leaving that assumption unconfirmed. But the taxi driver’s assumption still unnerved him.

He walked into the Budget Rental Agency and presented his altered California driver’s license. He rented a mid-sized car – a Chevy Malibu – and paid for the week’s rental charge in cash. He had credit cards, but they were easily traceable, even with the ‘Hemant Shah’ name. He carried the credit cards only to substantiate identity if he were asked for additional sources. He carried enough cash to pay for hotels and car rentals, but not too much as to cause any suspicion if he were questioned going through customs. He had several contacts in the states where he could obtain more money. One was in New Jersey in an enclave known as Little Egypt, just outside Newark. He drove the Malibu out of the parking lot and headed for a Hampton Inn several miles away on US Route 1.

He had never stayed at the Hampton when he traveled to New Jersey for Bechtel when he was assigned to that job on the East Coast. He would shun those hotels and any of the

restaurants he'd frequented during that time to avoid being recognized – even though it had been more than 10 years since he'd worked in New Jersey. Khalid was very careful. He had a cell phone, but realized how vulnerable it could be to call any of the contacts by phone. He carried the cell phone for other purposes. Any and all meetings would have to be arranged by personal contact. Areas where he would meet were selected in advance. The assumption was that everybody's phone was either tapped or the NSA was listening to their conversations. It was assumed that everyone was being observed, especially in areas like Little Egypt. This may or may not have been the case. But this mission was too important to take even the slightest chance. Obviously, risks would have to be taken to accomplish their ultimate goal, but they would do their best to minimize these risks. Phones, computers, and any forms of electronic communication were deemed high risk. This is one reason the planning for this operation took two years. All the terrorists and terrorist cells to be used in this operation located in Pakistan, India, Iraq, Britain and the United States were contacted by personal messengers.

The Hampton Inn near the airport was a rather rundown establishment. Khalid had a room on the top floor. It had a musty, moldy feel about it. The bathroom tiles near the bathtub had black mold embedded in the grout. Khalid left the bedspread on but removed the three pillows and stacked them up against the headboard and flipped on the TV. He lay back on the bed and started channel surfing. He was surprisingly edgy. He couldn't get comfortable. He wanted to get started on the mission and head to upstate New York, but he had to wait for Benazir, who would be arriving from London on Sunday. He toyed with the idea of calling an escort service – then realized it was too risky. Eventually he fell asleep with the TV blaring away.

Chapter 6

Buffalo: September 2, 5 a.m.

Dave was already up at five in the morning peering through the window curtains to check the weather first-hand. Maybe he got four hours of sleep that night. He hadn't heard any rain during the night, so he was hopeful the bad weather passed. He was encouraged by the view outside the window. Although it was still dark, the ground was lit up enough from the hotel's outdoor vapor arc lights so that it was easy to see that the parking lot and nearby sidewalk were bone dry. He quickly turned on the TV to get the Weather Channel's report. The sound of the TV coming on woke Holly.

"Jesus, Dave what the hell time is it?"

"I don't know – five or so," he said.

"What's it look like out there?" Holly turned and saw Dave peering through the window drapes again.

"Actually it looks pretty good. Maybe we got lucky and the storm passed us."

"Great. So it looks like we'll take off this morning for Albion?" She pulled the sheet over her head, remaining in a fetal position.

"We will if you ever get your pretty little butt out of bed."

"What time does the restaurant here open for breakfast?" she bellowed from under the sheet.

"Six o'clock."

Dave went into the bathroom. Holly began her yoga meditation followed by her Iyengar exercises. She performed them in the nude. Dave finished his bathroom activities and put on a pair of black Jockey mid-thigh boxer-type underpants. Then he stepped into his red Starter boxer shorts, the same ones he wore all day yesterday. Holly had finished her yoga routine and was lying in bed with a pillow propped up behind her head studying the New York Park and Trails *Biking the Erie Canal* brochure. Then she peered up as Dave came into the bedroom. She gave Dave the once over. She had a concerned look on her face.

"Now what's the problem, Holly?" Dave saw the troubled look.

“Aren’t those the same shorts you wore all day yesterday?” She asked.

“Yeah, I only brought two pair. What’s the problem?”

“Nothing,” she casually replied. “Hey those black underpants are pretty sexy.”

“Would you just get dressed. I’m getting hungry.”

Holly cast away the bed sheet and sprung out of bed and grabbed Dave’s arm. Spun him around and jumped on his back, her arms curled around his neck, her legs wrapped around his mid-section.

“What the hell are you doin’?” Dave was surprised at how quickly she leaped out at him and landed on his back. He wobbled around the room with her clinging tightly to his back until they were stable. Then she dismounted.

“Hey David. Lighten up. What the hell are you so tense about?”

“I’m hungry and I’d like to get outside and see what the weather is like and get going. I’m not tense.”

“Well you seem a little uptight.”

“I’m not uptight and I’m not tense. I’m just hungry.”

Holly went into the bathroom and ran the shower. Dave looked over the *Erie Canal* brochure. In ten minutes Holly was out of the shower and dressed in another Italian designer outfit. This one was the more traditional two-piece biking attire: padded black Lycra, knee-length, skin-tight shorts, and a colorful skin-tight Lycra shirt that was only missing that distinct “Cinzano” label to complete its fashion statement. Of course, Holly Morgan could have worn a burlap bag, and that alone would have made a fashion statement. It was 5:55, and they were in the elevator headed down to the lobby.

Once in the main lobby Dave headed right for the revolving door and walked into the parking lot to evaluate the weather first-hand. Holly walked into the restaurant and sat down at a table. No one else was in the restaurant. It still wasn’t quite six o’clock when the restaurant officially opened. Dave came back into the restaurant and located Holly, already on her second cup of caffeine.

“What’s it like outside?” She asked.

“It’s overcast, but it’s not really very cold and there’s almost no wind. It’s really almost perfect biking weather. I’d say a wind breaker and it’ll be perfect.”

“Maybe we lucked out.”

“I think we did. The storm was supposed to hit hard last night according to the Weather Channel. But it’s bone dry out there and hardly a whisper of a breeze. Did you order yet?”

“Nope. Waiting for you.”

They both had huge breakfasts. Dave had a bowl of cereal with a sliced banana, a waffle with sausage, an order of white bread toast and a large glass of orange juice. Holly had almost the exact same, breakfast except she had buckwheat pancakes instead of the waffle. Both were believers in big breakfasts before taking off on a 60-plus mile bike trip. Dave’s disposition improved with a full stomach and the knowledge that the weather was most suitable for biking the 62 miles to Albion, New York. It was 6:30 when they got back to their room, collected all their belongings, and loaded down their bikes. They were in the lobby with their cycles, headed through the nonstop revolving door before 6:45.

It was already light enough outside to see the continuous gray seamless cloud cover that either indicated the storm had missed the area or portended it was still lingering to the south and east waiting to pounce. Dave had recently purchased a new German-manufactured speedometer that not only indicated actual speed, average speed, total distance, trip distance, riding time, but also a host of other metrics dedicated bicyclists are enamored of. This ingenious little device also showed outside temperature, percent incline of the road, elevation, and height climbed. Dave’s thermometer indicated it was 60 degrees.

It was just chilly enough to put on their light rain jackets. They were, coincidentally, both the same lime-yellow color. Dave leaned his bike up against the makeshift snow fence and walked over to Holly. He took her bike out of her grasp and leaned it against the same fence.

“What are you doing?” Holly was surprised when Dave took the bike.

He put his arms around her and held her tightly. She responded. Then he tried to maneuver his head into a position to kiss her, but their bike helmets kept getting in the

way. They laughed and she removed his helmet. He removed hers and they finally kissed. He continued to hold her close.

“You ready for a leisurely 400 mile jaunt to Albany?” he said.

“Ready when you are, Lance Armstrong.”

They put their helmets back on, mounted their bikes and headed for the asphalt-paved path along the Niagara River that would lead them to Tonawanda, New York, and the entrance to the historic Erie Canal and the canal towpath. According to the *Erie Canal* brochure, it was 14 miles to Tonawanda and the canal entrance.

They were on the paved path behind the hotel in less than five minutes. The city of Buffalo kept their Niagara River real estate in an attractive park-like setting with lots of grassy areas with picnic facilities and several public tennis courts. In addition, several realtors took advantage of the pristine scenery and the expansive view of the river and Canadian shoreline and built condominiums and apartments. Some looked to be rather pricey, others more affordable, but everything looked to have been built within 5 years.

The bike path snaked through the condominium complexes and public parks and soon hugged the Niagara River bank separated from the fast-moving water by only a simple, two-foot high, single bar-type railing. They came around a bend in the river and the arches of the Peace Bridge came prominently into view. Holly was in the lead. They rode single file. Early morning joggers were beginning to appear on the path. It was wide enough for two bikes, but a jogger on the path made it tricky, so they continued on in single file. When no jogger appeared in the distance, Dave rode up alongside Holly. They kept their speed down to 12 miles per hour. Just before the Peace Bridge, the path diverted up a steep embankment back onto Niagara Street. At that time of the morning on a Saturday, there was virtually no traffic on the road.

The sky lightened up, but the seamless cloud cover remained firmly in place. From Niagara Street they saw a sign leading them back to the asphalt bike path down along the river's edge. Now the pace of the river had slowed appreciably. It was rather fierce under the Peace Bridge, as it should have been. The entire contents of four of the five Great Lakes were rushing through this narrow passage ready to dump its full force over the Falls. But a mile farther down stream from the bridge, the river widened considerably

– it was probably more than a mile wide and the river’s pace had calmed. Here, at this section of the river, the Niagara took on the look and proportions of a tranquil inland lake.

The Canadian side of the river was undeveloped compared to the industrialized American side. The Canadian side was more residential, even pastoral in nature. Many large homes on spacious lots appeared to sit right along the river’s edge or just on the other side of a road that ran parallel to the river. Many of the larger homes had private docks with large boats.

The rain held off and the temperatures remained moderate for most of the ride to Tonawanda where the Erie Canal began its long 400-mile downhill journey to the Hudson River. Although it drizzled occasionally, there wasn’t enough precipitation to be concerned about or even to get uncomfortably wet. They both remarked that the occasional drizzle felt good as Holly increased the pace to almost 15 miles per hour. They would gladly settle for this weather all the way to Albion. Unfortunately, Mother Nature wouldn’t accommodate them.

The entrance to the Erie Canal in North Tonawanda, New York, is rather dramatic and prominently marked with a large wooden signpost welcoming the visitor to “The Historic Erie Canal.” Dave and Holly took an hour to travel the 14 miles from Buffalo to the canal’s large bay-like entrance. They checked the distance on their speedometers to see how accurate the data in the Parks and Trails brochure was. The brochure listed the distance as 14 miles exactly. Both their speedometers concurred. Lots of watercraft of all shapes and sizes were docked in the inlet leading to the canal proper. Within a mile of the inlet, the waterway narrows to canal-like proportions – 125 to 150 feet wide. The average depth of the canal is listed in the brochure as 14 feet.

The asphalt towpath follows right along the banks of the canal. Occasionally the towpath ends and directs the bicyclist onto a two-lane Macadam road paralleling the canal. Then the bike towpath appears again and riders are directed back alongside the canal.

The towpath was completely flat; the road had occasional gentle rolling hills, but pedaling between towpath and road was effortless. Holly kept the pace near 14 miles per

hour, but only because Dave mildly complained when she picked it up to 15 or 16. Eventually she asked Dave to take the lead. She said it was more difficult to lead and keep the pace down rather than follow someone at the slower pace. His male pride totally unaffected, he gladly accepted the lead position. The predicted rain and torrential winds continued to hold off. Their bargain with Mother Nature appeared to be holding.

They had been on the bikes for well over an hour and Holly's caffeine craving was emerging. She asked Dave to be on the lookout for the first possible place to stop. Their present location didn't look very promising. Holly called out to Dave to stop so she could look at the maps she'd torn out of the brochure that morning and had in a clear plastic flap on a small canvas bag she had attached to her handlebar. The maps indicated they would be leaving the proximity of the canal in a few miles and heading towards Niagara Falls Boulevard. Holly thought they'd be able to get some coffee somewhere near there and asked Dave to be on the lookout. They were pedaling on Creekside Drive and quickly lost sight of the canal, which had been on their left.

Niagara Falls Boulevard soon appeared. It was a main thoroughfare and heavy with Saturday morning traffic. There was a small shopping center at the intersection of Creekside Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard and then Dave saw a Tim Horton's doughnut shop – Canada's answer to our Krispy Kreme. Holly was almost ecstatic. For some reason, neither had noticed that the intensity of the rain had picked up considerably. But when they stopped in front of Tim Horton's they noticed they were starting to feel damp, especially their shoes. Their rain gear was doing a good job of keeping their upper torsos dry. Dave noticed the temperature on his speedometer had dropped from 60 to 55. They balanced their bikes alongside the glass window in front of the doughnut shop and waited in line for some nourishment and to reduce Holly's caffeine craving to a manageable level. The shop was crowded. Holly offered to buy. Dave found an empty table and waited for Holly to get through the line. He enjoyed watching the patrons watch Holly as she waited in line. They were waiting for her to take off her rain gear to get a better view of her figure, which even the raingear had a difficult time concealing. Sadly she would disappoint them. She kept the rain gear on.

Holly had her coffee and a sweet roll. Dave had hot chocolate and two glazed doughnuts, which, just like Kripy Kreme, were much too sweet. They spent about 30 minutes in Horton's, then got back on the bikes and headed for Tonowanda Creek Road.

According to the map Holly had in her clear plastic flap, they could follow a road which paralleled Niagara Falls Boulevard and had virtually no traffic. Niagara Falls Boulevard was a six-lane highway and was congested with traffic. The New York Parks brochure was great at diverting the cyclist to "biker friendly" roads. They took the recommended road. Pedaled about a mile. At the street light they crossed back across busy Niagara Falls Boulevard onto Tonawanda Creek Road, another Macadam two-lane rural highway with little or no traffic. In another mile the Erie Canal appeared once again on their left. They were directed back on to the asphalt towpath through a park-like area and then right alongside the canal itself.

This was the most isolated from civilization they had been since they entered the towpath back in North Tonowanda. They had left any signs of other joggers and cyclists far behind when they left the Buffalo and Tonowanda metropolitan areas near the shopping center where Tim Horton's was located. In their present location, the banks of the canal were thick with undergrowth, and both sides of the canal were heavily forested. The entire scene had a mysterious almost jungle-like feel to it, especially with the steady rainfall.

It was eerily quiet except for the rain and the occasional muffled sounds of their bikes. They pedaled along the historic canal in their own private world with their own private thoughts – almost in a reverie. Then up ahead, the tranquility was broken by the sound of someone barking out commands. It sounded like someone was actually on the surface of the canal itself. They saw a small boat with an outboard motor trolling slowly alongside a shell of either college-age or high school-age girls rowing madly, responding to the orders of their coach in the motorized boat. Holly waved at the crew and the coach, but they were all business, not inclined to break their synchronized, rhythmic, rowing strokes to be sociable. Dave estimated the crew's speed at about 10 or 11 miles per hour as he and Holly easily overtook the shell on the towpath.

Dave and Holly stopped a few miles later to take in some fluids. The rain was now more of a constant drizzle. It hadn't picked up in intensity. They were still hopeful the

predicted storm had missed them and what they were experiencing was just the edge of the remnants of the hurricane. They weren't more than an hour from Lockport. They would get there well before lunch. They were making great time, averaging 14 miles per hour. They anticipated getting to their final destination for the day before two in the afternoon – a bed and breakfast in Albion, where Holly had called in a reservation before she left San Francisco.

There was no serious boat traffic along the canal, except for the occasional fisherman or local owner out for a spin. The Erie Canal had long since been avoided and replaced as a commercial route for serious commerce: the development of the railroads pretty much ended the short commercial life of the Erie Canal. At the time of its construction in 1817, the Erie Canal was considered the “Eighth Wonder of the World.” It was completed in 1825. Still today, some companies do transport commercial goods on the canal. There was a charge for commercial use of the canal, but they had dropped any tolls for recreational use.

You wouldn't really expect too much boat traffic in September. Those serious boaters trying to get their boats from the Great Lakes down the Atlantic Coast to Florida for the winter left months ago. In the other direction, heading west from New York, not too many East Coast boaters were eager to get their boats on the Great Lakes for the winter. During the mid-summer season, the recreational boat traffic on the canal could create severe backups at any of the 35 separate locks it took to either lift or let down boats the 570-foot differential in elevation between Lake Erie and the Hudson River. There was a speed limit of 10 miles per hour for all boats on various sections of the canal. It took the boater about a week to travel the 400 miles from Albany to Buffalo. But today, there didn't appear to be anyone taking their 36-foot sailboat to either New York City or Cleveland, Ohio.

Dave and Holly stopped just before the paved towpath led them out of the canal valley onto East Canal Road. They would lose the protection of the isolated towpath and mingle with the traffic on East Canal Road. East Canal Road was a local county road and the traffic was minimal. They basically had the county road to themselves. But the rain was

again gaining in strength and the wind was picking up in intensity, the strongest it had been all day long. They weren't thirsty, but they kept stopping to drink from their water bottles. They both knew how important it was to stay hydrated. Dave munched on a Reeses Peanut Butter Cup. Holly snacked on something resembling a Granola Bar.

"Hey Dave, want me to take the lead?" Holly asked.

"Yeah, if you can keep it under 25 miles an hour."

"Oh c'mon, we only have 5 or 6 miles to Lockport, let's push it."

Holly took the lead and quickly picked the pace up to 18 miles per hour. The road was flat, but the wind was blowing against them. They kept up the torrid pace for about 15 minutes, then Dave, in a burst of energy, passed Holly and took his handkerchief out of his side pocket and waved it in surrender. Dave took the lead and brought the pace back to 14 miles an hour.

They crossed the canal at Fisk Road and continued following the canal on the north side on Bear Road. Then they crossed back across the canal on Upper Mountain Road, and followed the road on the south side of the canal until they rode right onto Main Street in "downtown" Lockport, New York. It still wasn't eleven o'clock in the morning. Now it was raining hard. They had traveled 32 miles from the Adams Mark Hotel. They had been sitting on their bikes about two and a half hours. Their average speed was 14 miles per hour. They'd climbed only 200 feet; the average slope of the 32 miles was still "0%." These were metrics that obsessed the engineer in David Benjamin Cohen. Holly Julia Morgan couldn't have been less interested in them. (Except for the average speed.) They were hungry and they were wet. They drove leisurely down Main Street looking for a place to stop and eat, and to dry off a bit.

Lockport, New York, is a typical small canal town situated right on the Erie Canal. Two streets – Main Street and Locus Street – cross one another to form the heart of downtown Lockport. It's actually one of the larger "small" canal towns. Its claim to fame is that it controls the first locks on the Erie Canal heading east from Buffalo. They're designated as locks 34 and 35, the last two locks on the canal. Construction of the Erie Canal actually began in Rome, New York, so each lock is numbered appropriately from east to west. Lockport has two canal locks in series and drops the

boater headed east 70 feet down off the Niagara Escarpment, a large geological plateau that forms around the Great Lakes and extends all the way west to Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. Starting in Lockport is the longest unbroken stretch of the canal towpath. It's made of compacted, crushed, limestone and stretches 85 miles all the way to Palmyra. Dave and Holly planned to take the path to Albion after lunch – a distance of an additional 32 miles.

The Erie Canal runs right through the heart of Lockport. Dave and Holly were on the south side of the canal heading south on Main Street. They quickly found a diner on the eastern side of Main Street, crossed the street, carefully leaned their bikes against the diner's front window and welcomed the warm dry surroundings of the crowded diner.

The appropriately named Lockport Diner and Grill was really just a restaurant rather than the typical stainless steel railcar diner. It wasn't very large, with maybe ten tables and a counter with 5 stools. It was a rather narrow establishment, and it was filled with locals. It was noisy in a friendly way. Everyone seemed to know everyone. Dave and Holly's entrance quieted things down momentarily – then the cacophony of friendly conversations picked back up to its normal decibel level. Dave and Holly appeared to be the youngest patrons, by several decades. They found an empty booth in the back of the restaurant near the swinging kitchen doors. They took off their rain gear. The warmth of the kitchen felt good. A young high-school age waitress came up to their table and engaged them in some friendly banter.

“A little wet out there today, huh? You guys look like you could use a hot cup of coffee,” she said

“Boy, you got that right,” Holly quickly answered.

“Make mine hot chocolate,” Dave said.

The young waitress placed two sticky, plastic-coated, one-page menus down on the table and said she would return to take their orders after she brought back their beverages.

“Shit, it's getting cool out there,” Dave commented rubbing the palms of his hands together.

“Yeah, you don't notice it as much while you're pumping those pedals, but as soon as you stop you can feel it. And you just have that short-sleeved shirt on under your jacket.”

Just then the waitress returned and took their orders. They both ordered a second huge breakfast. It was just a little past 10:30 in the morning. Breakfast was more appealing than lunch. Holly had taken out the maps from her plastic flap and was looking at the map showing Lockport and the limestone towpath to Medina. The maps provided by the New York Parks and Trails brochure designated the different towpath surfaces. All the towpaths they had cycled on from Buffalo were asphalt paved. The limestone path from Lockport and for the next 85 miles was constructed of crushed, compacted limestone. Under the present wet weather conditions Holly questioned whether that type of surface would be suitable for their bikes, especially with their narrow tires. The brochure was so thorough that it marked alternative state roads cyclists could take if they preferred a different surface, or if they would rather ride on a road. The brochure always recommended “biker friendly” roads with a bike lane properly marked with a white line. The map indicated that State Route 31 would also take them to their final destination for the day – Albion. They discussed the possibility of taking Route 31 into Medina instead of the limestone towpath. Medina was about 20 miles from Lockport.

The rain had grown in intensity and the Labor Day American flags lining Main Street were flapping hard in the gusty breezes. Dave pointed that out to Holly while they were waiting for their food. Their food came and they both attacked their meals like the “Last Supper” – or more appropriately, their last breakfast. Just then Dave saw two bikes headed down Main Street and recognized the two cyclists as the unfriendly foreigners they’d met last night at the reception desk at the Adam’s Mark Hotel.

“Hey Holly, check that out!” He pointed out the front window of the restaurant. Holly turned in the booth to see the two cyclists pedaling quickly by.

“They must have left Buffalo a little after we did,” Holly said.

The waitress was refilling Holly’s coffee cup. “I don’t think so,” she entered into the conversation, “they were here this morning at seven eating breakfast. I served them.”

“Jesus, did those idiots ride their bikes here last night? They must be nuts,” Dave said.

“They were a bit strange,” the waitress continued. “They asked me the weirdest questions about the two canal locks: ‘Are they open 24 hours? How many people man

the locks?’ I’ve lived here all my life. I have no idea if the locks are open all night. And they weren’t very friendly.”

“Yeah, we met them briefly last night back in Buffalo. Definitely a strange pair,” Holly commented, then shrugged her shoulders.

It was only 11:30 when they got back on their bikes and followed the waitress’s directions to a park below the locks on the south side of the canal across from the limestone path. They made the decision to take Route 31 instead of the towpath, figuring the constant rain would make the limestone too difficult a surface to negotiate with their narrow tires. Dave, always the engineer, wanted to observe the two locks in series before they left town, so the waitress told them how they could take in the view of both locks and then get back on Route 31 from the south side of the canal.

Now the rain was coming down hard; the wind was gusty and blowing directly into anyone headed east – which of course they were. The hour in the diner had given them a reprieve from the nasty weather and allowed them to dry off a bit. Their enthusiasm renewed, they barely felt the nasty weather and headed down Main Street. They took a left near the red, brick courthouse, as suggested by the waitress, and headed down a steep road, down off the Niagara Escarpment. They found themselves in a small park alongside the canal just like the waitress directed them. They cycled around a slight bend in the canal but still couldn’t quite see the structure of the two canal locks in series as it showed in the picture in the brochure. Dave, always the intrepid curious engineer, stopped and rested his bike against a tree. Holly followed, although she was not a happy camper and wanted to get on the road. This was not the time or place to start an argument, she surmised. There was no “engineer” in Holly Morgan. But she pleasantly went along. They walked to the canal’s edge, then followed a footpath back towards the locks and got the perspective Dave was looking for – a full frontal view of both locks in series. Even Holly had to admit it was impressive. While Dave was still admiring the engineering feat of the two locks in series, Holly turned her attention across the canal towards the limestone towpath.

“Hey Dave,” she exclaimed, “there’s those two jerks taking pictures of the locks.”

Dave turned towards the opposite shore of the canal. One of the foreigners was snapping pictures of the two locks from many different angles, while the other seemed to be looking at drawings, engineering drawings on large bed-sheets, partially rolled up. They were oblivious to Dave and Holly. But then, suddenly, they were aware of their presence. They seemed startled at first, but then they waved in a friendly gesture and Holly waved back. The foreigners quickly left the scene and headed east down the towpath. They looked to be having some difficulty with the surface confirming Dave and Holly's choice to take the state road. Dave and Holly walked back to their bikes and headed for Cold Springs Road. The waitress said Cold Springs Road would lead them right to State Route 31.

"That's strange." Dave said, almost talking to himself, riding slowly ahead of Holly.

"What's strange?" Holly asked pulling her bike alongside Dave's.

"Those guys taking pictures and looking at engineering drawings."

"What's so strange about taking pictures of the locks? I'm sure most people coming through here take pictures of the locks. And how do you know they were looking at engineering drawings?"

"But not on a day as gloomy and rainy as this, and certainly not with a telephoto lens. And those were definitely engineer-type drawings. I've worked in an engineering office all my professional life. Those were definitely engineering drawings."

"So what's so strange about that? Maybe they're as interested in the engineering of the locks as you are. Maybe they're students and have an assignment to study the locks."

"What the hell kind of a panoramic picture can they get with a telephoto lens?" Dave was lost in his thoughts. "They were much too close to use a telephoto, unless they were preoccupied with the details of the construction of the locks. Yeah, you're probably right, they probably go to Buffalo University or Buffalo State. Engineering students. See, I told you; you should have been an FBI agent or joined the CIA."

A mile down the path they came to Cold Springs Road. It was pouring rain and the wind was blowing fiercely. They turned right on Cold Springs Road and headed up a long steep grade out of the valley. It was another mile till they got to State Route 31. Dave waited at the light at the top of the hill then turned left onto Route 31. There seemed to be an inordinate amount of traffic on State Route 31, especially truck traffic. It

was Labor Day weekend, but in this weather, who the hell would be out? Dave looked back to see if Holly was through the light. No sign of Holly. “Shit,” Dave thought, “Where the hell did she go?” He waited for the light to change and headed back down Cold Springs Road. He quickly saw Holly. She was almost at the bottom of the hill. Her bike was leaning against a fence post. It looked like the entrance to a cemetery. She waved at Dave.

“I got a flat in my front tire!” she hollered back at Dave.

“Shit, what a time and place to get a fuckin’ flat,” Dave thought to himself as he coasted down the hill to the cemetery gate. He leaned his bike on the opposite gate and removed some tools from his back bag and walked over towards Holly.

She looked at him quizzically. “What are those for?” She asked, looking at the Quick Stick and CO2 cartridge gun he held in his hand.

“It’s for fixing the flat,” he casually remarked.

“Hey Dave, who do you think fixed my flats in San Francisco?” She was mildly annoyed.

“Hey, I was only trying to help. Okay.” He held up both hands in a sign of surrender. The shitty weather was making them both a little tense.

“Just hold up the front of the bike so I can get the wheel off.”

Dave held up the front of the bike and in ten minutes Holly had the tire off, the tube replaced, blown up with her CO2 cartridge, and back on the bike. Faster than Dave ever fixed a flat. Dave was impressed, but now he was afraid to compliment Holly for fear he might offend her again. Dave was born and raised in an era that produced some of the finest male chauvinists the world would ever see. Although he married two very independent women, and practiced equal treatment of the engineers who worked under him, male or female, like Pavlov’s dogs, he sometimes fell backwards into bad habits.

“Okay, I’m ready. Let’s go.” She smiled at him with a Cheshire cat-like grin.

They pedaled to the top of the hill, waited for the light and began the 20-mile journey to Medina on NY State Route 31. The traffic was heavy and annoying. The road spray from a car was bad enough when they passed in the torrential rain, but the big tractor-trailer trucks created an entire weather front when they passed. They were both completely drenched, so there was no point in worrying about getting any wetter; that

was impossible. The temperature had dropped to 52 degrees. The wind was directly in their faces. Their speed had dropped to 10 miles per hour. They were smack-dab in the middle of the remnants of Hurricane Ernesto, just like the weather bureau had predicted. Don't fool with Mother Nature.

It was a real slog pedaling the next 10 miles to a mile just west of Gasport. Dave spotted a roadside restaurant across the road. Holly caught up; they waited for the incessant traffic to break then walked their bikes across the road. The restaurant was crowded. They found an empty table and quickly removed their rain gear. They were wet to the core. The warmth of the restaurant felt comforting, but they were both beginning to shiver slightly. They knew what that meant. Shivering was the first sign of hypothermia. They both ordered bowls of chicken soup. Dave had a slice of homemade blueberry pie. Holly ordered a BLT. Dave suggested that when they get into Gasport proper they head for the canal towpath. He reasoned that the towpath surface might be navigable; if it wasn't, they could always return to State Route 31. But at least the towpath wouldn't have the incessant, not to mention dangerous, car and truck traffic. Holly agreed. They stayed in the warmth of the restaurant till their shivering stopped – about an hour – then ventured back out in the storm.

They got to Gasport in less than 10 minutes and turned left on Hartland Road. They were at the canal in five minutes. Then they crossed over the canal and headed down to the towpath. The towpath was in excellent shape. They were both pleasantly surprised and wished they had taken it right from Lockport. In addition, the canal, being in a slight valley, offered some protection from the wind – or so they thought. They were riding through a heavily forested area, making good time, but in less than a mile they followed a bend in the canal and came into a wide-open area and exposed themselves to a horrendous gust of wind that stopped their forward progress dead in its tracks. The rain was now almost horizontal. The weather somehow took a turn for the worse. There were actual whitecaps on the canal. When you can detect whitecaps on the Erie Canal, you have a serious weather problem. They still had almost 10 miles to get to Medina. Then another 12 miles to get to Albion, where they had reservations at a bed and breakfast.

It took another 90 minutes to get to the bridge over the canal that had the sign “Medina” painted in broad white letters on the bridge’s superstructure. They stopped at the base of the bridge. Holly suggested they call it a day and stay in Medina that night. Dave was in agreement. It was at least another 90 minutes or more on the bikes to get to Albion, about 12 miles further east. They were both shivering again. Their lips were turning blue. They felt fine when they were pedaling, but as soon as they stopped, they began shivering.

They headed up the path to Gravel Road and pedaled about a mile into town. They stopped at Rudy’s restaurant. Holly brought in the *Erie Canal* brochure which had the listing of all the B&B’s and motels in every town and village along the entire 400-mile canal route. It was surely a lifesaver. They took out their cell phones and began calling, only to find out that every B&B (there were only 4) and both motels were booked solid. When the waitress came by they held off their phone inquiries for lodging and both ordered hot chocolate. They were still shivering even after 15 minutes inside the restaurant. They were in a quandary. Dave suggested they even think about the possibility of staying in Rudy’s all night. Holly thought that was a little drastic.

“Well you got a better idea?” Dave asked.

“We’ll find a place to stay. I can’t believe in this dinky little town every fuckin’ room is booked.” Holly was as frustrated as Dave was. “Look at that weather out there. What the hell is going on in Medina tonight?”

“There’s a wedding in Medina tonight, that’s why everything is booked,” a young female voice from the next booth explained. Then she turned around to face Dave and Holly.

“Sorry, I guess we were talking a little too loud,” Holly said.

“That’s okay,” said the young man sitting across from the pretty young girl and then he got up and sat next to his girlfriend.

“Who the hell’s getting married today in this lousy weather?” Dave asked.

“We are,” came the simultaneous reply from both the girl and guy. “We heard your problem, maybe we can help.” The young man said.

“We have a reservation in Albion at a B&B for the night but I don’t think we can make it in this weather,” explained Holly.

Dave was calling the B&B in Albion explaining their situation, while Holly was engaged in conversation with the young couple.

“Well look,” said the young, soon-to-be-married man. “If you can’t get a ride to Albion, here’s my cell phone number. I’m sure we can get one of our friends to get you a ride.” An incredibly decent and kind gesture to perfect strangers from perfect strangers.

“Well that’s very kind of you. Thanks so much and best of luck.” Holly was touched by the offer. The couple got up and left the restaurant. Dave was still on the phone with Tom and Marilyn Baker, proprietors of the Friendship Manor B&B in Albion.

“No problem,” Dave said, putting away his cell phone. “The owners of the B&B have a truck and said after they run an errand they’ll pick us up and drive us to their B&B.”

Holly’s smile lit up the rather dim lighting in Rudy’s restaurant.

Tom Baker pulled into the driveway of the Friendship Manor with two bicycles in the flat bed of his truck and two passengers still trying to control their shivering. Dave and Tom took the bikes out of the truck, and then Holly and Dave walked their bikes to the back of the century-old Victorian mansion. The mansion sat up on a small rise. It was the largest home in the expansive neighborhood. It had an uncanny architectural resemblance to the home near the Bates Motel in Hitchcock’s thriller, but it was in much better condition. After removing all their clothes and toiletries from the bags on their bikes, they headed upstairs to their room. Every object and piece of furniture in the B&B had an early-American look. Their bedroom was nicely decorated and had a warm and friendly feel to it. The king-sized bed was covered in pillows of various shapes and sizes and colors.

Holly was first in the hot bathtub. She stayed in there for over an hour. Dave removed his wet clothes and changed into dry ones. He took his and Holly’s wet clothes and gave them to Marilyn Baker, who graciously took them down to her dryer in the basement.

Dave was next in the old-fashioned bathtub. It was one of those ancient bathtubs that sat up off the floor on cat’s-type paws and was at least three feet deep. He spent an hour in there. It was after four in the afternoon when Dave finally got out of the bathtub. Holly was already in their room buried under every imaginable blanket she could find.

The B&B had filled by that time and you could hear the other occupants conversing in their rooms. The Bakers had thoughtfully turned on the heat. Dave got in the bed with Holly. They wrapped themselves around each other like two snakes mating and still couldn't get warm. The long wearisome day eventually caught up with them. They drifted off to sleep.

Dave was up first. He looked at his watch. It was six o'clock. He was starving. It was still raining, but not as heavy as in the afternoon. It was dark outside. He put on his only pair of clean Starter shorts and opened the door. Holly's and his clothes, still not completely dry, were sitting in a neat pile just outside the door in the hallway. Holly got up and put on a clean pair of shorts and shirt and came out to see what Dave was doing.

"Are the clothes dry?" She asked Dave, looking at the clothes he had gathered up in his arms.

"Just about. They'll be dry by morning."

It was dark in the hallway except for a nightlight left on, sitting on a small, wooden, octagon-shaped, antique table.

"Where the hell did everybody go?" Holly asked.

"I don't know but the place is empty."

"I'm starving Dave. How about you?"

"Famished!"

"Where are we gonna eat?"

"We'll have to walk into town."

"How far is it?"

"Less than a mile, I think."

"Let's go."

They put on their rain gear and headed for town, about three-quarters of a mile from the B&B. The rain was light. The wind had died down appreciably. Dave was still feeling chilled without a long-sleeved shirt. Their shoes were still wet clear through to the soles. It didn't take long for their dry socks to become soaking wet. They came to an Eckerd drugstore near the center of town. Dave stopped in and bought a gold-colored, XXL Albion Eagles sweatshirt. (Someone in the store asked if he was the new high

school football coach.) He put it on in the store, paid for it and they left. He immediately felt much warmer.

Just next to the drugstore was a local family-style restaurant that was overflowing with customers. A few hundred feet left of the family restaurant was a rather rundown looking establishment advertising Mexican food. It was called El Tapatio. Rather than wait in the more popular family restaurant, they walked over to El Tapatio. It was more crowded than it appeared from the outside. They took a table near the front by the cashier. They ordered chicken fajitas and enchiladas. The food was excellent. They ate like they had an appointment with the electric chair the next day. As they were about to leave, Dave nudged Holly rather hard and squeezed her by the upper arm.

“Hey Dave, not so hard. That hurts!”

Dave pointed to the far, darkened corner of the restaurant where the lighting was extremely poor. The two foreigners who had been taking pictures of the two canal locks in Lockport that afternoon were in a heated discussion. They spoke in a foreign language. Holly recognized the foreign language as Urdu or Hindi. It had the same sounds and cadence she remembered from her many trips to the ashram in Poona for her yoga training. The foreigners immediately toned down their discussion when the taller one facing the restaurant entrance caught a glance of Dave and Holly staring at them.

Chapter 7

Newark International Airport: Sunday, September 3

Benazir's British Airways plane was scheduled to arrive from London at 1 p.m. Khalid got to the airport before noon, parked his rental car in the more expensive short-term parking, and waited in a bar near the International Concourse. He ordered a beer. He was a good Muslim in Peshawar, Pakistan, a good American in Newark, New Jersey.

Benazir had left New Delhi the same day as Khalid, but later that afternoon. She had flown up to New Delhi from Bhopal. She had to stop in London to pick up some money and travelers checks and get a final briefing from an al-Qaeda cell in a suburb of London. Benazir Cossar's journey to al-Qaeda and the jihadist movement had begun with a broken heart.

Accustomed to the life of the privileged class since birth, she was indulged throughout her childhood. Benazir was afforded opportunities only the very wealthiest, to-the-manor-born Indians – Muslim or Hindu – were accustomed to. Benazir Cossar had the idyllic upbringing of royalty – which in fact she was, being related to past Begums of Bhopal. Her parents were progressive thinkers and believed an education and career for their daughter should be equally as good as their only son's. When they sent her off to England to attend a private high school at age 14, (in England they call it a public school) she was already fluent in English and French. She was extremely bright and had a great wit and great personality. She blossomed even more under her classic English schooling. She started to grow much taller in England, and she grew into a naturally beautiful and stunning woman.

She was a talented musician. She was technically trained on the piano, but had taught herself the sitar. She wasn't much of a practicing Muslim in England, and she'd slowly drifted away from her religious training back in Bhopal. She began wearing western clothes – expensive, stylish, western clothes – still very conservative but stylish. It was difficult not to watch this young woman as she walked about the university. She carried herself in a way that demanded attention, yet she was very down-to-earth, very personable. This just made her that much more appealing.

In her freshman year at Oxford she took a course in American History from an up-and-coming newly hired professor, a Cambridge undergraduate with a Harvard Ph.D. He was nine years her senior. He was brilliant and handsome and from a wealthy, well-connected, English family. Nothing happened between them that first year, but in Benazir's sophomore year, they met in the library. He asked her out to dinner that same night. She politely turned him down. With all her elegance and social grace, she had never dated men. She was actually quite ill-at-ease in the presence of men. In a mixed social gathering she was her ebullient self, but one-on-one with the opposite sex, she had no experience, no confidence. She felt awkward. Eventually, the history professor wore her down, and they began dating at the end of her sophomore year. They dated her junior and senior years. They were seen together everywhere, on and off campus. And they fell in love – the first time for Benazir. She fell hard. Just before her graduation, he asked her to marry him. She quickly accepted his proposal, even without consulting her family back in Bhopal.

John David Seigelman was the only son of Jewish Holocaust survivors who had met and married in London after their liberation from Buchenwald. Philip and Sarah Seigelman, thankful just to be alive, spared no sacrifice for their bright son, their only child. They opened a small discount dry-goods store in the early 1950s. It would turn into the largest discount/retail operation in England. The Seigelman family accumulated great wealth and were very generous in giving a good portion of it away, especially to Israel. They gained entry into the upper crust of English society – to the extent that Jewish Holocaust survivors were allowed to enter that exclusive, privileged world. When their only son was awarded a professorship in American History at Oxford, they couldn't have been more proud. When John David Seigelman told them of his desire to marry an Oxford graduate in history, a Muslim from India, they surely thought the ghosts of Buchenwald had returned to haunt them for the rest of their lives. They simply forbade the union. She would never be welcomed in their home. Sarah swore she would *sit shiva* (go into mourning for the dead) if her son ever married Benazir.

“Don't bring her here. I don't want to meet her,” Philip Seigelman screamed at his son when he mentioned his intention to marry Benazir.

Eventually Philip and Sarah Seigelman won the battle and the heart of their only son. He broke off the engagement with Benazir. She took it hard, very hard. She was crestfallen. She became ill. She couldn't eat. And when she did she couldn't hold food down. She lost considerable weight. She lost her good looks. She became depressed. She went to a psychiatrist. After almost a year, she finally found some peace and solace when she returned to the mosque. After an absence of more than 8 years, she decided to attend Friday prayers.

She eventually fell in with some rabid Pakistani zealots she had met at Friday prayers. They cheered in the privacy of their London flats at the sight of the Twin Towers crumbling to the ground. She would turn her melancholy and depression into a bitter hatred of the Jews, the English, and the Americans – anything resembling Western ideals or symbols. As her physical and mental condition improved, her deep-seeded hatred and bitterness intensified. But outwardly she regained her poise and demeanor and the good looks that made Benazir Cossar so appealing.

She immersed herself in the jihadist movement. At first she wasn't accepted as an equal. The troubled Muslim male ego made it difficult for most members of the cell to take her seriously. But she was smart and savvy. And her drop-dead good looks didn't hurt. Several male members of the cell tried to hit on her. She rebuffed those attempts quickly. She wasn't looking for romance. She was seeking revenge. But she still had to prove herself. The London bus and subway bombings were her initiation. She left the bomb on the bus near Hyde Park. Then she helped smuggle large sums of money around Europe. Eventually, the powers that be thought she could be extremely useful setting up a cell in India. Pakistan was a resolutely scrutinized target by all the Western intelligent agencies. India was not nearly as marked for surveillance, even with a population of 100 million Muslims. This was the main reason the present important mission was primarily staged in India and why Indian passports and identities were used.

Khalid stood near the security area of the International Concourse waiting for Benazir to appear. He noticed that her plane landed fifteen minutes early. It was a Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet – and was packed to the gills – so it could take 30 minutes or more to get through passport control and customs. He saw a group of female passengers dressed in

Indian saris and concluded this was probably Benazir's flight. He thought Benazir might be in the group of Indian women, but he didn't recognize her. Several minutes later, a lone passenger walked by in a stately manner. Tall, poised, dressed in designer jeans and a light, beige cotton V-neck sweater, she was quite shapely. She had foreign, possibly Asian facial features, but the oversized sunglasses made it difficult to tell exactly where she might be from. She had her hair cut short in a London spa. She was walking towards Khalid and he tried his best not to stare at her, but it was difficult not to. She finally walked to within two feet of him and stopped.

"Mr. Shah?" she questioned.

"Yes. Do I know you?" he had a puzzled expression on his face.

"Khalid, it's me – Benazir," she whispered.

He was completely befuddled, shocked. He was two feet in front of Benazir and didn't recognize her. He was expecting Benazir in a sari. Benazir with long hair. Benazir from Bhopal. He quickly regained his composure.

"Premgi, I trust your trip from London was fine."

Premgi Gupta was the name she used after she got to London. In London she became a British citizen of Indian lineage with a British Commonwealth passport.

Khalid quickly grabbed her luggage – two carry-on bags – and briskly walked towards the baggage claim and short-term parking garage. They made small talk about her plane ride. Khalid still couldn't believe he didn't recognize Benazir – even when she was inches in front of his face. It must have been the large sunglasses, he convinced himself.

Khalid was even more self-conscious walking alongside Benazir than he was standing next to her in the lobby of the Pagoda hotel in Bhopal. The beauty and the beast, Mutt and Jeff, the sight of them walking down the crowded airport concourse had a touch of both. Khalid was visibly unnerved by his self-image.

They got in the rental car and headed for the train and PATH station in Hoboken. In a locker near the restrooms a package contained two semi-automatic handguns, two silencers, and ten thousand dollars in 10s, 20s and 100s. The key for the locker was left in a UPS package delivered to the Hampton Inn the day before Khalid's arrival. It took about 25 minutes to get to the station. The traffic was the usual New York-New Jersey insanity. Khalid was used to it and after 10 minutes found a garage about a ten-minute

walk from the Hoboken Train Station. They walked right along the Hudson River. The incomparable, unbroken skyline of New York – minus the Twin Towers – was just to their left across the river. Benazir had never been to the States. She was in awe of the New York skyline, especially from the level of the river. She took in the continuous and unobstructed view of one of the world's truly great cities.

They retrieved the package from the locker and headed for an area of Newark known as Little Egypt – a religious Muslim enclave represented by immigrants from every Middle Eastern country and a few immigrants from Pakistan and Indonesia. It was constantly under surveillance by the NSA, FBI, CIA and a few other alphabetically-challenged government agencies known to few Americans.

It would have been foolhardy and much too risky to be photographed in this neighborhood. They stayed in the car looking for a sign to let them know they could head over to Queens to pick up their most important cargo. Twenty-five pounds of a commercial form of the military plastic, C-4 explosive, that had been “misplaced” years ago from a construction site in Gillette Wyoming, where Bechtel was working on an open pit coal mine. Khalid decided to drive right through Manhattan to get to Queens and give Benazir a quick tour of the city.

He crossed the 59th Street Bridge into Queens and headed for an Indian-Pakistani food establishment in Jackson Heights near Broadway and 74th Street. When they got there he sent Benazir in the store for the package. While browsing in the store she purchased several spices and condiments along with other assorted Asian groceries, and wound up leaving the store with several bags, one of which contained the 25 pounds of explosive. She wheeled the bags in a cart outside to the rented Malibu, and Khalid help load the bags into the trunk. They made one more stop at a Radio Shack in the Bronx to obtain the electronic parts Khalid would require for the detonation mechanisms for the explosive devices and then they headed for Weedsport, New York.

They crossed the George Washington Bridge. Just across the bridge they turned right onto the Palisades Parkway heading north. Khalid was headed for Interstate 87 then to Albany. In Albany he would follow Interstate 90 west just past Syracuse about 15 miles to Weedsport. It was about a 5-hour drive.

While perusing the map of New York State, Benazir thought it would be infinitely more interesting to cut across upstate New York and take a more scenic route to Weedsport. Khalid exited the Parkway onto NY Route 17. He then turned off Route 17 on to Route 17K. Then they got lost; totally confused, they found themselves in the small village of Pine Bush. They decided to stop at a gas station-convenience foodmart and have some coffee. Just by coincidence, the proprietor of the convenience foodmart/gas station was of Indian or Pakistani origin. Benizar got the coffee while Khalid found a table. Benazir chatted briefly with the owner in English, and then they both began to speak in their native tongue. The owner of the convenience mart was from New Delhi. Khalid got up and helped Benazir bring the coffee and doughnuts to the small table. Benazir introduced Khalid to the manager. They all made small talk in Urdu; then Khalid and Benazir sat back down and tried to determine how they got so screwed up on the many different Route 17s in that part of New York State. They tried to be more meticulous as they plotted their course to Weedsport.

They spent almost 30 minutes in the convenience mart in the quaint village of Pine Bush, New York, then headed east on the correct Route 17 – a four-lane divided highway resembling an interstate, but with almost no traffic. Benazir was studying the map looking for a route that would get them off the present 4-lane highway onto the more rural, picturesque roads of the region.

“I’m not sure we should have talked to that store manager, especially in Urdu,” Khalid just blurted out.

“Why not?” answered Benazir. She seemed provoked by the assertion.

“It’s risky. There’s no need to enter into casual conversations with anyone – especially Indians or Pakistanis. Indians and Pakistanis are nosey. They ask too damn many questions. They might recognize my accent as Pakistani. Too many goddamn variables, Benazir. The less we talk to perfect strangers, the less chance of talking too much.”

Khalid spoke to Benazir in a very condescending manner.

“First of all ‘Hemant,’ I think we better start using the names on our passports, even when we speak to each other in the privacy of our car. Otherwise we may just screw up on something as obvious as that. And secondly I don’t much appreciate your goddamn condescending manner. Don’t talk to me like I’m your child or some flunky on this

mission. I thought we covered that back in Bhopal. I know what my purpose is on this mission. I'm going to cover your ass and get you into Canada when all hell breaks out. You may have to depend on me more than you think. So get rid of all that Muslim macho crap. Get it out of your system. And get it out right now. And by the way, I think I'm entitled to know the complete assignment. I know the rules are that everyone only knows what they're supposed to do. Knowing more could jeopardize the entire plan if any one person gets apprehended. But as I understand it we will be together for the entire assignment, so I feel I should know as much as you."

She waited a few minutes for Khalid's response.

"Benazir, or Premgi, or whatever the hell you want to be called. Let's get something straight right now. I am in charge of this mission. Period. Quit reading me the riot act every time I make a suggestion as to how we should behave. This mission is by far the most important al Qaeda has ever undertaken, and that includes the Twin Towers. The attack on the Twin Towers was more of a message to the West. The fact that they collapsed and killed 3,000 people was just our good fortune – no one planning that mission had the slightest idea those towers would collapse – we were as surprised and as dumbfounded as anyone as they collapsed right there on the television screen."

He paused momentarily to collect his thoughts, then continued the lecture.

"Now, as for your being appraised of the entire mission – the ultimate object of what we are about to attempt. You know the rules on that. You stated them quite accurately. But you have a point. We will be together on this mission. If something should happen to me, for whatever reason, I do feel you could execute the mission. So maybe I can divulge the entire plan. First, tell me everything you know about what we're trying to do here."

Khalid had his eyes riveted on the county road Benazir had directed him onto as they headed towards Weedsport. She had the map of upper New York State on her lap as they continued the conversation; she would occasionally look at the map, making sure Khalid didn't take any wrong turns. The weather was improving from the previous day, when the remnants of hurricane Ernesto had terrorized the entire upstate region. But it was still overcast and cool and still misty on some of the mountain roads.

“I have been informed that the object of this mission is of the utmost importance. I should be willing to give up my life for it. I know it has something to do with the damaging of the Erie Canal, and creating the kind of chaos Katrina befell on New Orleans. But the final objective and the reason for all of this activity have never been thoroughly explained. Quite frankly, I researched the Erie Canal back in Bhopal and fail to see how it could possibly cause any serious damage – certainly not to the extent of Katrina.” She waited for Khalid’s response.

“Well I’m glad to see you researched the Erie Canal, but causing it to flood could be much more damaging than you might think. But then again you were a history major at Oxford, not an engineering major. Right?”

Benazir looked over at Khalid with an exasperated expression, but didn’t comment on his observation.

“The flooding of the canal is a major part of the operation, but minor in terms of the final objective.” Khalid continued, “Actually we gave serious thought to flooding New Orleans again. It looked so simple to do. Just blow a damn hole or two in one of the levees and you could easily flood the city all over again. It wouldn’t even take much more explosives than we’re using on the Erie Canal.”

“Then why didn’t you do it?” she asked.

“We were going to. We had two members of an al Qaeda cell from Houston spend a week in New Orleans. The Americans are not as stupid as we thought; they informed us. There is 24-hour surveillance, both from the air and on the ground, on all the levees in New Orleans. There was no way we could set the required charge. There wasn’t the time between air and ground patrols.”

“Al Qaeda has a cell in Houston?” Benazir seemed surprised.

“Houston and Chicago and Cleveland and every city of any size in the US. Absolutely, where have you been Benazir?”

“But why the Erie Canal? I checked it out on the Internet. It seems so innocuous,” she said.

“Yes we hope the US government feels the same way you do Benazir – innocuous and inconspicuous. But the Erie Canal has the potential to connect the entire flow of four of the Great Lakes with the Hudson River. Have you seen Niagara Falls Benazir?”

“Only in the movies or on television.”

“Imagine more than half that flow flooding central New York and the entire city of Rochester.”

“Well I suppose that would cause some confusion, but most of that land, except for a few cities and small towns, is open country. I don’t think most people would give a shit.”

“Benazir, do you know what’s downstream of the entrance to the Erie Canal?” Khalid was asking these questions like a professor probing his class, drawing out the suspense of the final answer.

“Niagara Falls, I guess.”

“Niagara Falls, of course. But there is another canal downstream of the Erie Canal on the Niagara River. And this canal diverts half of the river’s flow, or more, to electric generating plants.”

“So?”

“So, so if the Erie Canal – which is upstream of the canal for power generation, begins to flood, it will draw off the water from the generating facilities. If the operators of the electric generators are not aware of this – not prepared – then they will have to shut down the generators on an emergency basis. If other electric generators in the region, like in Quebec, are not ready for the surge – you’ll have a blackout on the entire East Coast, just like they had in the summer of 2003.”

“How do you know all this Khalid, I mean Hemant?”

“Benazir, you were a history major at Oxford, correct?”

“Yes that’s right.”

“Well, I was an electrical engineering major, and I worked as an electrical engineer for the world’s largest engineering and construction contractor for 20 years. Trust me. If we can destroy the first two locks on the canal in Lockport, New York, there is absolutely nothing to stop a 15-foot wall of water moving like a tsunami from Tonawanda, New York, 15 miles to Lockport. Lockport is where the first set of locks is located. They lower the canal 70 feet. After that, the next locks are located just east of Rochester, an elevation drop of almost 300 feet, the same distance the water drops and cascades over Niagara Falls. Imagine the damage more than half the flow of Niagara Falls can do to that

region, unimpeded. There is absolutely no way to stop that flow without damming the canal.

“That wall of water will fall over the 70-foot drop in Lockport after we blow the two sets of locks. The only way to stop the flow is to build some type of temporary dam – just like they did in New Orleans – but in this region that will be exceedingly more difficult. Besides,” Khalid finally took a breath, “we’ll blow the locks at two in the morning. It will take them at least till the light of day to figure out what the hell is going on.”

“How can you be sure all of those events will occur?” Benazir finally got to ask the first of many questions she had formulated as Khalid described the events he hoped would take place.

“Because I’ve researched this very carefully Benazir.”

“It sounds like this was your idea. How did you sell it to Ziwahari and bin Laden?”

“I met Ziwahiri on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan almost two years ago and told him of my plan. He liked it immediately. I never met bin Laden. Actually I think Osama is either very sick or very dead.”

“Why do you say that?” Benazir seemed genuinely saddened.

“Say what?”

“That you think bin Laden is very sick or dead.”

“Just the way Ziwahari brushed quickly by my inquiry as to bin Laden’s acceptance of my plan. Besides it doesn’t really matter, within a week the entire world’s politics will have changed completely.” Khalid was now gleeful and eager to explain more.

“It sounds like the flooding will cause considerable damage, but I doubt the geopolitical world will change much as a result of the Erie Canal flooding Rochester, New York,” Benazir seemed skeptical.

“The flooding of the Erie Canal isn’t even the final objective of this operation, Benazir.”

Khalid slowed the car down and pulled off onto a dirt side-road and turned the engine off. He turned to face Benazir directly.

“Now Benazir, what I am about to tell you only five others know, and if bin Laden is dead then only myself and Ziwahari know, along with two generals in the Pakistani Intelligence Service, the ISI.”

“I’m not following you at all Khalid. What the hell does the Pakistani Intelligent Service have to do with flooding the Erie Canal?”

“When the canal floods the plateau below Lockport, that’s just the beginning. Within hours, the electric generating capacity of the Niagara River will suddenly have to shut down for lack of water flow. This will require the electric grid in the eastern half of the United States and Canada to respond. It can’t possibly, so there will be blackouts all along the East Coast. From Washington to Boston. Even if they maintain the grid, there will definitely be a small blackout just due to the switchover to other sources. This is inevitable. This blackout is the signal for all hell to break loose.”

“What does that mean?” Khalid’s explanation and his enthusiasm, which bordered on fanaticism, transfixed Benazir.

“Right now, as we speak, there are 50 two-man teams practicing with automatic weapons all over the US. They are from cells all around the country. They will be positioned in all the cities on the East Coast – Washington, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. They will be in malls in Virginia, Times Square, and the Boston Commons. When those lights flicker from the electric grid, they will begin firing their weapons indiscriminately, killing anyone in sight, and they will continue to discharge their weapons until they are captured or killed. They will scream “Allah Akbar” and be dressed in the easily recognizable Arab Palestinian headdress – even though most of the teams are composed of Pakistanis.”

“Why would you make them so easily recognizable?” Benazir questioned.

“Because we want the US government to think that as we approach September 11, al Qaeda is extracting their revenge on George Bush and the Americans. We want the combination of events – the flooding and the mayhem in the largest American cities – to be construed as an official attack. We will simultaneously be attacking in force in Iraq and Afghanistan. We want their army and reserve units all over the world to be completely tied up, especially in the US, where the governors of the states in the East will be overwhelmed and have to call out what’s left of their National Guard.”

“I still don’t get the point, Khalid. How will this drastically change world politics?”

“Benazir, now listen carefully. The thing the US and the West are terrified of more than anything else, more than al Qaeda, more than Iraq, more than Afghanistan, is if President Musharraf would lose control of Pakistan, and the Islamists would take over that country. We know for a fact that both the US and Britain have contingency plans to rush 4,000 troops to Islamabad if there is any threat of that happening. But if we can distract and tie up those troops, then there are two generals in the Pakistan Intelligent Services, who meet every morning with Musharraf, who will assassinate him as soon as the news of the attack in the US is made public. They will surround the President’s residence with 500 troops and tanks loyal to the movement. Pakistan will officially be under Islamic rule.”

Khalid paused for a moment and let that thought register on Benazir’s face.

“My God!” Benazir exclaimed. “The Islamists will have access to nuclear weapons!”

“Exactly! And the ability to deliver them!” Khalid said.

“Oh my God, do you think this can really work?”

“It has to,” he said.

“It also means that the Sunnis will have nuclear weapons before the Shias in Iran.”

“Exactly, Benazir,” Khalid said. “We’ll have nuclear capability before the goddamn Shias in Iran. Today we are loosely allied with the Shias, because we have a common enemy – the US. ‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend,’ as the old Arab proverb goes. But the old rivalries will all-too-soon manifest themselves, and the fuckin’ Shias in Iran can’t intimidate us any more. We’ll be doing the intimidating on September 12.”

Khalid started up the Malibu, turned around on the dirt road and headed west towards Weesdport, New York. Here they would meet up with two Pakistanis headed by bike from Buffalo evaluating the canal and the locks at Lockport. They had never met Sultan and Jawid before, nor had they contacted them personally.

Benazir was contemplative for the next several hours. They spoke infrequently. The enormity of their task was now thoroughly explained, and she was absorbing its every detail.

Khalid was following the winding roads of the Finger Lakes region of New York. It took almost 8 hours to get to the Days Inn in Weedsport, New York, located at the intersection of NY Routes 34 and 31. The proprietors of the hotel were, coincidentally, Indians from the state of Gujarat. Khalid checked in and Benazir waited in the car. Benazir told Khalid to be sure to get two twin beds, thereby destroying any fantasies Khalid may have conjured up during the ride. It had been a long day – in more ways than one.

Chapter 8

Albion, New York: Sunday Morning, September 3

Dave was up before five in the morning hoping the rain had stopped. It hadn't. He could hear the raindrops pinging off the bedroom window. The pinging sound pissed him off. Holly was still fast asleep when Dave dressed and went downstairs to check the weather first-hand. It was still dark outside when Dave went to check on their bikes, which they had parked under a canopy in the back of the house. Dave found a hose and washed down the bikes from all the wet limestone they had picked up from the towpath the previous day. The wet limestone stuck to the frames of the bikes and in some spots had built up like stalactites and stalagmites.

It was almost 6 o'clock before he headed back upstairs. It was just starting to lighten up and the rain had almost completely stopped. The wind was almost non-existent. There was no doubt in Dave's mind. They would definitely head for Palmyra. Holly was more of a fanatic than Dave when it came to biking – weather be damned. Holly seemed to just be getting up when Dave returned to the room.

"Where the hell did you go?" Holly mumbled as Dave entered the room.

"Just went outside to check the weather and hose down the bikes."

"Are you nuts? Get back in here. I'm freezing."

Dave undressed down to his underwear and got under the covers. Holly immediately wrapped herself around him. She was shivering very slightly. Dave likewise wrapped himself around Holly's long slender body.

"Take your damn underwear off, Dave," Holly whispered in his ear.

"Take my underwear off? What for?"

"Gee I don't know Dave. Take a guess." She reached down and stroked the inside of his thigh.

"Not now Holly. Not here. There's three other couples on this floor."

"So what!" She almost came out of a whisper. "What the hell do you think they're doing right now?" She held him closer.

"You make too much noise. We'll be having breakfast with those couples in an hour."

“Shit. I’m sorry, Dave, that I express myself when we make love. I didn’t realize it embarrasses you.”

“I didn’t mean it like that. But everyone up here will hear us making love. Then we have to face them at breakfast. I don’t know; let’s wait till tonight.”

She could feel Dave getting aroused, and continued to use her hands appropriately.

“Tell you what David Cohen. I’ll try to keep my moaning down to an acceptable level. In fact I’ll do my best Marcel Marceau impersonation. God you are something else.”

“Well, Mr. Manners, was I quiet enough?”

“Ok, you made your point,” Dave said.

“When the hell did you turn into such a prude?”

“Ok, you made your point,” Dave repeated. He turned and kissed her on the lips.

“Let’s go downstairs for breakfast. I’m starving,” she said.

They dressed in new biking outfits: Dave in a different pair of red WalMart shorts and a navy blue t-shirt, Holly in another one-piece, Italian designer outfit. This one had turquoise blue as the dominant color, and was outlined in black. She would cause a few heads to turn at the breakfast table at the Friendship Manor B&B.

Dave and Holly were the first couple downstairs for breakfast. It was a buffet service. The Bakers were busily preparing the buffet, which wasn’t quite ready at eight. Mrs. Baker apologized profusely as she delivered a bowl of fresh cantaloupe slices directly from her backyard garden. They were incredibly sweet. Dave couldn’t stop stealing slices even before Mrs. Baker got them to the buffet table. Holly chided Dave politely, but that didn’t stop him – Mrs. Baker was delighted as Dave couldn’t lavish enough praise on the sweet fresh taste of her home-grown produce.

Soon the other couples came downstairs for breakfast and everyone introduced themselves. Dave and Holly entertained everyone with the harrowing tales of their biking adventure through the remnants of Hurricane Ernesto. Mrs. Baker brought out the rest of the breakfast feast – fresh-from-the-oven homemade blueberry muffins, hot oatmeal cereal, and buttermilk pancakes with a local maple syrup. One of the couples recognized Holly from her frequent appearances on CNBC.

Dave and Holly ate like there was no tomorrow, knowing how important breakfast is to the serious biker ready to pedal 60 or 70 miles that day. Dave, an intense observer of human behavior, found it interesting to watch the husbands around the table try to keep from staring at Holly. It was a rather intimate setting around the dining room table. So it took a rather subtle technique to view all 5-feet 9-inches of Holly Morgan in her Italian, Lycra, skin-tight, one-piece biking outfit without being too obvious. Dave would catch a stare or two from some of the wives as well.

By 8:30 Dave and Holly were on their bikes heading through downtown Albion. The canal was only a few hundred yards from the town square. They decided to take the limestone towpath rather than Route 31. Their destination for that evening was Palmyra, New York, known mostly for being the birthplace of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon religion. Palmyra has a yearly festival where Mormons from all over the world gather to celebrate the birthday of their founder. It was about 65 miles from Albion, and Dave and Holly exhibited an almost childlike excitement to be on their way.

It was drizzling very slightly once they got on the towpath, but considering the pounding rain and gale-force winds they encountered less than 24 hours ago, it really wasn't much of a distraction. The wind was non-existent, but it was still a little cool. According to Dave's German speedometer, it was 51 degrees, so Dave put his newly acquired Albion Eagles gold-colored sweatshirt on under his raingear.

Within an hour, the rain had stopped completely. Dave removed the sweatshirt. Holly's caffeine craving was acting up, and according to the New York Parks' *Biking the Erie Canal* brochure, they would be coming to the village of Holley shortly.

The cycling that morning was serene, almost sublime. It was overcast and windless, but hovering over the Erie Canal, just several feet above the canal's surface were tiny puffs of clouds – not 2 or 3 feet above the water, just lingering there, stationary, not moving in any direction. It was almost a surreal scene, like a Salvador Dali painting.

Once they left the proximity of the small towns and villages, there wasn't a soul around. They were far from any human existence, surrounded by farmers' fields or large forested areas. The Erie Canal, placid and calm with all its aquatic life – occasional fish leaping out of the water or a heron swooping down and landing on a tree branch jutting out over the surface of the water – was their only companion. It was eerily quiet except

for the sounds their bikes made on the wet limestone path. Holly zoomed past Dave to briefly take the lead. Then Dave zoomed past Holly. They played tag like that for 10 minutes and then settled into their normal 12 mile-per-hour speed – Dave was in the lead.

They came to a drawbridge over the canal with the name “Holley” painted on the side. They pedaled up the path onto the street and crossed the metal grated bridge. They waved to the bridge operator. On the south side of the canal they entered a tiny residential area – neat as a pin – not even a quarter-mile before the main town square.

The town square in Holley, New York, consisted of a small park-like area with several wooden benches in the center of town surrounded with several dozen stores and a red church at the far end of the square. One of the small storefronts housed the local lawyer’s office, another the chiropractor, another the local dentist. There was one restaurant in the town and it appeared to be bustling with activity. The scene could have been right out of *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Time seemed to have stood still in Holley, New York.

Dave and Holly leaned their bikes delicately against the diner’s front window, entered the diner, and found an empty booth toward the back of the restaurant near the kitchen. Holly ordered coffee and two bagels – one for the road. Holly thought the bagel was the perfect food for the serious biker, but she couldn’t convince Dave – who ordered hot chocolate and cinnamon toast. They spent a half-hour leisurely drinking their beverages and munching on their food. Holly called her daughter in New York, then her daughter in San Francisco. Dave called both his sons. They both used the bathrooms and were on their way, back across the metal grated drawbridge – with another wave to the bridge operator – then down the inclined trail to the canal’s limestone towpath.

It had brightened considerably, but it was still overcast. The temperature was a comfortable 61 degrees and the wind ceased to exist. The puffs of clouds that had been hovering over the canal dissolved into thin air. Several locals from town were leisurely walking their dogs along the towpath, greeting Dave and Holly with “good morning.” Dave and Holly finally got the hang of being sociable, and they began initiating the “good mornings.”

As soon as they left the proximity of the town behind them – maybe just a mile – they were again the only two human forms in existence. It was eerily quiet again. It was

peaceful and in a way Dave found it comforting. Holly pulled up alongside Dave and continued to ride right next to him.

“Is this incredible or what?” Holly said.

“Considering the weather yesterday, it’s amazing how calm and peaceful things are today,” Dave said.

“This is absolutely perfect biking weather; even the sun couldn’t improve it.”

“I can’t believe all those times you begged me to ride with you when we were back in Cleveland. And all I could do was make smart-ass sarcastic comments about biking. Remember?”

“Oh yeah, I remember. I still find it hard to believe you’ve become such a bike-fanatic. You were a real jerk back then David Cohen. How the hell did I fall in love with such a jerk?”

“Well how am I doing now? Am I still the jerk?”

“I will admit you’ve improved quite a bit – but you still have your jackass moments – like a few hours ago in our bedroom.”

“Can we just forget about that?”

“I’m trying.”

This stretch of the canal was very long and straight. Appearing about a quarter-mile ahead was a huge knife-like gate structure that spanned the entire width of the canal. As they approached the structure Dave noticed that the two foreigners they had met back in Buffalo and in Lockport were again taking pictures of the structure. This time Dave decided to stop and engage the two students in a more detailed conversation. Dave and Holly waved as they approached the two. They waved back. Dave and Holly were maybe a hundred yards from the structure. And the two students were taking pictures from all different angles.

“Let’s stop and talk to these guys,” Dave said.

“What the hell for? They’ve never really been very friendly.”

“I’m just curious, and besides I’m sure they’re engineering students, probably civil engineer students like I was. Maybe I can give them a few tips for their term paper.”

Dave and Holly approached the two students, stopped a few feet short of them and straddled their bikes.

“Hello, I’m David Cohen.”

“And I’m Holly Morgan.”

“You guys seem to be very interested in the structures of the canal. We figure you’re engineering students,” David prompted the conversation.

“Yes that’s right,” the taller of the two responded.

“Where do you go to school?”

“University of Buffalo,” the taller one responded again. Answering as though he didn’t really want to continue the conversation any further. But Dave persisted.

“I’m a civil engineer, myself. What are you guys majoring in?”

“We’re both civil engineering majors.” Again the taller one responded; the shorter one turned toward the knife gate structure and continued to take more pictures.

“Are you guys headed all the way to Albany?” Holly decided to enter into the conversation.

“Were not really sure yet,” the taller one answered.

“What do you think that large knife gate structure is for?” Dave asked.

“They use the knife gates to isolate sections of the canal when they have to repair a leak,” the taller one answered again.

“I think you’re exactly right,” Dave said.

Just then the shorter one stopped taking pictures and turned towards his partner, “I think we better be going, Sultan,” he said.

“Well we must be on our way,” the taller one said and excused himself. Then they both turned their bikes back in the direction of Holley, where Dave and Holly had just come from.

The two students then packed their cameras away in the two saddlebags they had hanging from the rear racks on the backs of their bikes and took off in the opposite direction.

Dave turned around to watch them take off. Holly was already on her bike and headed east. Dave noticed their bikes were heavily packed and made rather deep wheel marks in the damp limestone towpath. As they pedaled away, Dave noticed a familiar cord-like wire hanging a couple of inches out of the shorter one’s saddlebags. It was about as thick as the cord on the mouse of a computer, but was white. It was rather distinctive and Dave

had seen this type of cord before but couldn't place when and where he had come into contact with it.

He re-mounted his bike and pedaled to catch up with Holly, who was now more than a quarter mile ahead of Dave. He realized he must have been pondering that distinctive cord longer than he thought. He quickly came up beside Holly.

"Strange guys," Dave said.

"They never bothered to introduce themselves or tell us their names." Holly said.

"I think the shorter one called the taller one Sultan – sounds Muslim."

"It is. I remember we had a driver in Poona at the yoga ashram, a Muslim named Sultan. I think he worked for the Blue Diamond Hotel, where we were staying."

"But they spoke perfect English with almost no trace of any accent."

"They're probably born in England," Holly said.

They both continued pedaling down the towpath in silence for a couple hundred yards. Then Dave exclaimed, as he hit both brakes and skidded on the limestone to a dead stop almost falling over, but quickly catching his balance. "Detonation cord!"

"What the hell are you talking about? And you damn near fell in the goddamn canal."

"Detonation cord, that's what was dangling out of his saddlebag."

"Detonation cord? What the hell are you talking about, David?"

"That guy was carrying detonation cord used for explosives! Shit. That's what it was. I couldn't figure it out at first."

"What the hell would two college kids be carrying around that for?"

"Exactly. That's what I want to know."

"Are you sure it was detonation cord? How would you know?"

"Believe me Holly, it was detonation cord. Several years ago I worked up in Gillette, Wyoming, on an open pit coal mine. That stuff was all over the place. That kid had detonation cord hanging out of his saddlebags. I'm positive."

"Well I guess they plan on blowing up the Erie Canal," Holly tried to make a joke.

"That's not even funny, Holly."

"Oh David, I can see you getting in that goddamn engineering inquisitive frame of mind. Here come one thousand questions. We'll never get to Albany. Look Dave, seriously, I'm sure it's nothing. So they have some detonation cord, maybe it's part of

their project for school. They are civil engineering students. C'mon Dave just forget about it. I'm sure there's a logical explanation for it. Forget it. Please!"

"So they have some detonation cord!" Dave sarcastically repeated. "I don't know, when I went to college I never carried around any detonation cord, nor did any professors assign projects that would require carrying any detonation cord. That shit's dangerous."

"C'mon Dave you're blowing this up way out of proportion. I'm sure it's nothing. Things were going so well for us. You're gonna ruin the entire trip." Holly was almost pleading with Dave.

"Okay, you're probably right. You're the CIA agent. The FBI agent. But I'll tell you what. If we see a cop or State Highway Patrol officer on this trip, I'm going to tell them to check those guys out."

"Fine. If we see an officer of the law we'll inform them of the two students."

"Students my ass," was Dave's final comment on the subject.

Sultan pedaled about a quarter mile back towards Holley, New York, and suddenly stopped his bike. Jawid pulled up alongside him.

"Why the hell did you call me by name back there you idiot?"

"I didn't call you by name."

"Yes you did, you asshole. You said something like, 'Let's get going Sultan.'"

"So what? Those two were harmless."

"We're not supposed to address each other by our real names. That's just careless, goddammit."

"You're making way too much out of it, Sultan. Those people don't even remember your name by now."

Sultan got off his bike to pack his light windbreaker back in his saddle bag and saw the two inches of detonation cord hanging out of Jawid's saddlebag."

"You fucking moron, Jawid! Look what the fuck you've got hanging out of your fucking bag!"

Chapter 9

Immokalee, Florida: September 3

Immokalee, Florida, pronounced im-mock-a-lee, is a city in central Florida, 30 or 40 miles from the tip of the peninsula and about 30 miles east of Naples. While Immokalee, a Seminole Indian name, is only a distance of 30 miles from Naples, sociologically it's one, maybe even two, light years away from the trappings of Naples. Immokalee is a little too far from the Gulf of Mexico to have shared in any of the incredible economic development of the Southwestern Florida coast. Its only claim to fame is the Seminole Indian gambling casino, which manages to siphon off some of the money Naples has to offer. It has a population of several thousand at the most: consisting of native rural white Floridians, who have a bond and kinship with southern Georgia more than the inhabitants of either coasts of the state of Florida. In addition to a small rural white population, there is also an enclave of Seminole Indians, Hispanics, and rural blacks. Immokalee is large enough to support one McDonalds and one Burger King, and one CVS and one Walgreens pharmacy. It has two nondescript motels, both run-down and dilapidated and looking more like they should rent by the hour than by the day.

Charlie Futch, a good-ol' native Floridian from the northern part of the state, was at the McDonalds waiting for two foreign contacts that were coming up from Miami. Mamoud was a Somalian, and Qumar was a Pakistani. Both were members of the Miami al Qaeda cell. They were to meet with Charlie Futch to purchase their automatic weapons – ironically, Israeli-made Uzi submachine guns – then head down to Everglades City and learn how to fire them. Charlie, who had been running guns and drugs through the Everglades for anyone and everyone, had been contacted through his Venezuelan contact to provide whatever the two gentlemen wanted. It was one in the afternoon and the two gentlemen from Miami were late. Charlie was pissed.

At 1:30 a rented Chevy Impala pulled into the McDonalds parking lot. The two foreigners got out and Charlie went outside to introduce himself. Charlie told them to follow him to Everglades City, 47 miles further south on Florida Route 29.

They drove down Route 29. Within miles they were in desolate country. Nothing but swamp on either side of the road. Occasionally they came upon signs warning of

“Panther Crossings.” On both sides of the road where they had the “Panther Crossing” signs, there were 10-foot high chain-link fences running parallel to the road for miles. It was hot and steamy as only south Florida weather can be in September. Between Immokalee and Everglades City there was just one gas station. And it was located just 3 miles outside Everglades City. They arrived in Everglades City in less than 40 minutes. Charlie was pushing it. Everglades City was more primitive than Immokalee. It didn’t have a McDonalds, a Burger King, or any drugstores. It had a lot of signs advertising airboat rides through the Everglades.

Charlie drove through the small center of town and headed towards the city of Chokoloskee, another step down on the primal scale from even Everglades City. Before they came to Chokoloskee, Charlie turned left onto Plantation Road, which warned of a Dead End. A couple miles down on Plantation Road was a small enclave of trailer homes, makeshift shacks, and an occasional well-built home that even the big bad wolf may have had trouble blowing down. Charlie pulled up next to a trailer. Parked out in front were two brand-new Harley Davidson motorcycles. Sitting on a makeshift rickety wooden porch, loosely attached to the trailer, were two good-ol’ boys who hadn’t missed too many meals and hadn’t passed up too many tattoo parlors.

Charlie made the proper introductions and the five then took their own vehicles – the two guys on the porch rode on one Harley – and Charlie and his passengers followed the tattooed dudes down a dirt road to a desolate area a few miles from the trailer. At the end of the road was a boat ramp and dock that ran down to a small canal where an airboat was located. On the wooden dock was a locked metal chest containing fishing equipment and two Uzi submachine guns.

Charlie asked for his payment after the tattooed gentlemen provided the foreigners with the two Uzis and several hundred rounds of ammunition for each. Charlie said his part of the deal was finished and that Billy Joe and Billy Bob – not their real names – would take the two foreigners out by airboat to a desolate region of the Everglades where they would teach them how to use the guns. Charlie got back in his car and left. The others got on the airboat and took off down the narrow canal until they entered a much wider channel and finally, in about 15 minutes, were out in an expansive area of the Everglades. The heat and humidity were oppressive.

Billy Joe then took out one of the Uzis and showed the foreigners how to load a magazine. He then rapidly fired off 10 shots. He gave the gun to one of the foreigners and told him the gun had a tendency to rise up, but the foreigner got off another 10 shots with no problem whatsoever. He looked like he had firearm experience. His partner, Qumar, checked out the other gun, also with no difficulty. Mamoud then handed over a roll of 100-dollar bills – \$5,000 – to Billy Bob, and the deal was consummated.

Billy Joe started up the airboat. The noise of the engine was so loud it was impossible to talk over it. But Billy Joe and Billy Bob didn't have to talk to each other. They knew what they were going to do. They each had Glock pistols under their grimy t-shirts and when they got in the middle of the swamp they planned on killing both Mamoud and Qumar and reselling both Uzis. But they never got the chance. As soon as they turned the boat around, Quamar ripped off a stream of bullets into both Billy Joe and Billy Bob and sent them over the side of the boat into the Everglades. The Everglades aquatic life would take care of the rest. Mamoud quickly grabbed control of the airboat and throttled back the engine until the boat came to a gliding halt.

“We should have taken out that Futch guy too,” Qumar said.

“I didn't think he would leave before the other two. But it doesn't matter. By the time they realize those two jackasses are missing, we'll either be dead or captured.”

Mamoud and Qumar practiced steering the airboat till they got the hang of it, then gunned it and returned the airboat to their car parked near the boat ramp. They ran the Harley down the ramp into the swamp, got in their rented car and headed towards the mall at Tyson's Corner in suburban Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. They would be there in two days and wait for the lights to go out – or to flicker.

Chapter 10

Spencerport, New York: September 3

Dave and Holly continued towards Palmyra, their destination for that day. Dave was reluctantly giving up on his terrorist conspiracy theories, occasionally prodding Holly with a lot of “What if” and “What for”- type questions. But Holly kept telling Dave he was nuts or overreacting and eventually Dave came around to Holly’s point of view – mostly to keep the peace. Holly was getting annoyed with Dave’s persistence. The sun tried to break through the cloud cover a few times, but it didn’t last more than a few minutes.

Holly commented that she would like to get new riding gloves. The rains the previous day had pretty much ruined her gloves. Spencerport was the next town they’d be arriving at, and according to the canal brochure, it had a bike store.

They got to the Spencerport lift bridge about 11:30. They pedaled up out of the canal towpath onto Union Street and headed away from town to the north where the bike store was located. Within a mile, they came to a small shopping center containing a dozen or so retail stores. One was a restaurant that was quite busy with the church crowd. The bike store was at the other end of the shopping area and had a sign on the window that said it was open at noon on Sundays. Perfect timing. They parked their bikes in the bike store’s bike rack. Then they went to the restaurant and figured by the time they finished, the bike store would be open.

The restaurant was packed with early Sunday morning churchgoers. Greek immigrants owned the restaurant, and they had a few of their native offerings sprinkled on the menu. Dave and Holly both had omelets. They both commented on the quality of the food – especially the coffee. When they finished it was already after 12 and the bike store should have been open. But when they walked over to the store, it was still dark inside. Then Dave noticed another makeshift sign on the window that said the store would be closed the entire Labor Day weekend.

They got their bikes out of the bike stand and began riding out of the parking lot back towards the canal.

“Shit!” Dave exclaimed, “I think I got a goddamn flat.” He dismounted and sure enough the back tire was flat as a pancake.

Holly helped Dave and tilted the back of the bike off the ground while Dave removed the tire and rim from the chain after he disengaged the back brake. He used his “Quick-Stick” tool to remove the tire and check the tire – inside and out – carefully to be sure whatever made the flat was no longer present in the tire. The tire appeared okay, so he partially inflated an inner tube and began putting the tire back on the rim. He was having some difficulty getting the final edge back on. Holly was watching Dave struggle and finally Dave asked her to help, which she did, and got the last edge of the tire back on the rim. Dave re-inflated the tire with a 16g CO2 cartridge. He only had one left. Then they headed towards the lift-bridge and back on the towpath. They were only about 6 miles from the western suburbs of Rochester. They were now both low on spare tubes and 16g CO2 cartridges.

Holly immediately stopped her bike after just a few yards on the canal and told Dave they should find a bike store in Rochester and stop there. Tomorrow was Labor Day and certainly those stores would be closed. It would be risky riding the towpath with one spare and not enough CO2 cartridges between them. They quickly found two bike stores in Rochester in the Parks and Trails canal brochure, both of which were within a mile of the towpath. But when they called the stores they were both closed for the weekend. They continued to bike towards Rochester.

The city of Rochester, New York, was extremely bike-friendly. They navigated the entire city from east to west on a beautifully paved, smooth bike path that ran through the southern edge of the city in a park-like terrain, with many intersecting bike paths leading to many other destinations. The confluence of all these bike paths could be confusing, except Holly quickly noticed the Erie Canal bike path had a distinct insignia painted on the correct path which made it infinitely easy to follow once it was identified.

About 6 miles onto the paved section of the path they came upon a rather dramatic scene. The Erie Canal, the Genesee River, and the bike towpath all converged and crossed at a single point. The canal crossed the wide, rain-swollen, muddy, angry Genesee via an aqueduct built right over the river. The paved bike path crossed the river on a separate bridge, built just for bikes and hikers. It was a single, graceful, arching

span at least a quarter mile in length, if not longer. The nexus of all these “paths” the towpath, canal and river, made for one very dramatic scene.

Dave and Holly stopped midway on the bridge and took it all in. The view was especially moving. They were straddling their bikes when Dave leaned over and attempted to kiss Holly, but the position of their bikes made it difficult. Holly got off her bike and leaned it against the railing of the bridge, came around to Dave’s side of the bike and embraced him and held him tightly.

When they made it to the other side of the bridge it started to rain and they had to don their raingear. The rain was pretty heavy, but it lasted only 30 minutes. By the time they got to the eastern end of the city, the rain had stopped and they came to the second set of locks on the canal – about a mile apart, designated as locks 33 and 32.

A mile or so west of the locks they entered a tourist-trendy section right on the canal called Schoen Place, located in the town of Pittsford. Signs politely asked bikers to “Please walk your bikes.” Lots of people were milling about. They stopped at a restaurant right on the banks of the canal and ordered some food. It was already three in the afternoon when they finished examining some of the upscale, fashionable shops along the canal.

Back on the towpath, not more than a few miles from Pittsford, Holly got another flat, this time in her rear tire. Now they were perilously low on spares and CO2 cartridges. Dave quickly looked through the Parks and Trails brochure. Sure enough, there was a bike store listed back in Schoen Place. And to their good fortune when they called by cell phone, it was indeed open. Holly fixed her tire while Dave road back to Pittsford and Schoen Place to the bike store – which, coincidentally was only 100 feet behind the restaurant where they had just eaten. Somehow they had completely missed it.

It was an eight-mile pedal to the bike store and back to where Holly had her flat – four miles each way. Dave loaded up on spare inner tubes: he bought 4, and then purchased enough 16g CO2 cartridges to blow up the Goodyear Blimp, if necessary.

Seven miles later they came upon another upscale canal development in the town of Fairport. Slightly fancier than Pittsford and a bit newer, it had a definite upscale, yuppie feel to it. They pedaled right through the canal development and soon they were again on a very isolated section of the Erie Canal. The towpath had changed back to crushed

limestone. The map in the canal brochure indicated that there were no towns or villages until they would get to Palmyra. There weren't even many roads that crossed the canal for the next 12 miles.

They were weary from fixing two flats and even a bit tired. Most of their travels that day had taken them on a crushed limestone surface. It is a more resistive surface to bike on. At first, you don't feel any difference from a paved path. But the accumulated effect of 40 miles on crushed limestone is felt as soon as you bike on a paved surface, even for a short distance – say 50 feet – like when you pass under some of the bridges over the canal. For some reason they paved that short section of the path under a bridge. Then you can feel the immediate release of some of the strain in the legs when you switch to the smoother paved surface. In any event, both Dave and Holly were a bit weary – tired – and were eagerly looking forward to getting to the Liberty House B&B where Holly had called, weeks in advance, for a reservation.

They both consciously slowed down the pace. It was already five in the afternoon. They had been on the bikes since 8:30 that morning. The isolation and desolation of their present location had an enchanting, calming feel about it. And then, for the first time on the trip, the clouds began to break up and the sun peered through, casting shafts of light through the dense hardwood forest, illuminating sections of the towpath like spotlights on a Broadway stage. The banks of the canal were thick with undergrowth. It was again very tranquil and peaceful and devoid of any other human presence. It was a rather reflective, almost introspective ride. It was biking at its existential best.

They finally got into Palmyra about 6:30. They left the limestone towpath about a mile before they got into town and took NY Route 31. They'd had it with the crushed limestone. One of the truly nice advantages of traveling with the New York Parks and Trails canal brochure was that it gave you other options besides the towpath.

The owners of the B&B were out but had left the key under the mailbox as they said they would if they weren't home. Dave and Holly first located the B&B, but rather than go in and leave their stuff inside, they went to eat at a local pizza house near the corner of the street first. They agreed: loading up quickly on carbs was definitely in order. They stuffed themselves, first on bread sticks; then they attacked a large pizza. Holly's

speedometer indicated she'd traveled 65 miles that day; Dave's said 73 – the extra 8-mile round trip he traveled back to Schoen Place to get the tubes and CO2 cartridges. When they finally got into the B&B, they were a bit disappointed. It didn't compare to the one they'd stayed in the previous night in Albion. But they were exhausted. The owners were still out, so they took a shower together and washed each other's backs. They fell asleep long before the owners of the B&B returned.

Chapter 11

Palmyra, New York: Labor Day, September 4

Holly was up before Dave; she showered then put on her canary-yellow, one-piece Italian biking outfit. She went downstairs to check out the weather and decided to perform her yoga routine on the front porch of the B&B. It was still cool outside. There were four cars parked in the driveway of the bed and breakfast. Evidently, when Holly and Dave were asleep last night, the Liberty House B&B filled up. Holly finished her yoga routine and went back upstairs to their room. It was seven; the sun was coming up and Dave was still asleep, snoring quietly. Holly got back under the covers after she removed the skin-tight biking ensemble, which woke Dave up.

“What time is it?” Dave questioned through a yawn.

“It’s seven,” Holly answered.

“Seven! Jesus, I must have been exhausted last night. What the hell time did we go to sleep last night?”

“It was before nine, maybe even 8:30.”

Dave sat up, leaned over Holly and kissed her on the forehead.

“Your breath stinks; go brush your teeth.”

“And a good morning to you, Holly Morgan.”

“Hey, Dave, we better find a Laundromat, I’m starting to wear stuff a second time without washing it.”

This was the least of Dave’s concerns; he could have easily gone all week with the two biking outfits he brought along.

“We may have to wash our stuff in the bathtub; I haven’t seen any places along the way, yet. Have you?” Dave said.

“No, but I’m not wearing anything again until I wash some of this.”

The proprietors of the B&B were up and making noises downstairs in the kitchen readying breakfast. Some of the noises were the banging of pots and pans. Others were the orders Mrs. James was barking out at Mr. James, the proprietors of the B&B. There was no doubt who the boss of this operation was. And Mr. James followed every command Mrs. James barked out. If he didn’t, Mrs. James was not very tolerant.

Dave and Holly finished all their bathroom activities and went downstairs for breakfast. They were the only patrons downstairs; the rest appeared to be still sleeping in their rooms, although it was doubtful they didn't hear Mrs. James barking out orders.

Breakfast, in a word, was disappointing. Dave was anticipating something like they were served back in Albion. Unfortunately there wasn't any sweet backyard-grown cantaloupe, any freshly baked blueberry muffins, and no buttermilk pancakes smothered with local maple syrup and gobs of butter. Instead, they had some stale multi-grain cereal, with skim milk, fresh fruit cup that had canned fruit only, and French toast made with stale raisin-bread, which even soaking in eggs couldn't revive. Dave ate the French toast but left all the bread crusts. "Dave, look at you, you left the crusts – You eat like a child would eat."

Mrs. James brought out two paper bags and informed Holly that she'd prepared them both pack-lunches for their bike journey that day. PB&J with some assorted other treats – pretzels and candies. Holly accepted them graciously and brought them outside to show Dave, who was washing both bikes off with a hose. Dave was less than ecstatic with the James' offering.

"I wonder what kind of shit she packed in there," Dave said as he continued to hose down the bikes.

"Jeez Dave, not so loud, she can hear you."

"So what, that breakfast was horrible."

"Are you gonna be miserable all morning now – we better get some breakfast on the road, or you'll be unbearable until we eat lunch."

"But we already have lunch," Dave said, sarcastically pointing at the two paper bags Holly was holding. "So I'll probably be unbearable all the way to Weedsport."

Holly laughed and shook her head. Dave brought both bikes out on the sidewalk and leaned them against a lamp pole. Then Holly dug out the canal brochure from one of her saddlebags. They were already on Map 12 and would eventually make it to Map 16 that day. They evaluated the maps and planned their trip. Their destination was Weedsport, New York. The early morning sun quickly disappeared, but the weather was perfect biking weather. The winds were finally from west to east – at their backs. And they were substantial, 10 to 15 miles per hour, and constant. The temperature was in the mid-

fifties, but would soon warm up to the low sixties. They mounted their bikes and headed down the street to State Route 31, not more than a quarter mile away. Mrs. James was still ordering Mr. James around, admonishing him this time for misplacing a pot. Dave and Holly could still hear Mrs. James barking out commands as they pedaled down Maple Avenue.

It didn't take long for Holly's caffeine craving to take control, especially since Mrs. James' coffee left a lot to be desired. The 15-mile-per-hour wind at their backs pushed them towards the city of Newark in less than 45 minutes.

Newark appeared to be one of the larger "little" towns on the canal. Holly prodded Dave to stop at the first convenience store they came to, to get her coffee. They entered the western edge of Newark and stopped at an Exxon station/convenience food mart. Holly got her coffee. Dave ate two doughnuts. They breezed through the town of Newark on Route 31 in 10 minutes. They were easily maintaining a pace of 14 miles per hour. It was the kind of cycling all cyclists dream about, especially after having recently fought hurricane-type winds and blinding rain for 8 hours.

Near the eastern end of the city Dave saw a Wal-Mart store and waved Holly alongside then pointed at the Wal-Mart. They pulled into the Wal-Mart parking lot and entered the cavernous store. Dave purchased a bungy cord so he could attach his Albion Eagles sweatshirt to the top of his rear bag and relieve Holly of that burden. Then they went to the automotive section where Dave purchased a spray can of de-greaser and a package containing two cheap toothbrushes. It was time to clean the chains and gears on their bikes, which they would do as soon as they got to Weedsport.

There would be no towpath to follow on the journey to Weedsport. The canal brochure followed Route 31. They crossed the canal several times on the journey. They crossed the canal just outside of Lyons and then rode back across the canal in the town of Clyde. In Clyde they decide to try the lunch Mrs. James provided. They forced down the PB&J sandwiches, but the pretzels were from the Paleolithic Age and a carbon-14 test on the candy would have indicated they were made before the Resurrection. After a quick bite of both the pretzels and candy, they quickly trashed the remnants of the bags.

In Clyde, the New York Trails and Parks brochure recommended a side trip to the town of Seneca Falls, New York, considered the birthplace of the suffragette movement. They decided to pass on the trip to Seneca Falls and continued on Route 31 bordering the Montezuma Marsh, a 7,000-acre wildlife refuge providing a critical nesting and resting spot for migratory birds. Digging the canal through this region back in the 1820s had caused great hardship and death from malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases. It got so bad that they postponed the digging until the winter months.

Dave and Holly left the comfort of the canal behind as they followed the desolate Route 31 through the fringes of the Marsh. For 20 miles they pedaled through marshes and fields and an openness and emptiness they hadn't seen before. It was quiet except for the many birds swooping down into the marsh. Because they were moving in the same direction as the wind, at almost the speed of the wind, it was almost like riding in an air balloon. You could feel the wind at your back. You could see its effect on the trees and tall swamp grasses. You just couldn't hear the wind. And almost no traffic appeared on the road. There were few crossroads, no gas stations or convenience stores. Once they left the level towpath bordering the canal, Route 31 turned hilly, by comparison. It was still overcast. It was effortless cycling – they were averaging 14 miles per hour – they were hardly pedaling, or in biker's parlance – they were spinning, meaning they were just letting their legs and the force of gravity upon them propel the bikes down the road.

They stopped several times to rest, take a drink of water and take in the vastness of the region. Dave began to spin his terrorist theories over and over in his mind as he pedaled down Route 31. Often, biking lends itself to an intense reverie that can, at times, be dangerous – losing your concentration on your surroundings can be perilous on a bike. And this quiet setting lent itself to some serious reverie for both Dave and Holly. The lack of any traffic on the road for long periods of time and the effortless pedaling kept both Dave and Holly in an almost perpetual state of their own private thoughts – Dave with his terrorist conspiratorial theories, Holly with thoughts of her two past marriages, her two daughters – and why she and David Benjamin Cohen never married. They rarely spoke to each other for over an hour – wrapped up in their own private meditations.

They arrived in Weedsport before one in the afternoon. They had traveled 45 miles from Palmyra. They checked the brochure for motels and there were two listed – one was a Best Western and the other was a Days Inn. They pedaled by the Best Western; it looked rather dingy. They passed it up. They continued slowly pedaling down Route 31. On their left they passed a Laundromat, which Dave quickly pointed out. Right next to the Laundromat was a self-service car wash, which Dave thought would work out perfectly. They could take their laundry to the Laundromat and clean their bikes at the car wash.

About a half-mile down the road, on the left, was the Days Inn, which looked newer and in better shape than the Best Western. Like so many small-town hotels and motels, the Days Inn in Weedsport, New York, was owned and operated by Indians from the state of Gujarat. Coincidentally, they also owned and operated the Best Western.

Holly and Dave cycled right up to the entrance of the Days Inn, leaned their bikes against the concrete pillar holding up the roof over the entrance, and walked into the small lobby of the motel. No one was at the reservation desk, so Dave made some noises and soon a middle-aged Indian woman dressed in a traditional sari came out of a room just behind the reservation desk.

“How may I help you?” the Indian woman asked with a heavy Indian/English accent.

“We’d like a non-smoking room with a king-sized bed,” Holly spoke up first.

“May I have your credit card, please,” the Indian lady asked.

“Here take mine,” Dave was quick to hand his credit card to her. Then he turned to Holly. “You paid for the first two B&B’s.” Holly put her credit card away.

“Just one night?” the Indian lady asked.

“Yes,” they both answered simultaneously.

“How many room cards would you like?”

“One should be enough,” Holly looked at Dave and he agreed.

She handed the room key to Holly as Dave filled out the reservation form and returned it to the Indian lady.

“Just pull your car around to the end of the building. Yours is the first room on the right.”

“Well we don’t have a car, but we’ll ride our bikes over there.” Dave smiled

“Oh, you’re the second bike riders we have staying with us. You must be on the Erie Canal bike tour.”

“Yes we are,” Holly said. “Are the other two bikers native to your country?”

“Why yes they are. You must have met them on the towpath.”

“Is one, by any chance, called Sultan?” Dave quickly asked.

“No I don’t believe either one goes by that name. But we also have two other Indians staying with us – a man and his wife. He may go by that name, but I’m not sure. My husband checked them in last night. I haven’t met them yet. By the way, we have a continental breakfast at six in the morning.”

“Thanks,” Dave said. And began to leave the lobby but quickly turned around, “Do you know of a really good restaurant in town?”

“There’s one right in town called The Old Erie Restaurant. Here’s the menu,” she handed it to Dave. “It’s just a half-mile down Route 34 on the left. Turn right as soon as you leave our parking lot; you can’t miss it.”

“Thanks.” Again they both answered simultaneously and walked outside to get to their bikes.

“Well I guess it’s not the two terrorists staying at the motel like you thought when you went on your fishing expedition. ‘Is one by chance called Sultan?’” Holly sarcastically repeated. “I thought we agreed to give up on your conspiracy theories, Dave.”

“Hey, c’mon. I was just curious to see if those two guys were staying here.”

“Yeah, right. Curious my ass. C’mon. Let’s go wash some clothes at the laundromat and clean our bikes.”

They checked into their room and gathered their bike clothes and put them in a pillow-case they took from one of the many pillows laying on their bed. Then they both showered. They weren’t even very tired from the easy 45-mile trip from Palmyra. It was almost like a rest day. Dave packed the de-greaser and tooth brushes and strapped the bag of laundry onto his back carrier with his bungy cord. The laundromat and car wash were only a half-mile west, back up Route 31.

They put their laundry in one washer and then went next door to the car wash to clean their bikes. The de-greaser was especially effective in removing all the grime that was ground in between the gears from the chain and the sockets. The high-pressure water

spray took care of the persistent limestone. The toothbrushes were used for a final cleaning of the chain and the links. Then a final high-pressure spray. They both felt better after they thoroughly cleaned their bikes. Holly had brought some Teflon lubricant and they lubricated the chains before they went back to the laundromat to put their clothes in the dryer.

They had to wait for the dryer to finish, and when it did, the clothes were still damp. So they ran the dryer for another cycle until their clothes were dry. They both felt better riding back to the Days Inn with clean bikes and clean clothes. Holly felt better than Dave about the clean clothes.

It was still only three in the afternoon when they got back to their motel room. The restaurant didn't open till five, so they killed two hours in bed. Dave told Holly she could make as much noise as she wanted. But instead, they both fell asleep and didn't get up until it was half past six. They hadn't had a decent meal all day. So they were both looking forward to the meal at the Old Erie Restaurant.

Dave suggested they just walk to the restaurant rather than ride their bikes. It was still light outside and the walking would feel good. It was about a mile down SR 34 to the center of Weedsport; the Old Erie Restaurant was located across from the Key Bank office, in a century-old, faded red brick building. People were waiting to be seated when Dave and Holly entered the restaurant. The wait wasn't long, maybe twenty minutes. While they were waiting, Holly noticed the diplomas of the owners of the restaurant, who had graduated from the well-known and well-respected Culinary Institute of America located in Hyde Park, New York – just 20 or so miles up the Hudson from New York City. The owners happened to be married to each other, and by the looks of the crowded restaurant, looked to have a thriving business – at least on this Labor Day.

Dave and Holly were finally seated at the back of the restaurant, in a corner near the window that faced the main street. Dave took a seat facing the entrance of the restaurant; Holly had her back to the entrance.

Dave was in a quandary over two choices on the menu. He was tempted to get the pan-fried, fried chicken, but instead opted for chicken marsala served over homemade thin pasta. He thought the carbs from the pasta would be more apropos for his biking

requirements. Holly ordered the breaded veal cutlet with home made spaetzel browned in a butter sauce. Both meals were nothing short of fantastic. Who would have expected such perfection from a small restaurant in Weedsport, New York? But the Old Erie Restaurant would have been considered a fine eatery in New York, or Paris, or New Orleans.

Always thinking ahead and especially always thinking of his stomach, Dave ordered the pan-fried, fried chicken to go. He thought it would make one hell of a tasty lunch tomorrow around noontime. To hell with the added weight. Holly thought he was nuts. While they waited for the fried chicken, Dave and Holly split an order of homemade coconut cream pie (Absolutely to die for!) and both had coffee. Just as the coffee arrived, Dave's facial expression changed to one of great surprise.

"What's the problem, Dave?" Holly inquired.

"You'll never believe who just came into the restaurant."

"Who?"

"The Indian/Pakistani biker dudes." Dave waved at them. They returned the wave.

Holly turned around in her seat and also waved. They both waved back at her.

"They're with another couple, a man and a rather attractive younger woman," Dave said. Holly didn't turn around to see the other couple.

"They look Indian or Pakistani too."

"So? So what?" Holly said.

"So, so nothing," Dave said, knowing Holly was getting agitated and thinking he was going back on his terrorist fishing expedition.

"C'mon. Let's get out of here, I see the waitress has our fried chicken." Holly was eager to leave before Dave got his engineering juices flowing and started all over again with the conspiratorial terrorist theories.

They walked past the table with the two Indians, who were heavily engaged in a conversation with their two friends, so they didn't intrude or wave as they passed the table of four and left the restaurant. They started walking back to the Days Inn when Holly realized she'd left her "doggy bag" of unfinished veal cutlet and spaetzel back on their table.

"Hey Dave I forgot my veal and spaetzel. Wait here I'll be right back."

Dave waited outside the restaurant while Holly went back inside to retrieve her unfinished meal – neatly wrapped in aluminum foil in the shape of a swan. She walked past the table with the four Indians, and this time got a look at the shorter man and attractive tall woman who came in with the two bikers they had met on the towpath several times. The four seemed to be involved in a rather animated conversation and didn't notice Holly's entrance back into the restaurant. She got a better glimpse of the shorter man, then took a couple of steps back and stopped right at their table.

"Khalid? Khalid Khan?" She was hesitant but was positive she recognized the shorter man sitting next to the tall, attractive woman.

"Excuse me," Khalid said in total shock. "Are you talking to me?"

"Khalid, it's me; Holly Morgan."

"I'm sorry, you must have me mistaken for someone else." Khalid said with some conviction.

"You're not Khalid Khan from San Francisco?" Holly persisted.

"No I'm not. I'm sorry. My name is Hemant. Hemant Shah. You obviously have me confused with this Khalid chap."

"Well, I'm so sorry. You look exactly like someone I had in my yoga class back in San Francisco."

"Well you're obviously mistaken; this is my husband Hemant," came the icy cold indignant and rather sharp reply from Benazir.

"Well, please excuse me, I must be mistaken. I'm sorry for the interruption."

The four at the table continued talking like nothing had happened, and Holly went back to the table where she and Dave been sitting and retrieved her veal and spaetzel. She left the restaurant avoiding any glance at the table where the four foreigners were still having an even more animated conversation – in Urdu.

Dave noticed the troubled, puzzled expression on Holly's face as soon as she exited the restaurant.

"What's the matter?" Dave asked.

"Nothing."

"Well you sure don't look like nothing's the matter. What happened in there?" Dave pointed back at the Old Erie Restaurant.

“I just had the strangest experience.”

“You just went back to get your doggie bag. Right?”

“Yeah right, but I thought I recognized someone back in the restaurant I knew in San Francisco.”

“Did you say hello to them?”

“Yeah, yeah. I mean yes, yes I did.” Holly was still shaken and collecting her thoughts.

“So what’s the big deal?”

“Well, it wasn’t the person I thought it was.”

“So it just looked a lot like that person, that’s all. How did that make you so shook up? Christ, Holly look at you, you’re shaking for Christ’s sake.” Dave was holding her hand. He stopped and turned to face her. Her terrified expression said it all. Dave put his arms around her. She held on to him tightly. “What the hell happened back there Holly?”

Holly took a deep breath and collected her thoughts. She loosened her tight grip on Dave and backed slowly away and faced him.

“Dave, there’s something strange going on here.”

“What are you talking about? What’s strange?”

“That person back in the restaurant. The one I recognized from San Francisco.”

“Yes?”

“He was the short guy sitting at that table with our Indian biking friends, next to the attractive, tall woman.”

“I don’t get it. What’s so unusual about that?”

“Dave his name is Khalid. Khalid Khan. He was in my yoga class at least four, maybe five years. But he denied that he was Khalid. He called himself Hemant. Hemant Shah.”

“Well maybe you were wrong. It was pretty dark in that restaurant, Holly.”

“Goddammit David! I’m telling you that guy back there was lying. He was Khalid Khan, not some goddamn Hemant Shah. I saw that face once a week for five years. We talked many times after class. I remember his face was severely pockmarked from a case of childhood smallpox he had back in Karachi. I am 100% positive that guy in the

restaurant was the same Khalid Khan in my San Francisco yoga class. I even met his wife a few times. She was an American girl, rather homely as I remember her.”

“Well, there you have it, Holly.” Dave quickly replied. “He’s probably cheating on his ugly wife and you embarrassed him. You caught him in the act. What did you expect him to do in front of that beautiful woman he was sitting next to?”

“No, Dave. I can’t buy that. Besides I think she referred to him as her husband.”

“Well then he must have remarried. It’s perfectly possible.”

“But the way she defended him when he said his name was Hemanat Shah, not Khalid. If he was cheating on his wife with that woman, there’s no way she would have given me that answer – and in a real nasty mean bitchy way. If she thought she was really with a Hemant Shah, instead of Khalid Khan, she would have kept her mouth shut and waited for me to leave before she lit into me. No, the way she lit into me she seemed to be in on the ruse – whatever the hell the ruse is. And besides, she’s much too beautiful to be romantically involved with a short, pockmarked guy like Khalid.”

“Ruse? What, are we back to the terrorist conspiracy theory?”

“I don’t know David, but something is definitely wrong with this picture.”

They continued walking back towards the motel. Holly had her head nestled on Dave’s shoulder her arm around his waist. Dave had his arm around her. She had calmed down considerably. Then she quickly bolted away from Dave’s arm and turned towards him.

“Dave, you know how you sometimes associate a single thought about a person. An impression that lingers and the first thing you think about when you meet that person?”

“Yes.”

“I remember thinking it strange that Khalid was such a virulent anti-Semite.”

“What do you mean?” Dave was suddenly interested in Holly’s comments.

“I remember after yoga class Khalid always had some anti-Jewish or anti-Israeli or even anti-American comment he would confide in me. ‘Those goddamn Jews or those fucking Israelis or the goddamn American government supports those damn Jews, never the Palestinians.’ I don’t know why the hell he confided those personal thoughts with me. But he did. I always remembered that.”

“That doesn’t make him a terrorist. Shit, if every anti-Semite in the US was a potential terrorist, Christ, we’d have ten million potential terrorists on our hands.”

Holly paid no attention to Dave’s observation.

“Now I remember. Damn it! He got laid off from his job and lost his anti-discrimination lawsuit. He still came to yoga class, but now he was real bitter, and the anti-Semitic comments flew fast and furious – to anybody within earshot, not just me. There were several Jewish people in my class and they complained bitterly. One woman damn near went after him. I had to ask him to leave the class. A few days later 9/11 hit the country. I never saw him again. Someone said he took his wife and family and moved back to Karachi, Pakistan.”

“Do you remember what he did for a living? Who he worked for?” Dave asked.

“Yes I do, Dave. He worked for the Bechtel Corporation. He was an engineer, electrical I think. He worked in their mining division.”

Dave stopped in his tracks. His pulse quickened. He looked directly into Holly’s eyes. “Are you sure about that Holly?”

“Yes, I’m positive.”

“I can’t believe it!” Khalid said in Urdu as Dave and Holly left the Old Erie Restaurant.

“You can’t believe what?” Benazir quickly asked.

“I can’t believe I’m in the town of Weedsport, New York, and I run into my yoga instructor from San Francisco. It’s been six years since I saw her last.”

“That’s not the point Khalid, what the hell are we gonna do about it?”

“Do about what?”

“That woman blew our cover. She recognized you.”

“So what? She can’t possibly know what the hell we’re about to do. So she recognized me. Big deal. Who cares? She probably thinks I’m cheating on my wife.”

“I care, god damn it. This could jeopardize the entire mission, and certainly screw up our ability to leave the country.”

“I don’t think there’s a problem here. We met those two a couple times on the trail. They’re harmless. They couldn’t have a clue about our mission.” Sultan threw his two cents into the conversation.

“Shut the fuck up, Sultan. You have no idea what this mission is about.” Benazir cut his conversation off abruptly. “We’ve got to do something about those two. And we’ve got to do it fast.”

“You’re overreacting, Benazir. I agree with Sultan, those two are harmless. If we do anything to them now we’ll only bring unwanted attention to ourselves and our objectives – then we damn well could harm the mission. So just forget about them. I’m still running this operation.”

“Look, you idiot,” Benazir wasn’t quite finished, “as soon as we blow those two locks in Lockport, and all hell breaks loose, the FBI and every other goddamn agency will be asking questions and following the damn canal all the way from Buffalo to Albany. Asking anyone if they saw or heard anything suspicious. That damn girl will identify you and the FBI will get your name and photo from your past employer. I’m sure that you told her during one of your yoga sessions who you worked for. Didn’t you?”

She didn’t wait for an answer to that question. She already knew the answer. “Then your fucking picture will be all over the news and every goddamn border station between here and Canada and Mexico. We’ll have one hell of a time getting out of here. So don’t tell me she’s harmless. I say we take them out as soon as possible.”

“Well I’m still running the show here Benazir,” Khalid quickly answered Benazir’s tirade. He was a little embarrassed in front of Sultan and Jawid. That a Muslim woman would have the temerity, the gall, to talk like that to Khalid.

“We’re not taking anybody out you crazy bitch. So just cool it. Now let’s get back to the hotel rooms and finish some important business,” Khalid closed the conversation.

Benazir gave Khalid a cold hard stare. It scared even Sultan and Jawid. But she kept quiet and held her temper and they left the Old Erie Restaurant and headed back towards the Days Inn. It was almost 10 o’clock.

Chapter 12

Room 210, The Days Inn: Tuesday, September 5, 5:30 a.m.

Dave and Holly barely slept three hours. They talked till 2 in the morning. They were so keyed up from the scene in the Old Erie Restaurant. At 5:30 Tuesday morning they were both lying side by side staring at the ceiling and trying to rationalize their individual theories. They were slowly feeling ridiculous and thought they were overreacting to circumstances that they may have blown way out of proportion.

“But Dave you had to see and hear that bitch. She was pure evil. Scary. I’m serious. You weren’t there. You always said I was good at sizing people up. Didn’t you? Well this bitch was something else. Trust me.”

“Hey, I believe you. She probably was a mean, evil person, but that sure as hell doesn’t make her a terrorist. You gonna call the FBI and tell them that we think we’ve come upon a terrorist plot because some Indian or Pakistani woman was acting strange, or evil? Because some guy you recognized went by another name? Because he was sitting next to a beautiful woman who you don’t believe was his wife? C’mon Holly, they’ll think we’re nuts.”

“Well what about the detonation cord you identified the other day?”

“Well that is still disturbing, and even if they’re not terrorists – which quite frankly I’m beginning to believe is the case, that is something the FBI might investigate.”

“David,” Holly was sounding frustrated, “you’re the one who first proposed the damn conspiracy/terrorist theory in the first place. Now you’ve completely changed your mind.”

“Well I just think we’ve both overreacted to information that can easily be explained a zillion different ways. I mean, c’mon, what are the possibilities – what are the probabilities – that we’ve uncovered some nefarious terrorist plot here on the banks of the Erie Canal. When you talk about it out loud, on the face of it, it just sounds ridiculous. I just think we’ve both gotten a little carried away.”

“Wait a minute Dave. Last night we looked over the Parks and Trails brochure. You said that if the locks at Lockport were destroyed it would cause one hell of a flood down stream. Because half the goddamn Niagara River would come down from Buffalo and

nothing could stop it until they dammed it up. Which you said would take longer than it took to block the flood waters in New Orleans.”

“What’s your point, Holly?”

“My point is what if you’re right. What if that’s the plan, to blow up those locks? Look at the damage and possible loss of life that could cause. And maybe we could have stopped it. Isn’t that reasoning enough to call the authorities? So maybe we’re wrong. Maybe we are alarmists. So the FBI thinks we’re nuts. So what? But what if by some small chance we’ve hit upon something? If something happens and we didn’t tell anyone, we’ll never be able to live with ourselves.”

“All right, okay. You’ve made your point. Look, we’ll get some breakfast at that diner down on Route 31. And afterwards when we get on the road, you can get the phone number of the FBI in Buffalo and call them from the road and tell them about the detonation cord and the two guys taking suspicious pictures of the locks with a telephoto lens. Will that relieve your frustration and anxiety?”

“Okay. And it should relieve yours too, Dave.”

“It will. I agree. We should notify the authorities,” Dave said and then quickly added, “but Jesus, don’t talk about that guy using another name and the woman and her evil stare. That will just blow the whole thing. It’s a stretch and makes the detonation cord theory less believable.”

“Okay fine. No mention of the woman or Khalid using a fake name. But damn it, Dave, you didn’t see her face or hear that bitchy voice.”

“No mention of the woman or Khalid.”

“Fine.”

Dave and Holly were at the diner before seven. Both had large breakfasts, although Dave was tempted to start eating his fried chicken dinner before they even got to the diner. Holly convinced him to hold off till lunch, but he sneaked a quick bite when she wasn’t looking. Convincing themselves that the prudent approach would be to inform the FBI had taken away a lot of the pressure of the last 24 hours and their terrorist theories. They were back on their bikes and heading east on Route 31 by 7:30.

It was another overcast morning, cool enough for Dave to wear his Albion Eagles sweatshirt. They still had a nice breeze at their backs. Holly's gears needed some adjustment, so they stopped and made the proper adjustments and were back on their way towards Syracuse. The eastern suburbs of Syracuse were about 20 miles away. The terrain became quite hilly, and they left the Erie Canal, which took a northern route, behind. In the town of Jordan, not even five miles from Weedsport, they left State Route 31 and followed local county roads with names like Peru and Laird and Whiting.

Things had calmed considerably since their decision to call the Buffalo FBI that morning, and by 8:30 Holly was on her cell phone getting the phone number from Information. Dave was off in the bushes relieving himself. When he got back to the bikes, Holly was on the phone speaking to Agent Douglas Chaffee from the Buffalo office of the FBI.

"I know this probably all sounds ridiculous to you Mr. Chaffee, but my husband and I just thought we should bring this information to the proper authorities. We're probably overreacting. I know you probably think we're nuts."

"No, no Ms. Morgan. You're doing exactly the right thing. The only way we'll truly prevent another 9/11 situation is if Mr. and Mrs. John Q Public are observant like you and your husband. You're probably right. I'm sure it's nothing. But we'll check it out anyway as soon as possible. Can I have your cell phone number?"

Of course, Agent Chaffee already had her cell phone number, even though she had it blocked, but he just asked for it to see if Holly was willing to give it up. She quickly gave it to him and thanked him for his time.

"What was that all about?" Another agent in the office asked Agent Chaffee, hearing only one side of the conversation.

"What did you hear? The detonation cord part some Pakistani may have had dangling from his back bike carrier?" Chaffee said, sipping his first of many cups of coffee for that day.

"Yeah, that sure was a strange one. You gonna check it out or what?"

"I'm sure it's another wacko call, but I'll call the sheriff in that county to check it out. It's a one-in-a-million, but if anything does happen and we didn't check it, we'd be working in our Ishpeming office before the week is out."

Agent Chaffee called the sheriff of the appropriate county.

“That was the FBI, huh?” Dave said as soon as Holly put her cell phone away.

“Yeah.”

“Feel better, now?”

“Yeah, how 'bout you?”

“Yeah, I do. Now let's get back in our proper frame of mind and leave all this conspiracy/terrorist shit back in Weedsport. Buy the way, did I hear you refer to me as your 'husband' when you were talking to the FBI?”

“Yeah. I thought if I were a married woman he'd take my warning more seriously and not think I was some kook out riding on the Erie Canal.”

“Did he take it seriously?”

“Not really. I mean he was supportive and said all the right things, but I think he thought I was just another nut calling with a terrorist theory. They probably get dozens a week.”

Sultan and Jawid were on their bikes getting ready to leave the parking lot of the Days Inn. It was only nine in the morning. They were headed for the breakfast diner on Route 31. They hadn't pedaled 50 feet when a sheriff's car pulled into the Days Inn and signaled for them to stop.

“Good morning,” the Sheriff said as he got out of his car with a picture of Bucky Williams in his hand.

“Good morning,” Sultan and Jawid answered and straddled their bikes.

The sheriff walked over to them and showed them the picture of Bucky and asked if they'd seen him on the towpath where he said Bucky was reported to have been spotted. The sheriff was lying.

Both Sultan and Jawid said they hadn't seen anyone on the path looking like that. The sheriff walked suspiciously around their bikes looking at the saddlebags hanging off their back carriers.

“Would you mind opening your saddle bags?” the sheriff asked.

“Are you looking for something in particular?” Jawid asked.

“We’re checking cars and other vehicles just to be sure. You don’t have to open them if you don’t want,” the sheriff said.

Not wanting to raise any suspicion they quickly agreed and opened the bags – nothing but CO2 cartridges and spare inner tubes and clothes and some bike tools.

“Thank you very much, sorry for the inconvenience.” And the sheriff got back into his car and took off. Sultan and Jawid continued out of the parking lot until they saw the sheriff’s car disappear and then quickly turned around and headed for Khalid’s room at the motel.

“I don’t understand,” Khalid was annoyed. “Did he say what he was looking for?”

“No. He showed us a picture of some fugitive named Bucky something and asked us if we’d seen him on the towpath,” Sultan was nervous as he spoke.

“Did you see the sheriff stop any other cars?” Khalid persisted; he seemed nervous too.

“No he just took off down Route 31. He didn’t stop anyone but us, as far as I could tell,” Jawid said.

“I don’t like this one bit,” Benazir finally spoke up. “I’ll guarantee it had something to do with your yoga instructor and her boyfriend.”

“Think, goddammit Sultan. Is there any possible reason he would want to search your saddlebags?” Khalid was getting upset.

“What the hell could he possibly suspect was in our saddlebags – a gun maybe?” Jawid posed the question.

“I’ll bet it was the goddamn detonation cord you had hanging out of your bag yesterday, Sultan,” Jawid remarked.

“What detonation cord?” Khalid asked.

“We met those two guys yesterday on the towpath and had some idle chitchat. When we left I noticed a foot of detonation cord hanging out of Sultan’s saddlebags. I’ll bet that guy recognized what it was. He was a civil engineer. Maybe they called the police.”

“You jackasses!” Benazir screamed at Jawid and Sultan. “You’re all a bunch of rank amateurs. Now those two have got to be eliminated. Now! We have no choice.”

“I’m afraid Benazir is right about that. We can ill afford to take a chance. But we have to wait a few days till I make the explosive charges and get the detonators and electronics working properly. That will take another day or two. We’ll have to move the entire operation up before the eleventh. It shouldn’t be a problem because all the teams are supposed to be in place today checking out their territories. Once they receive the signal they can begin the killings immediately. Sultan and Jawid, you have to keep close contact with our two friends. Let us know where they are staying each night. Talk to them on the towpath. Engage them in conversation. Get friendly with them. We’ll kill them a day before we set off the charges in Lockport. By then if they find the bodies, it will be too late.”

“What’s your cell phone number, Khalid?” Sultan asked.

“No, no cell phones. Just call us at the Days Inn. And call from your hotel or from a public phone. No goddamn cell phones. We organized this entire operation with no computers or Internet or cell phones, and we’re not gonna start now. The only cell phone call anyone is gonna make is me, when I call in the code to detonate the charges and blow those fucking locks apart.”

“Who’s gonna kill the girl and her boyfriend?” Jawid asked.

“I will.” Benazir quickly broke her silence, “I will be happy to put two bullets in that bitch’s brain. You just call us and tell us where they’re staying. We’ll drive over and do the job. Can you do that without screwing things up?”

“Okay, Sultan, you and Jawid take off now and see if you can catch up with those two by this evening. And remember, be friendly, be sociable. And call me every evening. No fuckin’ cell phones. Got it?” Khalid said.

Sultan and Jawid left Khalid’s room and got back on the bikes and headed east on Route 31 towards Syracuse.

“We should eliminate those two jackasses along with the bitch and her boyfriend,” Benazir commented almost as soon as Sultan and Jawid left the room.

“We will,” Khalid quickly answered.

“I think your cell phone is ringing,” Dave said.

“It’s probably one of my daughters.”

Holly stopped and took the cell phone out of her back saddlebag. Dave stopped several yards ahead of her.

“Hello?”

“Ms. Morgan, this is Agent Chaffee with the Buffalo FBI.”

Holly put her hand over the phone.

“It’s the FBI, Dave.” She paused briefly, “Yes this is Holly Morgan.”

“Ms. Morgan I just wanted to report that we called the local sheriff in Weedsport and he made contact with the two foreign nationals you described. By the way, you described their bikes perfectly. We just wanted to get back to you and let you know the sheriff found nothing unusual in their saddlebags, nor did they seem suspicious in any way.”

“You didn’t find any detonation cord?”

“No he didn’t.”

“Let me talk with the agent, Holly,” Dave said and motioned to give him the cell phone.

“Could you hold one second Mr. Chaffee?” Holly held her hand over the phone. “What the hell do you want to talk to him about? He said the sheriff stopped and searched both foreigners and found nothing.”

“Just give me the damn phone, will ya?” Dave was in no mood to negotiate with Holly.

“Mr. Chaffee my husband would like to speak with you.”

She handed the phone to Dave.

“Mr. Chaffee, I’m David Morgan, Holly’s husband.”

“Hello Mr. Morgan.”

“Yes, hello. Mr. Chaffee I’m a civil engineer. I’ve worked in the mining business many times and know exactly what detonation cord looks like. I am positive there was some detonation cord dangling from one of their saddlebags the other day.”

“Well I’m sorry, Mr. Morgan, but the sheriff thoroughly searched both sets of bags and found absolutely nothing.”

“That’s what bothers me Mr. Chaffee. Because that means they got rid of the detonation cord sometime between yesterday and today. What did they do with it?”

“I have no idea Mr. Morgan. But there is very little we can do about it now.”

“May I suggest something then, Mr.Chaffee?”

“Certainly, what did you have in mind?”

“There were two other foreigners at the Days Inn and they were all dining together last night at the Old Erie Restaurant. Holly and I saw all four of them dining together last night. It’s quite possible the detonation cord could be in their room. Perhaps you might want to search their rooms.”

“That would be very difficult Mr. Morgan. We would need a search warrant and to get a warrant we would have to show probable cause. We don’t have nearly enough information to go to a judge and get a search warrant. We’d surely get a racial profiling charge slapped on us.”

Dave was getting frustrated; Holly was getting exasperated – with Dave.

“Well then how about this Mr. Chaffee: Call the Days Inn and find out when the foreigners are leaving. Make sure the owner informs you when they’ve left. Make sure they don’t clean the room and bring out a bomb-sniffing dog and see what happens.”

“Well I suppose we could do that, Mr. Morgan, and we appreciate your idea and effort. If we find the time we just may take your advice. And thanks again for your concern and your time.”

Agent Chaffee hung up the phone and Dave gave the cell phone back to Holly.

“The husband is as wacky as his wife,” Agent Chaffee commented to the agent who was listening to the entire conversation on another phone.

“Is he gonna check out the rooms like you suggested, that was a pretty good idea?” Holly asked.

“If he finds the time,” Dave answered Holly sarcastically. “Shit, he’s not gonna do a damn thing. He’s just humoring us.”

“You’re getting worked up all over again Dave. I can see that engineering brain of yours working overtime. Jesus Dave, you’re like a hot and cold running faucet. One minute you’re up to your neck in conspiracy terrorist theories, and the next you think the whole idea is crazy. Make up your damn mind.”

“What bothers me Holly is that the sheriff found no detonation cord whatsoever. I would have felt a lot better if they found some cord and then found out those jerks just had it illegally. But damn it, they got rid of it. And you know who they gave it to. They

gave it to Khalid, the electrical engineer. That's who they gave it to. That's what bothers me. Khalid, the anti-Semitic bastard and that mean-spirited bitch."

"Let's find a place where we can eat some lunch. A little fried chicken will settle you down."

Dave laughed. "You know me pretty well, Holly Morgan."

"Well yeah, after 25 years, it's all slowly coming back."

Chapter 13

Five Miles West of Syracuse

Dave decided to forego the fried chicken. It was still only 10:30 in the morning. He'd wait until they got into Syracuse proper. They'd been on the road for two hours but still hadn't found a place to relieve Holly's coffee craving. Caffeine withdrawal symptoms were starting to set in. She was getting surly. They stopped to check out the maps: they presented nothing remotely resembling a town or village that might offer coffee.

They were on Canal Road. But the Erie Canal was nowhere in sight. They were directed onto a section of the towpath again, but they were confused because the map indicated that this section was identified in the brochure as a "natural" or "unfinished trail," which they were determined to avoid with their narrow tires. But this path was paved so they took it. In a hundred yards they entered the Erie Canal State Park. They were now riding along an old section of the original canal that was preserved. There wasn't any boat traffic on the old canal, but several older gentlemen were fishing along the banks, which were thick with underbrush. This part of the original Erie Canal had long been abandoned for any commercial or pleasure boat traffic. In fact, if you did put a boat in the canal, you could only travel on the old canal for several miles before it just abruptly stopped.

The paved towpath ended abruptly at Airport Road, which was bustling with traffic. Having been away from any traffic since Buffalo, it was disconcerting to be back riding a bike with so many cars rushing by. Holly was desperately searching for a place to stop for coffee. They were now in the western suburbs of Syracuse, so finding a coffee rest stop should have presented no problems. They passed under State Route 5, a four-lane, divided highway buzzing with traffic still driving into downtown Syracuse. Soon they found Milton Avenue, a two-lane road which paralleled the busy Route 5 and left the bustling traffic behind. Again, the New York Parks and Trails brochure came through with a more genteel way of getting through Syracuse.

Within a few miles, they entered a residential/commercial area with lots of Italian surnames on the businesses. And then, there it was. Like finding an oasis in the middle of the Sahara Desert. Corbo's Italian Bakery, a nondescript tiny establishment which,

upon close examination, appeared to be a converted old residential home – advertising “Coffee, Espresso, Cannolis, and Italian breads and pastries – cooked fresh daily!”

Holly was overjoyed and couldn’t believe their luck. Finding even a coffee shop in this area of the city looked to be a remote possibility. Finding an establishment like Corbo’s in such an unlikely setting was the ultimate definition of serendipity.

They parked their bikes at the foot of an old wooden staircase, which led up to a porch and the bakery’s front door. The owner and baker, a 20-something-young Italian chap with an outgoing personality, welcomed the weary bikers with some freshly brewed coffee before they even chose their pastry. Dave selected a Cannoli and a cheese danish; Holly just picked out a plain danish. John Piazza had opened his Italian bakery just three months ago. They could smell fresh Italian breads, which had just been removed from the oven and were cooling in a back room where the floors were covered with a light dusting of white flour. They spent 20 minutes drinking coffee and eating their pastries. They refilled their water bottles with some ice and water from John’s refrigerator and headed further east on Milton Avenue. Quickly the area changed from commercial to residential and was quite hilly. This was definitely the Little Italy section of Syracuse.

Dave had the map of Syracuse in his clear plastic flap on his handlebar bag. Milton Avenue dead-ended into Geddes Street North. They followed Geddes Street for a mile, but then it dead-ended into another street that wasn’t on the map. Dave looked at the map again, but was obviously confused. He looked around and headed down one street. Holly followed his lead. But then he doubled back and headed down another street. He stopped again and looked at the map. His head started spinning about like a character in a cartoon movie short, as he looked down one street then another then back again to the first street, then back again at the map. He was confused. Totally flummoxed, or, as his mother might have said, he was completely “*fermished*.” Holly was getting upset following Dave down all these wrong paths, and she finally took control of the situation.

“Hey Dave, do you have any goddamn idea where we are or where you’re going?”

“This map is all fucked up.”

“Dave, just put the damn map away and follow me.”

“Why, do you know where the hell we are?”

“No, not exactly but I have a sense where we’re supposed to go, and you’re running around like the proverbial headless chicken,” Holly was getting upset.

Dave reluctantly gave up the lead to Holly, but he was silent and rarely spoke to her as she calmly proceeded to get into the downtown section of the city within 15 minutes. Dave was impressed with her sense of direction. Somehow they found themselves on Erie Boulevard. They followed Erie Boulevard east through the downtown area where traffic was heavy. About five miles east on Erie, they spotted a bike store and decided to stop there, look for some new gloves for Holly, and ask where the towpath leading to Canastota, New York could be accessed. They decided Canastota – a distance of about 52 miles from Weedsport – was the logical place to stop for the night.

Holly didn’t find any gloves to her liking, but the salesperson at the store said the Erie Canal towpath was about five miles up the road. The towpath actually intersected with Erie Boulevard. From there they could follow the limestone towpath all the way to Canastota – about 20 miles. They weren’t too thrilled about another 20 miles of limestone towpath, but they had no other option. The towpath followed the old Erie Canal through the narrow Old Erie Canal State Park.

Dave had his tires topped off at the bike store on Erie Boulevard. Holly bought some more 16g CO2 cartridges. The bike store was located half way up a steep hill above the boulevard. When they coasted back down the hill they decided to stop at a McDonalds and dine on the food they brought along from the Old Erie Restaurant in Weedsport. Holly’s veal and spaetzel hit the spot and Dave ate the fried chicken like there was no tomorrow. He grudgingly gave Holly a small piece of the chicken, but guarded the rest like a junkyard dog protecting his food.

“Dave, what the hell is it with you and food?” Holly asked.

“What do you mean?” Dave responded innocently, ripping apart another piece of fried chicken.

“Never mind,” she shook her head, deciding that the argument which would have ensued wasn’t worth it.

“No, c’mon,” Dave wanted to pursue the conversation.

“Forget it, Dave. I’d rather talk about how we’re gonna proceed on the rest of this bike trip if we become so obsessed with these crazy conspiracy terrorist theories.”

“Now they’re crazy. Last night they weren’t so crazy.” Dave said.

“That’s exactly what I mean. We both change our minds every other minute. You thought we were overreacting too. Then this morning you changed your mind again.”

“I changed it again after I talked with that FBI agent, Chaffee. I don’t appreciate being humored as some kind of a harmless kook.”

“So where does that leave us? It’s gonna ruin the entire trip. We said that after we called the authorities and reported the detonation cord, we’d both feel we fulfilled our responsibilities. And that was it. But we can’t seem to let it go.”

“That FBI agent bothers me. He doesn’t believe that I identified the detonation cord. If he did, he knows that it’s illegal to possess that stuff. He would have checked that out further. He’d have gone to Weedsport. But he just brushed me off like some well-intentioned wacko.”

“Well I don’t understand. You’re pissed at the FBI agent for doubting your identification of detonation cord? What do we do now? Play amateur detective? Make a citizen’s arrest? C’mon Dave, this is getting ridiculous.”

“Do you believe me? Do you believe I saw detonation cord hanging out of that guy’s saddlebag?”

“Yes, of course I believe you.”

“Then where the hell did that cord go?”

“How the hell should I know?”

“Where do you think it disappeared to?”

“I get your point, Dave. He probably passed it off to Khalid and that bitch.”

“You mean Khalid, your former yoga student who denied his name was Khalid. Khalid, the electrical engineer who worked for the world’s largest engineering contractor – Bechtel – in their mining division. Khalid, the virulent anti-Semite, who was fired from his job, lost his anti-discrimination lawsuit and took off for Pakistan after 9/11.”

“Okay, Dave, I see your point.”

Dave continued, “What do you suppose a bitter, angry, and probably vengeful Khalid did when he got back to Karachi? Joined the local JC’s, volunteered with the Red Cross or Red Crescent – whatever they call it in Pakistan?”

“What are you saying, Khalid joined al Qaeda? Now that is a bit of a stretch.” Holly was suspect of where Dave was going with his argument.

“I don’t know. I may be hallucinating. But boy, he sure was an excellent candidate for a terrorist group. And they would welcome him with open arms. What great credentials for a terrorist. Right attitude, engineering background – electrical engineer with mining and therefore explosive experience. Access to the US with either a green card or actual citizenship, an American wife and children with American citizenship. You couldn’t write a better resume a potential terrorist than Khalid’s.”

“Boy you’ve really thought this through,” Holly said.

“Look, I’ll make you a deal.”

“What?”

“Tonight when we get to Canastota, we’ll discuss every aspect of this bizarre situation. And again I admit, on the surface it’s a long shot. But one way or another we’ll either leave the whole thing behind in Canastota or we’ll pursue it with that FBI agent until we drive him nuts – or at least until he goes back to the Days Inn in Weedsport with a bomb-sniffing dog. We’ll play on his psyche. What would be the consequences if we’re right and he failed to follow this up? Tell him if he doesn’t follow this up we’ll call the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* – that usually scares the shit out of government servants and sets those politicians in action.”

“Okay. That sounds like a plan. Sic the *New York Times* and Woodward and Bernstein on them. That can scare anyone. But can we get back to *us*? You and me and the bike trip and reaching the Hudson River and meeting my daughter in Albany?”

“Let’s go. We’ll resolve everything tonight in Canastota. Promise.”

They left the McDonalds and headed east on the busy Erie Boulevard. They decided it was safer just to ride on the sidewalk. In a few miles they came to Towpath Road, which led directly to the towpath and the Old Erie State Park. In a mile they were back on a limestone towpath next to a section of the original Erie Canal. They were again

alone on the towpath. Not another soul in sight. The bike path was heavily forested again.

It was the warmest day of the trip so far. It was the first time they rode their bikes without a windbreaker. It was probably in the low 70s, another ideal day for biking. And again the wind was from the west, at their backs. The limestone surface was a bit of a drag, but they had no choice. It was the only safe bike route to Canastota.

After about five miles on the towpath, hugging the banks of the old Erie Canal, the limestone towpath transformed into a rather bumpy, rock-strewn dirt road, and for a minute they thought they may have lost the towpath. But that would have been impossible – there were no other paths to have taken. Soon the dirt road led them to a small enclave of rather shabby-looking house-trailers and shacks that looked more like they belonged in the rural south rather than upstate New York. It was a rather impoverished site, and to complement the scene further, there were quite a few mangy looking junkyard dogs wandering around the grounds unleashed.

The immediate sight of the dogs wandering aimlessly about immediately gave pause to both Dave and Holly and they instantly became apprehensive. They expected to be chased and attacked at any moment and realized they couldn't outpace the dogs on the bumpy, rock-strewn roads. They quickly slowed their pace down not wanting to encourage a chase. But to their surprise the mangy dogs hardly paid them any attention. They must have been used to the bike traffic that came through on a regular basis all summer long. In less than a mile they were back on the limestone towpath.

It took only about an hour and a half to cover the 20 miles along the old Erie Canal till they arrived in Canastota. The old canal ran right through the heart of town. They exited the towpath onto Main Street and then cut over to Peterboro Street, which led them towards Interstate 90, where two hotels were located just a few hundred yards from the eastbound entrance to the Interstate. The two hotels were within a hundred yards of each other, and Holly thought the Graziano Motor Lodge looked more appealing.

Canastota, New York, was not quite as charming or quaint as some of the other canal towns Dave and Holly had visited. This may have been due to its location on the old Erie Canal, which had no boat or commercial traffic and hence Canastota lost some of the commerce the other towns on the more modern, navigable canal could generate.

Although slightly run-down, Canastota still had a personality all its own. Its main claim to fame was its Boxing Hall of Fame, celebrating mostly the career of Carmon Basilio, Canastota's favorite son and both the world welterweight and middleweight champion in the 1940s.

Dave and Holly checked into the Graziano Motor lodge at about three in the afternoon. Dave gave his credit card to the receptionist. The small lobby of the motel had large photographs of Rocky Graziano in a typical fighting pose hanging on the walls. This prompted Dave to ask if Rocky Graziano was associated with the motel. Turns out he was a distant cousin of the owner.

Just across the parking lot from the Graziano Motor Lodge was the Graziano Grill, and if you were a guest of the motel, you got a 10% discount on your meals at the restaurant. Dave and Holly quickly showered and were the first customers at the restaurant. It opened at four. They both filled up on pasta and bread, like all bikers on a long journey. Get those carbs into the blood stream as quickly as possible. The food was rather disappointing. With a name like The Graziano Grill, they expected the Italian food to taste better than what they got.

They headed back across the parking lot to the motel. Leaving the motel and heading towards the restaurant were Sultan and Jawid. Dave and Holly were shocked to see them, and even more surprised to see how sociable and talkative they had become. They stopped in the parking lot and exchanged pleasantries. Sultan informed Dave and Holly that they decided to head all the way to Albany.

Unbeknownst to Dave and Holly, Sultan and Jawid had stopped at the Canastota Days Inn first and inquired if their "two biking friends" had checked in. Upon getting a negative response, they left and then went to the Graziano Motor Lodge, where they got a room on the same floor as Dave and Holly, just two doors down.

"How's that for a coincidence?" Dave asked Holly, as they walked up to the second floor of the two-story motel.

"I suppose you think they're following us, huh Dave?"

"As a matter of fact, I do. What do you think?"

"I don't know what the hell to think. Maybe. I don't know."

They entered their dingy, poorly-lit room and turned on the TV. They propped up some pillows against the headboard of the king-sized bed and started channel surfing. They settled on *Oprah*, but neither was paying much attention.

“Okay, do you want to call Agent Chaffee or should I call him?” Dave asked.

“I’ll call him. You’re liable to get all pissed off at him if he starts to doubt your theories.”

“Okay you call, but tell him everything this time, including the part about that cold-hearted bitch. And don’t forget the implied threat of the *New York Times* if he doesn’t check out those rooms in the Days Inn in Weedsport.”

“You’ll be right here when I talk to him. If I leave anything out you can just remind me.”

“All right, go ahead and call him.”

“Now this is it Dave. After this call we forget about this crap and concentrate on the trip and you and me. Okay?”

“Yes, that’s what I said.”

Holly dialed Agent Chaffee’s phone number she had logged on her cell phone. It was his personal office number so she wouldn’t have to go through the receptionist. The phone rang four times, and finally his answering machine picked up. Holly quickly covered the phone with her hand.

“He’s not in; I got the answering machine. Should I leave the message on his machine?”

“Yeah go ahead. We’ll see if he calls back.”

She left a 22-minute message on Agent Chaffee’s answering machine. She didn’t miss a detail including the implied threat of going to the media or what would possibly happen to his career at the bureau if they were right and he didn’t take their warning seriously. She was masterful at her presentation, impassioned but not overly dramatic. Here was a woman who appeared regularly on CNBC and spoke with Marie Bartaromo, the sexy and provocative anchor of the “Closing Bell” segment, on both a professional and personal level.

She put down her cell phone when she was finished and smiled at Dave. He reached over and kissed her lightly on the cheek. Then Dave picked up his cell phone and started making a call.

“Who you calling?” she was curious.

“I’m calling a guy I used to work with back at McKee. Best goddamn civil engineer I ever met. You might remember him; we went out together a few times with him and his wife Karen.”

“Oh sure, sailboat Herb.”

“That’s right. We went sailing with him and Karen a few times.”

“What are you calling him for?”

“Just listen.”

The phone rang twice and Herb picked it up.

“Hello, this is Herb.”

“Hello ‘This is Herb.’ This is David.”

“David Cohen, where the hell are you? I thought you went on a bike trip with Holly. Along the Erie Canal, wasn’t it?”

“That’s where we are right now. In Canastota, New York.

“Say hello to Holly for me.”

Dave turned to Holly, “Herb says ‘hello.’”

Holly bellowed out, “Hello Herb!”

“What’s up? I figured by now you’d either be married to Holly or else she would have thrown your ass in the canal.”

“Very funny, Herb. Look, I need some Internet help. Do you have your computer on?”

“Yeah it’s on.”

“Get on the Internet for me. I need a Google search.”

“Hey this sounds important.”

“C’mon Herbie, just do it.”

“Okay, I’m on Google.”

“Okay, search for: ‘Erie Canal average depth and width near Buffalo.’”

“Ooookay, weee’re there. Let me hit this site, hang on. Okay, let’s see, blah, blah, blah, okay here it is, but it’s the average along the entire canal.”

“Okay, what is it?”

“Fifteen-foot average depth and 125 feet wide.”

“Wow, I didn’t realize it was that deep. Now look up the average depth of the Niagara River – above the Falls.”

“Dave what the hell are you up to?”

“Just do it, will ya?”

“Okay, here it is. Let’s see. It’s about 40 feet deep near the Peace Bridge; then it averages about 30 feet until it shallows down near the rapids a mile before the Falls.”

“Okay now here’s the tricky part Herb. I want you to do an open channel flow calculation. Say about a one-percent slope...”

Herb quickly interrupted, “Yeah, let me guess a one-percent slope, 15 feet deep and 125 feet wide.”

“Exactly.”

“I’ve got to get the computer program up that makes that calc. I can’t do that shit on the fly anymore.”

“Go ahead,” Dave said.

While Herb was getting the computer program up, Holly was making all kinds of faces at Dave.

“I thought we were finished with this amateur detective crap, David.”

“Not yet, we still have the rest of the day, besides I’m just curious. Just hang on.”

Herb finished the quick computer open channel flow calculation.

“David, that’s a shit load of water. Why the hell are you obsessed with this stuff? I wouldn’t blame Holly if she ran you and your bike into the canal. No wonder you’ve been divorced twice.”

“Listen to me Herb. Thirty miles from the canal’s entrance from the Niagara River are the first set of locks on the Erie Canal. They drop the canal down 70 feet or so. Between the Niagara River and Lockport, where these two sets of locks are located is 30 miles of open channel flow. Nothing to stop the flow should those locks catastrophically fail.”

“Why the hell would those locks fail? There’s very little hydraulic pressure on them. I’m sure they’re designed for the head of water and then some.”

“No, I was just wondering what might happen if they did fail. Just curious. It would be quite a flood downstream. More than half the flow of the Niagara River would inundate that area of New York State.”

“I don’t even think that would be the worst of it.” Herb said.

“What do you mean?”

“Well if you lost that kind of flow from the Niagara River, you’d certainly cause all kinds of havoc with the massive turbines and electric generators located at the foot of the Falls. You’d certainly force them to shut down for lack of water flow.”

There was a long pause and a few seconds of silence.

“Dave, Dave, are you still there?”

“Yeah, yeah I’m still here. Are you sure the diversion canals for the turbines are downstream of the Erie Canal?”

“Positive, I’ve done work down there. They’re at least 5 miles downstream of the Erie Canal. Oh absolutely, you have a structural failure in the locks at Lockport, you not only have one hell of a flood on your hands, you’ll have another East Coast blackout like they did in ’03. There’s no way they can recover from a sudden loss of generating capacity at the Falls. It could take hours, even days, to divert some of the power from Quebec and then fix the damage to the grid. No grid can sustain that kind of an instantaneous loss of a massive amount of electrical power without damage. It would be 2003 all over again.”

“Shit; that’s what they’re up to.”

“What? Who’s up to? What are you talking about?”

“No, nothing. Thanks Herb. You’ve been very helpful.”

Holly was taking the one-sided conversation all in. It wasn’t too difficult to figure it all out. She caught Dave’s glance as he was trying to piece everything together.

“It’s still not over yet. Is it Dave?” There was sympathy in her voice, mostly for herself.

“We’ve got to call that Chaffee guy back.” Dave was in a world of engineering calculations and terrorist conspiracy theories.

“Could you please connect me to Mr. Hemant Shah’s room,” Jawid said to the Days Inn receptionist.

“Hello.”

“Hello, Khalid. We’re at the Graziano Motor Lodge in Canastota. We’re two doors down from their room.”

“Good. Stay with them. See if you can find out where they’ll be tomorrow. Maybe even have breakfast with them. But don’t follow them too closely. Maybe even take the lead tomorrow. They aren’t stupid. They’ll know if you’re following them. Be discreet. I still need another day to work on the charges and the detonation mechanism. We’re moving the entire operation up. I’d like to set the charges in the locks day after tomorrow. Are you sure about the directions on how to fill and empty the locks.”

“Yes, we watched the operator go over the method twice while we were in the control room,” Jawid said.

“Listen, we’re getting out of the Days Inn tomorrow morning. It’s too dangerous to stay here and finish the work on the bombs. That sheriff could have second thoughts and return. Who knows what those two assholes told the authorities? Look up in that Parks and Trails canal brochure a hotel or motel in North Tonawanda and give me the name. That’s where we will be staying until further notice. Call us there tomorrow and let us know where you and those other bikers are.”

Jawid gave Khalid the name of a hotel in North Tonawanda and then underlined it in the canal brochure to make sure he didn’t forget it.

Chapter 14

Canastota, New York: Wednesday, September 6

Holly was up and in the bathroom at four in the morning. Neither she nor Dave got a very restful night's sleep. Both their minds were moving at warp speed. Holly finished in the bathroom, flipped off the light and made her way back into the king-sized bed.

"Are you up Dave?"

"Yeah, what time is it?"

"It's only four."

"I don't feel like I got any sleep last night." Dave said.

"Neither do I."

"Dave, if these people really are who we think they are, we could be in grave danger. Do you realize that?"

"Yes of course, that's what kept me up all night. I got so wrapped up in the engineering and conspiracy plots I forgot that we're the only ones in peril."

"Dave, if that is the case, I don't think we can continue on the towpath. We're much too vulnerable on bicycles."

"Absolutely, I agree."

"They know we've contacted the authorities, right?" Holly said.

"They must, of course. Who else would have? But they don't really know what we've told the FBI. And because there hasn't been any follow-up by the police, they must think that they're still safe. Their cover hasn't been blown. So we present their only problem, and they're not really sure how much of a problem. If they did, they'd have already tried to do something to us."

"Jesus Dave, you're scaring the shit out of me."

"I'm sorry," he drew her closer. She rested her head on his chest. "But we've got to figure out what we should do to protect ourselves. At this point we can't rely on the FBI. They don't believe us, and after your call, they really probably think we've stepped off the deep end. And to be honest, we're still not sure ourselves we haven't created this entire bizarre situation out of our crazy imaginations."

"Dave we've got to ditch these guys today before we do anything."

“I think you’re right. How far is the nearest good-sized town where we can rent a car?”

“I’m not sure; I think it’s Rome. I’ll get the canal book.”

Holly turned on the light near her side of the bed, got up out of bed and dug through her saddlebags until she found the Parks and Trails *Erie Canal* brochure. Dave sat up in bed and turned his bedside light on. They both looked at the maps in the brochure.

“Rome is only 20 miles from here, Dave.”

“Yeah I see. I’m sure we could find a car rental agency in Rome.”

“We could put our bikes in the rental car, or we could stop at a bike store in Rome and get a carrier.”

“Yeah, but somehow we have to leave Sultan and Jawid in Canastota,” Dave said.

“We could leave before seven this morning.”

“Call the front desk and tell them we want to leave a message for our biking partners to meet us for breakfast, and see if she tells us the room they’re in.”

“Why?” Holly asked.

“Because I suspect they got a room one or two doors from us when they checked in yesterday so they could listen to us when we leave this morning.” Dave’s mind was spinning fast.

Holly called the front desk. Then hung up the phone.

“You’re right. They’re two doors down,” she said.

“Look, I actually think we’re safest if we keep them as close as possible for the time being. So let’s leave here at seven, and make some noise when we leave and talk loud enough so they’ll know we’re going to breakfast at that diner on Peterboro Street that we passed on the way into town yesterday. Then, if they show up at the diner in ten minutes or so, we’ll know they were listening.”

“Yeah, and if they do show up in ten minutes or so, that’ll confirm some of our suspicions about them.”

“Exactly.”

“Shit, I’m scared David.”

“So am I, but what the hell can we do?”

“I just hope we’re not blowing this thing way out of proportion. I just hope we’re doing the right thing.”

“Let me ask you a question,” Dave paused. “Just for the sake of argument, let’s say that on September 10, 2001, a couple taking the same bike ride along the canal we’re taking was eating at the Old Erie Restaurant sitting next to Mohamed Atta, the ringleader of the Twin Towers disaster. Mohamed and his pals are talking in Arabic, figuring who the hell in the restaurant would understand a word they were saying. They’re talking about blowing up the Twin Towers, and it just so happens the girl in the next booth was a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco and spoke fluid Arabic. You tell me what that couple would have done, and do you think if they called Agent Chaffee he would have believed them any more than he believed us?”

“Let’s go get ready for breakfast, and make sure we talk loud enough for our pals to hear us when we leave the room.” Holly sounded more confident and convinced they were doing the right thing.

Dave and Holly were on their bikes and headed for Flow’s Diner by 7:05. They were the only patrons in the diner. Flow, the owner, cook and waitress, brought them their breakfasts – French toast for Holly, buttermilk pancakes and sausage for Dave. Two bites into their meals and Sultan and Jawid walked in the diner. Holly was sitting with her back to the entrance so Dave saw them first and waved them over.

“Want to join us for breakfast?” Dave asked.

“Sure,” Sultan answered.

Holly got up and came around to Dave’s side of the booth. Sultan and Jawid now sat with their backs to the entrance of the diner.”

“You know,” Dave said, “I’m not sure we’ve ever formally introduced ourselves. I’m Dave Johnson and this is my wife Holly.”

“I’m Sultan Khan and this is my brother Jawid.”

Everyone was shaking hands and everyone was lying.

“So you’ve decided to go all the way to Albany like us.” Holly tried to keep the friendly repartee going.

“Right,” Jawid answered. “School doesn’t start back up till the end of the month, so we figured we’d go till we got to the Hudson River.”

“Well, we welcome the company; it got pretty desolate on the trail. Sometimes we were the only bikes on the towpath for miles at a time,” Holly said.

“Yeah, we can help each other if anyone gets a flat,” Dave said.

“Right,” Sultan quickly spoke up.

They chatted for several minutes, Sultan and Jawid ordered their breakfasts and Holly quickly finished her French toast and drank the remnants in her coffee cup.

“Hey, that reminds me,” said Holly. “I’m gonna top off my tires with some CO₂; they were a little low this morning. Excuse me.”

Holly got up and walked out to her bike. Dave kept the friendly conversation going for several minutes then Holly came bursting back into the diner in a bit of a huff.

“Dave, damn it, I think I left my wallet in the motel room. I can’t find it.”

“Calm down, it’s got to be here or in the motel. You had it last night, right?”

“Yeah I’m sure, c’mon back with me and help me look for it.”

“Okay, don’t panic. We’ll find it. Women.” Dave said and smiled at Sultan and Jawid looking for some sympathy. “Let me buy you guys breakfast. Here’s a twenty and a ten: that should cover everything. My wife seems to be in a panic about her wallet. We’ll see you out on the towpath.”

Holly had already left the diner and was on her bike when Dave came out and got on his bike.

“I’m sure you left the wallet somewhere in the room.”

“I’ve got my wallet right here Dave,” she pointed to her zippered pocket on the side of her Italian designer biking outfit. “Let’s get the hell out of here.”

Dave smiled and just shook his head.

They biked to the bridge over the old canal, several hundred yards from the diner.

“Don’t take the towpath, Dave. I checked the brochure map; we can take State Route 46; it’s called Canal Road. It parallels the towpath, but we’ll make much better time. It has a bike lane. I saw it this morning on our way to the diner.”

They pedaled across the bridge and turned right on Canal Road.

“Well, Sultan and Jawid will be on the road in a few minutes so we better figure out how we’re gonna ditch them.”

“I don’t think so, Dave. Jawid and Sultan aren’t going anywhere on their bikes for quite a while.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I didn’t top off my tires, Dave. I got out my Swiss Army Knife and cut all four of their tires clean, clear through to the rims. There’s no way in hell they can patch them. They’ll need brand new tires. I also cut all their spares and took their cell phone. Unless one of them kept a cell phone with them, they don’t have a cell phone now.”

“You’ve got to be kidding!”

“No I’m not, and oh yeah, I took their New York Parks and Trails brochure, so now you can have your own.”

“Hey, maybe I was right. Maybe you should have joined the CIA or FBI.”

“Dave I’m gonna take the lead. I’m gonna really push it. Can you keep the pace? I’m gonna try to go at least 20 for as long as I can till we get to Rome.”

“Go ahead. I’ll keep up. I’ve got enough adrenaline pulsing through these veins to keep pace with Lance Armstrong. Besides those two guys will have to wait till at least ten before a bike store opens.” Dave was shouting ahead to Holly as she was flying down Canal Road.

“They’ll have to wait much longer than that.” Holly hollered back to Dave who was barely keeping up with her burning pace, now 22 miles per hour. They had a nice tail wind.

“Why’s that?”

“Cause there ain’t no goddamn bike store in Canastota according to the brochure,” Holly smiled to herself.

“They fucking cut the tires clean clear through. They cut the damn spares. They stole my cell phone and they took the brochure.” Sultan was in a panic.

“What the fuck are we gonna do now?” Jawid asked.

“We gotta call Khalid, now, and tell him what happened.”

“Call him with what?”

“Didn’t you bring your cell phone?” Sultan asked.

“No. You said you were taking yours, so I didn’t bring mine.”

They walked the mile back to the motel with their bikes and flattened tires and called from a pay phone in the lobby. They had to call Khalid on his cell phone because he’d already left the Days Inn in Weedsport and was already heading toward Tonawanda. Khalid was irate and told them to wait in Canastota and he’d send Benazir to pick them up in a few hours. He still had several hours more work on the explosive charges and the detonation devices.

“They’re in Canastota at the Graziano Motor Lodge. Get rid of them. I don’t want to see any trace of them or their goddamn bicycles,” Khalid said.

Benazir was in the Graziano Motor Lodge parking lot before 10 a.m. Jawid and Sultan were sitting in the lobby of the motel. Their bikes were leaning against some bushes just in front of the motel entrance just off to the side. Benazir honked the horn. She didn’t want to get out of the car. Sultan and Jawid came outside and broke down the back seat of the Malibu so they could fit both bikes in the trunk. They had to remove the front wheels. The frames extended into the back seat. The three of them would have to sit in the front seat. It was crowded and uncomfortable. Benazir hadn’t said a word to either Sultan or Jawid. She was too busy trying to figure out when and where and how she would eliminate them in broad daylight.

She got back on Interstate 90, but got off after Rochester and followed Route 31. Khalid was working on the bombs in a state park just off Route 31 called Royalton Ravine Conservation Park. They rented an isolated cabin in the State Park after they left the Days Inn specifically to work on the explosive devices. She was only about an hour from the park and knew she had to devise a plan to get both Sultan and Jawid out of the car. But they provided the opportunity for her.

“I gotta piss bad,” Sultan said.

“Me too,” Jawid concurred.

“Wait a minute, we’re right along the canal. We can find a spot where they can’t see you from the road. She turned off Bear Ridge Road down a dirt road, which looked like a place to launch a small boat. She drove to the end of the dirt path, just a few hundred

yards from Bear Ridge road. Sultan and Jawid both got out of the car and rushed for the canal. They stood there side by side like they were at a public urinal and relieved themselves right into the Erie Canal.

Benazir attached the silencer to the .22 semiautomatic she had taken from her purse. She opened the car door and left it open as she quietly approached Sultan and quickly shot him twice in the back of the head. He fell straight into the canal. Jawid couldn't figure what the hell happened. He was still pissing, holding his penis in his hand. He turned around and saw Benazir. She had a broad smile on her face as she aimed the gun at Jawid's face and quickly fired twice. He fell back into the canal. They both floated on the surface of the canal, one face up the other face down. She pumped two more shots apiece into them. Then she dragged out their bikes from the trunk of the car one at a time. She was amazed at how light they were – especially the titanium bike. She dumped both bikes in the canal – one on top of Jawid, one on top of Sultan. Sultan and Jawid and both bikes slowly sank beneath the surface of the canal.

Dave and Holly got to Rome in just over an hour. They were both sweating profusely. Their hearts were racing when they stopped briefly at the intersection of Heelpath Road, Route 46, and the very busy Erie Boulevard. For the first time they felt safe in the comfort of all the traffic. Dave checked the map in his clear plastic flap. The map directed them across Erie Boulevard to West Liberty Street. They waited at the light, then crossed Erie and biked only a quarter mile on Gilfford Road till they reached West Liberty Street. They turned right on West Liberty and followed it two miles right into the heart of downtown Rome, New York.

As luck would have it, they found a local bakery with several wrought iron tables set up outside on the sidewalk, a sign on the window advertising: “We serve Starbucks freshly brewed coffee.” They leaned their bikes against a light post and entered the bakery.

“What do you want? I'm buying,” Dave said.

“Coffee and anything sweet.” Holly sat down at a table; Dave went over to the counter to order.

He brought back two coffees and four glazed doughnuts – still slightly warm. He had to make two trips.

“We must have averaged close to 20 miles per hour,” Dave said, while devouring his first doughnut.

“Fear is quite the motivator.” She paused for a moment, “but at least we established one fact for sure.”

“What’s that?”

“Those two were definitely up to no good. I’m sure of that.”

“How can you be so sure of that?”

“If you befriended two people on a bike trip and were having breakfast with them, and then found out that after they left the table early, your tires were slashed, your spare inner tubes were cut in half and your cell phone was stolen, what would you have done?”

“Called the police.”

“Exactly, and the police would have tracked us down on that road in ten minutes. But no police, huh Dave?”

“No, of course not, how could they call the cops if they are planning what we think they’re planning and bring all that attention to themselves. What do you think they did?”

“I’m sure they phoned Khalid and that shrew.”

“Look, we gotta find a car rental agency,” Dave said. Then he turned to a young couple sitting at the next table, “Excuse me. Is there a car rental agency nearby?”

“Yeah,” said the man. “There’s an Enterprise car rental agency about three blocks back up on Erie Boulevard.”

Chapter 15

Royalton Ravine State Park, Gasport, New York

Benazir drove into Royalton Ravine State Park and parked the Malibu in front of the cabin they had rented. It was just after four in the afternoon. The park was uninhabited except for Khalid and Benazir. Khalid heard the car pull up in front of the cabin and was at first startled by the sound. He was totally absorbed in his work and forgot for the moment Benazir was out on an assignment, but quickly remembered and went outside to greet her.

“Is it done?” he asked.

“It’s finished. Where did you find those guys? They were dumber than that idiot in Bhopal.” Benazir slammed the car door shut in anger. “They let two rank amateurs pull the wool over their dumb-ass eyes.”

“Both those guys spent over a year in training camps in Afghanistan,” Khalid said.

“They should have spent another year there. Now what are we gonna do about those two we met at the restaurant in Weedsport, especially the woman who recognized you?”

“There’s not much we can do now. We have no idea where they are. They’re obviously on to us, but they can’t have a clue as to what our plans are, and even if they did, the authorities obviously didn’t buy their story.”

“How can you be so sure of that?”

“If the authorities believed whatever story they told them, our room and that motel in Weedsport would have been surrounded by FBI SWAT teams. Instead, some local sheriff stopped Sultan and Jawid and found nothing.”

“They’re still gonna make our escape difficult.”

“We’ll have to face that problem after we blow the canal locks. If we get caught trying to get to Canada, then we get caught. The mission is more important.”

Benazir turned away from Khalid and raised her eyebrows. She didn’t quite agree with Khalid about getting caught. But she hid her facial expression and held her comments to herself.

Khalid brought Benazir over to a table where he was putting the finishing touches on the bombs. The C-4 explosive and detonation devices were neatly packed in four

aluminum briefcases. The kind you might find in a *James Bond* movie handcuffed to a State Department official carrying important documents; the cases were also very similar to those metal briefcases those sexy girls carry out on stage in that inane television program *Deal or No Deal*. Khalid had purchased all four at a Wal-Mart.

He filled the empty space in the metal cases with a sand/concrete driveway patch mix, also purchased at Wal-Mart. The sand would make sure the briefcases would sink and stay positioned at the bottom of the canal near the appropriate concrete walls. Each aluminum briefcase weighed close to 30 pounds. There was virtually no current in the Erie Canal, and as long as no boats were entering the locks, it was virtually impossible for those metal briefcases to budge an inch. Khalid figured at two in the morning in September, there would be no chance of any boats trying to move through the locks at Lockport.

Khalid took great pride in explaining all of this to Benazir, who pretended to be fascinated, but who could have cared less. She was preoccupied with the two bikers Sultan and Jawid let escape and how she would get through passport control and customs in Niagara Falls after the explosions and the chaos soon to unfold thereafter in the cities up and down the East Coast of the United States.

“So what do we do now?” Benazir asked.

“Well, first we have to check to see if the detonation electronic mechanisms work by telephone.” Khalid took out his cell phone, “And we have to do this at a distance of about 15 or 20 miles. That’s where we’ll be when we set off the charges: somewhere near Tonawanda.”

“What about the garage door openers you purchased at the Radio Shack in Queens?”

“They were a backup if the phone didn’t work. I was going to use Jawid and Sultan to stay in Lockport just in case and use the door openers. But obviously we’ll have to scratch that idea. We’ll test the phone thoroughly. I’m sure it will work.”

“Will the detonation and electronics work under water?” Benazir asked.

“Water will actually carry the signal much better than the air.”

Khalid hadn’t attached the final detonation mechanism to the electronics so he could call on his cell phone and see if the connection was completed to set off the detonation. He told Benazir what to look for and drove about 15 miles from the state park. He was

tempted to use the cell phone to call Benazir and tell her that he was positioned but he had told her to just keep looking at electronic devices. It would be apparent when the appropriate contacts were made after he dialed the number on his cell phone.

From his spot 15 miles away from the park, Khalid dialed the designated phone number. Back in the cabin Benazir had all four metal briefcases opened and could both see and hear the electronics make the right contacts. Khalid repeated the phone call four times. And four times Benazir heard the clicks and saw the switches make contact.

Thirty minutes later Khalid returned.

“How did it work?” he asked as soon as he entered the cabin.”

“Perfectly,” she replied.

“Do you know how many times I tested the contacts?”

“Four,” she said.

“Yes! Exactly!”

“What do we do now? Wait back in the motel in Tonawanda?”

“No. I already checked out of there. It was too dangerous to stay. Those assholes may have written down the name of the motel when they gave it to us last night, and then left that piece of paper back in Canastota. We’ll just stay here till about ten then drive over to Lockport to position the explosives. I want to talk with that lock operator. I don’t trust the instructions Sultan and Jawid gave us if the locks aren’t in the proper position. I may need your help to distract him after we talk with him. Actually I think we better get to Lockport a little earlier. I want to check out the locks myself. Those pictures Jawid and Sultan took left some minor details unanswered. Let’s get to Lockport this afternoon around 3:00 or 3:30. In fact, let’s leave now.”

It was just after noon.

Chapter 16

Office of the FBI, Buffalo, New York: Tuesday, September 5

“You gotta hear this Jerry,” Douglas Chaffee said to a fellow agent sitting next to him in the FBI offices in downtown Buffalo.

“Hear what?” Jerry DeGorgio replied.

“Remember when I asked you to listen in on a conversation I had yesterday with a Mr. and Mrs. Morgan?”

“Yeah, that wacko married couple with their terrorist bomb theories,” DeGorgio said.

“Well I just finished listening to a 22-minute taped phone call – part explanation, part diatribe, part threat – from the wife. You gotta hear this to believe it.”

“I got no time to listen to that shit, what was it about?”

“Oh, I don’t know, something about blowing up the canal locks in Lockport, flooding the city of Rochester, shutting down the Niagara power station, blacking out the east coast of the United States, and all the turmoil that might cause.”

“You kidding me, Doug? Where the hell do these people come up with this stuff?”

“I still got the tape. You want to listen to it?”

“No way.”

“At the end of the tape she threatens to call the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* if we don’t send a bomb sniffing dog to the Days Inn in Weedsport.”

“Weedsport! Where the fuck is Weedsport, anyway?”

“I think it’s just west of Syracuse – maybe ten fifteen miles west.”

“Yeah, we’ll schlep out to Weedsport and back –six friggin’ hours of driving, right.” DeGorgio said.

“I love when people threaten us with calling the press. That shit just drives me up a wall.”

“Yeah I know.”

Agent Chaffee paused for a minute than snickered out loud, “Jeez, what would happen to us if the Morgans had somehow actually caught wind of a real terrorist plot?”

“You mean if they were right and we didn’t check it out?” DeGorgio asked.

“Yeah. I mean we’d get crucified.” Chaffee said. “We’d wind up opening an FBI office in Ishpeming.”

“Where the hell is Ishpeming?”

“Exactly. My point exactly. Hey didn’t Ron Wilson get transferred to our Syracuse office?” Chaffee asked.

“Yep.”

“Maybe we should give him a call. He could get a dog from the airport and check out that Days Inn for us. It wouldn’t take him but an hour or so.”

“Are you serious Doug?” DeGorgio was dumbfounded.

“Sure. What the hell. We’ll just tell Wilson there might be a mad bomber in that area. We got a tip from some tourist. We don’t have to give any names. Play it down. You know, the old ‘ounce of prevention’ theory.”

“Boy those Morgans really seem to have you rattled. Yeah, sure give Wilson a call. He’s a good guy. He’ll go after work to check it out. But don’t mention anything about all those goofy terrorist conspiracy theories or he might tell us to go fuck ourselves and then we’ll have to drive the six hours ourselves.”

“Nah, I’ll just say it’s a lead we have to check out and leave it at that. I’m gonna call him now.”

“I hope you realize how crazy this is. We got half our department and half the New York State Highway Patrol looking for Bucky Williams.” DeGorgio paused slightly then looked up at Chaffee. “You remember Bucky? He just shot and killed a New York State Patrolmen and seriously wounded another, but we’re on some goddamn wild goose chase.” DeGorgio was almost laughing out loud.

Just before Agent Chaffee was about to pick up the telephone receiver and call Ron Wilson in Syracuse, his telephone rang. He looked at the caller ID.

“Shit, Jerry you’re not gonna believe this. That wacky Morgan broad is calling. Pick up the extension and listen in on this call. These people are getting to be a royal pain in the ass.”

Chapter 17

Enterprise Car Rental Agency, Rome, New York

“They’re gonna rent us a Dodge Caravan for the same price as a mid-sized car. They need to get the van back to Buffalo.” Holly said, as she left the agency rental office. Dave was watching their bikes.

“Great, we can probably fit both bikes in the back without taking off the front wheels,” Dave said.

They walked their bikes over to the large white van, folded down the appropriate back seats and easily maneuvered both bikes into the back of the van.

“You wanna drive or should I?” Dave asked.

“You drive. I’m gonna try and get some sleep. How long till we get back to the Adams Mark?”

“It shouldn’t be more than three, three-and-a-half hours. It looks about 180 miles.” Dave had started the engine and was reading the map from Enterprise, figuring out how to get to Interstate 90. Rome was about ten miles off the Interstate.

“Let’s go.”

Dave took off out of the parking lot onto Erie Boulevard and headed south. He took a few wrong turns but eventually made it to the Interstate. Holly feigned sleeping but was wide awake and on the telephone ten minutes after they got on Interstate 90.

“Who the hell are you calling?” Dave looked over and saw Holly with her cell phone. She held up her free hand and waved him off with out saying a word.

“Information, yes could you please give me the number of the Canastota Police Department?”

“You can’t be serious!”

Holly waved him off again, more aggressively, while waiting for the phone number. Then she accepted the added charge for dialing the number directly. Dave waited impatiently to hear what this was about.

“Canastota Police Department, Sargent Cirelli speaking.”

“Yes, ah Sergeant. I was, ah, just wondering if anyone, ah, reported their bicycle tires being slashed and their cell phone being stolen.” Holly didn’t quite know how to start the conversation. She was hesitant.

“Excuse me?” The sergeant was befuddled. “Was your bike damaged?”

“No, not mine, but friends we were riding with had their cell phone stolen and their tires cut. We just wondered if they had reported that to the police?”

“We’ve had no reports of a bike damaged or a cell phone stolen this morning. Could I have your name please?”

Holly disconnected her cell phone.

“What the hell are you doing?” Dave finally got a chance to say something without being waved off by Holly.

“I just wanted to be sure those guys didn’t contact the police about their bikes. They could have contacted them and the police may have assumed we were on the towpath or took a different road. I don’t know.”

“Well, are you satisfied now?”

“Yeah, but could we do one more thing?”

“What?” Dave was frustrated.

“Let’s stop at the Graziano Motor Lodge. Canastota is just a few miles from here, and the motel is just a hundred yards off the Interstate.”

Dave took his eyes off the road and turned towards Holly.

“You’re kidding, right?”

“No, I’m serious. I just want to see if they went back to the motel to call someone to pick them up.”

“Yeah, and what if they’re still there. I don’t think they’ll be too happy to see us.”

“If they’re still there and we see them outside, we’ll just drive right by the motel. They’ll never see us. They don’t expect us to come back driving a white Dodge Caravan. And besides the windows of the van are tinted, they’d never recognize who the hell is in the van.”

Dave turned off Interstate 90 at the Canastota exit and drove by the Graziano Motor Lodge. No bicycles and no one waiting outside the motel. Dave drove into the motel parking lot and pulled up to the front entrance.

“Now what, Sherlock?”

“Just wait here. I’m going inside and talk with the receptionist.”

Five minutes later Holly got back in the van.

“We just missed them.”

“Thank God.” Dave quickly interrupted.

“They left about ten minutes before we got here. Check this out. A young woman in a black Chevy Malibu picked them up. She never got out of the car, the receptionist said. I’m sure it was that bitch from the restaurant in Weedsport.”

“Yeah I’m sure it was. So what?”

“So nothing. It just proves that we’re not as crazy as Agent Chaffee probably thinks we are. It just helps confirming all our suspicions.”

“You’re preaching to the choir. You don’t have to convince me something is rotten in Denmark. It’s Chaffee and the FBI we have to convince.”

Dave was back on the Interstate heading towards Buffalo. Within ten minutes Holly was back on her cell phone.

Dave looked over again.

“Now who the hell are you calling?”

She waved him off again.

“Hello, Agent Chaffee?”

“Yes, Ms. Morgan. What a coincidence. I just finished listening to your call.”

“Now I bet you really think me and my husband have gone off the deep end?”

“No, not at all Ms. Morgan. In fact we are contacting someone in our Syracuse office to check out the Days Inn in Weedsport. Maybe even today or tomorrow.”

“You are?” Holly seemed surprised.

“Yes, absolutely.”

“Well we have some more info and I think this will help to confirm our suspicions and help convince you we’re not as crazy as you think.”

Holly Morgan was too savvy to buy any of Agent Chaffee’s patronizing manner. She then told him about the bikes and the flat tires, that no police report was made. And that they had just come from the Graziano Motor Inn and described the scene there that had taken place 20 minutes ago.

“Now Ms. Morgan, if these people are who you think they are, I think you’re getting a little too close to things. This is all better left up to law enforcement officials. This could be a very dangerous situation.”

Chaffee went on for a few more minutes warning Holly about the dangers, all the while pointing to the side of his head with his index finger, then circling the finger as Agent DeGorgio was looking on and listening to their conversation on the extension phone.

“And thanks again for your efforts.” Agent Chaffee hung up the phone just shaking his head in bewilderment.

“Does he believe us now?” Dave quickly asked as Holly put her cell phone in her zippered inside pocket.

“No. He’s just humoring us,” she said.

“Can we go to Buffalo now?”

It was a rhetorical question.

Dave started up the car, left the Graziano Motel parking lot and headed for the westbound entrance to Interstate 90. Within minutes they were headed for Buffalo on the Interstate. Dave was a little pissed at Holly’s obsession and gave her the silent treatment for the first 30 minutes of the ride.

“Okay, Dave, enough with the silent treatment shit. You wanna quit pouting like a child?” Holly was miffed now.

“I’m not pouting; I’m trying to figure out what the hell all those phone calls were about. I thought we decided to just get back to Buffalo and let the FBI finish with the investigation.” Dave had calmed considerably.

“I was just curious to see if those two guys called the police or not and if they got Khalid and his sidekick to pick them up at the hotel. I just wanted to convince myself that we’re both not completely off our rockers,” said Holly.

“Well, did you?”

“Well did I what?”

“Did you convince yourself that we’re not both delusional, crazy, off our rocker?”

“You know, Dave, I swear, sometimes when I think about the whole theory, I think we’ve completely overreacted. There’s probably a simple logical explanation for the

series of events that led us to our conclusion, not the least of which is some cockamamie terrorist conspiracy theory. And then something happens to change my mind all over again. We're probably gonna feel like complete jackasses when this is over."

Dave let Holly go on for several minutes, one minute convincing herself they let their imaginations get out of control, and then in the next minute recounting the series of events that led them to their terrorist theories. And then convincing herself that there definitely was something going on that couldn't simply be explained by happenstance. At times Dave felt the exact same conflicts, and that they'd both feel like jerks when all the events of the past few days were logically explained.

"We're stopping in Lockport," Dave just blurted out.

"What do you mean?" Holly was perturbed.

"I mean we're gonna stop in Lockport before we head back to Buffalo."

"What for?!" Holly was mad now.

"What for? For the same damn reason you wanted to stop in Canastota. I've got some questions I need to answer for myself. It won't take more than an hour. Then we'll head for Buffalo and head back to Pittsburgh. But first I've got to see those two canal locks for myself and talk to the operator."

"C'mon, Dave, that's nuts. What if Khalid and that bitch are there? Then what?" Holly asked.

"So what if they're there. What are they gonna do, shoot us in broad daylight? Kidnap us? Now you're getting a little carried away."

"Go ahead. Go to Lockport. But I'm not getting out of the van."

"Fine. You can stay in the van."

"I will."

Holly stared straight ahead as Dave headed west towards Buffalo. They were just getting to the western suburbs of Syracuse. Dave asked Holly to look at the map and determine the best exit to get off at to get to Lockport.

"Get off at Batavia and take Route 98 north to Route 31. Then take Route 31 to Lockport. It's about 30 miles from the intersection of 98 and 31." And those were the last words Holly spoke till they reached Batavia. Now she gave Dave the silent treatment. It took about 90 minutes to get to the Batavia exit. Dave was pushing it.

Chapter 18

Batavia, New York

When Dave got to Batavia – Holly hadn't spoken to him for the entire ride – he pulled off to the side of the road on Route 98 and stopped the car. Holly stared straight ahead at the road. Dave turned to Holly.

“Okay, enough of the silent treatment. C'mon Holly, you can help me in Lockport.”

She finally turned toward Dave.

“David, this is just nuts. If we're right and these people are terrorists, we're not prepared to take them on. We have no experience in fighting terrorists. We see how dedicated these people are to their cause. They're nuts! They're willing to die for it.”

“Holly we're not in any danger in Lockport. It's not even two o'clock in the afternoon. There are all kinds of people walking around in Lockport. I'm just curious about some facts. We'll be on our way to Buffalo in less than an hour. C'mon, lighten up.”

“And then what if this whole thing is just plain fantasy. Our fantasy. We've pestered Agent Chaffee and the FBI. We're just gonna feel like complete fools.” Holly changed her mind again.

“Look, Holly. Sometimes I feel just like you. That this whole thing is some far-fetched conspiratorial plot we've pumped each other up with. That there's a logical explanation and when we see it we're gonna feel like the jackasses we've often thought we were. But some things just don't wash. The detonation cord for one. Why those guys didn't call the cops after you slashed their tires and stole their cell phone. Khalid's behavior in that restaurant in Weedsport. And I'm sure those two guys Sultan and Jawid were sent to follow us.”

“All right, I'll help you in Lockport. But damn it. That's it. After that, we head straight for the Adams Mark and leave for Pittsburgh. Tonight! Not tomorrow.” Holly wasn't in any mood for compromise.

“Fine. We'll leave for Pittsburgh as soon as we get back to the Adam's Mark.” Dave said.

He reached over gently to bring Holly's face closer to his. They kissed. Holly gently stroked the side of Dave's face.

"It's all coming back Dave. I remember 25 years ago when you used to get obsessed with an engineering problem. You would wake up in the middle of the night and run to your desk. Sometimes you'd even call someone in the field at three in the morning. You haven't gotten any better. You may even be more possessed."

"I take that as a compliment," Dave quickly answered.

"Well I'm not sure I meant it as one."

"Yeah, I remember those times. I'd crawl back into bed, and you used to say that it turned you on when I'd call an engineer in the field or get a call about a technical problem and discuss it while you were lying next to me."

"Well, what can I say? I was young and naïve back then."

"Nothing wrong with being young and naïve. Are you turned on now?"

"Let's go Dave." Holly quickly dispelled the notion of any activities Dave may have conjured up.

Dave started the van back up and headed for Albion. New York Route 98 was devoid of traffic. Dave cruised along at 65 miles per hour. They reached Albion in 20 minutes. Then they turned west on Route 31 towards Lockport. Lockport was about 30 miles west of Albion. They headed towards Medina. From Medina they followed Route 31 straight into Lockport. Just a few days earlier they had ridden their bikes through the remnants of Hurricane Ernesto down the same road, but in the opposite direction. That day the rain was pelting them in horizontal sheets with head winds gusting at 50 miles per hour. Today they were in the safety of a Dodge Caravan. The sun was shining brightly, the sky was blue, and they reached downtown Lockport in 45 minutes. The traffic on Route 31 was surprisingly heavy, especially the large truck traffic.

They came into Lockport on East Avenue and turned right onto Pine Street. They passed the small diner they had stopped at Saturday morning after they'd left Buffalo to begin their journey. They decided to stop there again and get something to eat. They hadn't eaten since that morning. It was almost two o'clock in the afternoon. Dave parked the van right in front of the diner, just walking distance from the bridge over the canal. They walked into the almost empty diner and took the same table near the back of

the restaurant near the kitchen where they had sat on Saturday. They had the same young attractive waitress, and she recognized them immediately.

“Finish the bike trip already?” The waitress asked, then continued, “I didn’t think you’d get out of Lockport with all that rain and wind. You were headed to Albion, right?”

“Well we didn’t make it to Albion, but we got to Medina,” Holly answered.

“Yeah, we had to get the B&B to pick us up in Medina and take us to Albion,” Dave chimed in.

“Well, glad to see you’re safe and sound. What can I get you guys?”

“I’ll have a BLT and coffee,” Holly said.

“Make mine the same,” Dave said, then quickly continued, “How late is the canal museum at the locks open?”

“I think they stay open till five,” was her reply.

Dave and Holly didn’t talk much while waiting for their food. They were exhausted from all the biking and driving and talking and thinking they had been doing since early that morning. Their food came and they ate slowly for the first time on the trip. They didn’t leave the restaurant till after two, and then they walked towards the bridge on Pine Street over the canal. On the north side of the bridge they walked down the limestone towpath, which was partially paved with asphalt, till they were directed to a gate that was open, and then they crossed a narrow bridge spanning half the canal to a small building which was the Erie Canal Museum. It was actually located right over the canal next to Lock 34, the lower of the two locks in series, adjacent to the control house for the operation of both canal locks. Within a few minutes a middle-aged man walked into the small building and introduced himself as Ron Larabee. He was actually the operator on duty and also served as the tour guide to the museum. The small building that served as the museum and the station from which the locks were controlled were attached.

Dave wanted to get right to all the questions he had formulated in his mind in the car during the drive from Canastota. But his limited patience prevailed as he and Holly listened to a brief history of the canal’s construction, especially the difficult construction of the locks at Lockport, which had to climb the steep, 70-foot Niagara escarpment.

In the early 1800s the dream of connecting the Hudson River with the Great Lakes was thought by President Thomas Jefferson at the time to be “a little short of madness.” But when DeWitt Clinton became governor of New York – he was the mayor of New York City previously – he made sure he pushed the state legislature to quickly appropriate the funds for the construction of the canal. Construction began in 1817 – not in Albany or Buffalo, as is commonly thought, but in Rome, New York. From Rome the construction moved in both directions towards Albany and Buffalo. Initially the project was known as “Clinton’s big ditch” and “Clinton’s Folly.” But Governor Clinton would get the last laugh.

The canal cost a little over 7 million dollars in 1817 dollars. The canal was completed in 8 years, using mostly untrained men without the aid of a single professional engineer. The designers and engineers of the canal were expert, highly-skilled surveyors who had studied the canals of Europe. When completed and opened on October 26, 1825, the Erie Canal was considered the engineering marvel of the world.

The original Erie Canal was 363 miles long, 40 feet wide and 4 feet deep and a huge commercial success, paying for itself in only 4 years of tariffs and tolls. It spanned 18 creeks and rivers with aqueducts and required 83 locks to raise and lower boats a total of 682 feet from one end to the other. The construction teams not only battled physical obstacles like escarpments and trees and boulders the size of ships, but physical and emotional hardships as well, like cholera epidemics and mosquito-borne diseases from trying to cross the swamps near Syracuse.

The greatest engineering challenge on the canal was trying to negotiate the Niagara escarpment, a 70-foot cliff-like geological formation that dropped off right around Lockport. It was negotiated with a five step lock system, known as the “Flight of Five” locks. It was replaced years later by the double lock system presently in place in Lockport. They left two of the original “Flight of Five” locks next to the present day double locks for a historical perspective. You had to cross the old locks to get to the museum and the control house.

The Erie Canal was expanded several times. Between 1836 and 1862 it was enlarged to 70 feet and deepened to 7 feet; 72 double-locks were added, and minor course changes

were made. In 1882 tolls were abolished; the canal had already raised funds in excess of 100 million dollars above its 7 million dollar cost. The canal was enlarged again in 1895.

Between 1905 and 1918, an entirely new canal system was created to accommodate much larger barges. Most course changes were made and most of the original canal was abandoned. Stretches of the original Erie Canal were maintained till the present day. Dave and Holly rode their bikes through sections of the old canal when they cycled from Syracuse to Canastota. The new revitalized canal was given the title, “The New York Barge Canal System,” which incorporated the old Erie Canal route from Buffalo to Albany and included three major additional branches to Lake Champlain, Oswego Lake and Cayuga-Seneca Lakes. The size of the canal was increased to an average width of 125 feet and average depth of 12 to 15 feet and totaled 35 locks.

While the original Erie Canal was initially a huge commercial success, its fate was doomed by Cornelius Vanderbilt and the coming of the railroads, which could haul freight at fractions of the cost of the canal and could move that freight much faster.

The New York State Thruway Authority operated the present canal system.

Dave and Holly listened attentively to Ron Larrabee’s knowledgeable presentation while strolling the tiny museum looking at historical canal pictures and artifacts. But Dave was straining at the leash to start asking specific questions pertaining to the two locks in series at Lockport and their specific operation. He didn’t want to raise any suspicions, so he began rather modestly.

“Tell me, Ron, how long have you been operating the locks here at Lockport?”

“Twenty-five years,” Ron answered with a certain degree of pride.

“Really,” Holly spoke up. “You don’t look that old.”

Ron smiled broadly trying not to stare too directly at Holly’s incredible figure. She was wearing the yellow Italian biking outfit.

“Do you man three shifts around the clock, Ron?” Dave asked.

“We used to, but stopped around-the-clock operation about five years ago. Now we start at seven in the morning and shut down at ten at night.”

Dave cocked his head to the side in acknowledgement.

“What are the dimensions of the locks?” Dave asked.

“300-feet long by 45 feet wide.”

“How long does it take to fill a lock?”

“It takes about 20 minutes. The lock holds about 2 and a half million gallons of water.”

Dave tried to ask questions that wouldn't prompt suspicion.

“Can we walk out to the locks and look around?” Dave continued with his questions.

“Sure, go ahead. There's walkways over the locks along the double lock doors and all along the locks themselves.”

“Which way do the double lock doors open, Ron, inward into the locks or outward towards the canal?”

“Outward towards the canal.”

“I see,” Dave said, then continued, “and how are the levels maintained, like they are now, with the higher lock towards Buffalo filled and the lower lock towards Rochester left at the lower canal level?”

“Yes, that's right. That's the normal water position for the locks. We leave them like that all winter when the canal is closed for the season.”

“Do you get much traffic this time of year?”

“Nope, hasn't been any boat through these locks for over a week. Things slow down appreciably after Labor Day.”

“Yeah I bet they do.”

“You sound like an engineer,” Ron spoke up. “Engineers usually ask these types of questions. In fact we had two young foreign engineering students here a few days ago asking the exact same questions. They were writing a paper about the canal. I even let them into the control room.”

Holly shot a quick stare at Dave.

“Didn't we meet those two on the towpath, Dave?” Holly innocently asked.

“Yeah that must have been those two guys we met the other day. Say, Ron, can I get a quick look in the control room?”

“No, I'm sorry; no one is allowed in the control room without permission from Albany. I got in some trouble when I let those two students in.”

“That’s okay Ron, I was just curious. Could you tell me how the canal lock system is interlocked to prevent, say all the lock doors from opening at the same time? That could be quite dangerous, couldn’t it?”

Ron stiffened noticeably then hesitated a bit before he answered. He seemed a little suspicious of Dave’s last question. Holly noticed Ron’s change in expression and look immediately. Ron answered hesitantly.

“Well the lock gates can’t be opened until certain water levels are maintained, and then the sequence of valves and gates are interlocked to prevent the waters from the canal from just rushing through both locks. It’s really impossible to open all the lock doors at the same time.”

Dave nodded his head in agreement. “Well that’s reassuring to know, especially for those folks living in Rochester. Dave chuckled and tried to make a small joke of the original question. But Ron Larabee wasn’t smiling or laughing.

Holly immediately felt the tension in the room.

“Hey Dave let’s go out and see the locks and walk around, is that okay Mr. Larabee?” Holly smiled at Ron in an almost flirtatious way.

“Sure go ahead, if you have any more questions let me know. I’ll be in the control room.”

“One more question Ron. I’m just curious. What size motors do you require to operate the lock doors and the gate valves?”

“They’re both 7 horsepower motors. Both for the canal doors and the valves.”

“Not very large motors to do the work especially to open and close the immense steel lock doors.”

“That’s because we equalize the pressure on both sides of the doors before we can open them. If we don’t fill the lock first with water, the doors can’t open against the water pressure on only one side.”

“Yeah sure, like if you drive your car into a lake or a river, you have to wait until the water fills the car to equalize the pressure before you can get the car door open, right?”

“Exactly,” Ron said.

“Thanks so much for the tour, Ron. We’re gonna take a look at the locks,” said Holly.

Dave and Holly left the small building which housed canal memorabilia and walked out towards Lock 34. Then across the pedestrian bridge attached to the steel lock doors – a double set of swinging doors not unlike a set of French doors, but of course these French doors were massive, 30 feet tall and made of steel. They walked along the wall of the lock till they came to Lock 35. They walked along the wall of Lock 35 and came to a locked fence that wouldn't allow passage to the end of the lock. Dave made mental notes of the structure of the gates and the lock's concrete walls. He commented to Holly that if anyone wanted to blow the steel doors they would most likely place the bomb on the canal side of the doors where they opened. He explained to Holly that if the bomb were placed on the lock side of the doors, it might only blow the doors open in the same direction they were designed to open and leave the hinges intact. If that were the case, the explosion might not destroy the doors, and they could possibly be closed and prevent a good deal of flooding. Placing the bomb on the canal side of the doors would insure the doors would be exploded against their hinges, most likely destroying the door and the hinges, thereby making it impossible to use the door to dam the flow of the water.

They spent 30 minutes evaluating the locks, determining how easy it would be to place a bomb in the water on either the canal side of the locks or directly in the locks themselves, which is what a terrorist would have to do to blow the common lock doors between Locks 34 and 35.

“Dave, is it my uneducated lack of engineering know-how or is it as easy as it appears to be to get in here and just blow these locks to kingdom come?” Holly asked.

“No, I'm afraid you're exactly right. Not only would it be easy, but you can walk around these structures like you were in Disneyland. Disneyland probably has more security. I mean if I were carrying a small metal briefcase with 25 pounds of C-4 explosive, I could just dump it in right next to these lock doors on Lock 35 and not a single person would know. There isn't a soul around and it's only three in the afternoon.”

Dave walked back over the bridge near the lock doors on Lock 34 back towards the towpath but stopped right over the old historical “Flight of Five” locks, of which only two were left. He looked back towards the Buffalo side of the canal.

“If anyone wanted to get the full flow of the canal through the damaged locks, they’d probably have to blow up these old locks, which look like they are used just to let some water run over the old locks either for aesthetics or maybe to keep the water supply downstream of the locks.” Dave commented as he studied the right side of the canal where the old canal locks were located.

“Why is that, Dave?” Holly asked.

“If you just blew up the new locks, you’d only have a 40-foot wide channel for the entire flow of the upstream canal. That alone would restrict and dam off the flow. You’d really have to knock off these old locks too, to get the full flow of the canal. Don’t forget, the canal is 125 feet wide”

Holly could see that Dave was now in full engineering form, pensive and concentrating on the structures before him. It reminded her of when Dave used to take calls in the middle of the night from a construction crew in the middle of a plant start-up.

They walked back up the towpath to Pine Street and headed back across the bridge towards the diner.

“Well, what do you think?” Holly interrupted Dave’s train of thought.

“Think about what?” Dave replied.

“What do you think about our terrorist theories? Do you think it’s possible someone would try to blow up these locks?”

“I think it would be too easy to blow up these locks if you wanted. Way too easy. Look at this place. We just walked around those two locks completely unattended. I could have gone back to the car four times and dropped four metal briefcases anywhere in those locks or in the canal and hardly a person would have seen me. If I waited till it got dark, it would have even been easier. The lock on the chain link fence could be snapped in minutes. According to Ron, after ten o’clock at night no one is watching the store.”

“Well what do you want to do?” Holly asked.

“What the hell can we do? Call Agent Chaffee for the umpteenth time and have him humor us? I think we’ve done all we can do, except camp out on the bridge for the next few days and wait. And then what, fight off Khalid and the bitch and the two bikers all by ourselves? And then there’s always the possibility that there’s a logical explanation

for all the events and we've overblown them and let our imaginations run wild. So let's just go back to the Adam's Mark, get the bikes back on the car, return the van to the airport rental agency and drive back to Pittsburgh. Maybe give Chaffee one last call."

"Dave, I'm sorry, but I just get the feeling we're making a mountain out of a molehill. When I think about the events privately I can get all worked up. It seems so logical. But when we talk about them out loud, it just feels like we're creating a lot of something out of nothing. You know what I mean. I mean, just think about this. Someone's gonna make a sophisticated bomb and place it strategically along the walls of those locks and flood the city of Rochester, then shut down the power facilities at the base of Niagara Falls, and then cause all kinds of commotion—whatever. See what I mean, when you say it out loud it just sounds preposterous."

"Yeah I know," Dave seemed to give into the absurdity of the entire situation. "Okay, you ready to head back?"

"Dave, let's just stay in Lockport tonight at a B&B I saw in the brochure. It has this charming wrap-around front porch and looks very romantic. Then we can get up early tomorrow morning and take off for Buffalo, get to the airport, and head back to Pittsburgh. I am absolutely exhausted from today. Aren't you?"

"Yeah I'm pretty tired. Shit we drove 20 miles this morning on the bikes already today at break-neck speed. I'm exhausted both physically and emotionally. You sure you want to stay in Lockport tonight?" Dave asked.

"Absolutely, if you do."

"It's okay by me, where the hell is this B&B?"

"I think it's right on Pine Street; it looks charming. I've got the phone number from the Parks and Trails brochure, I'll call them and book a room for the night."

Dave and Holly walked back to the van. Holly called the Hamelton B&B and booked, what Joan Hamelton, the proprietor of the bed and breakfast, designated as Room Two on the second floor of the B&B – brass double bed, private bath, mahogany antiques and floral wallpaper. The 160-year-old structure was once the home of Alan Baright, a well-known carriage maker in Lockport. They stopped in the diner and asked their waitress for the exact location of the Hamelton House B&B.

They drove the three blocks to the B&B, checked in with Mrs. Hamelton, used Dave's credit card to pay for the night in advance, and settled into their upstairs room. It was four in the afternoon. They were the only guests. When Mrs. Hamelton left to do some shopping, Dave and Holly showered together then made a futile attempt to bathe together in the immense clawfoot bathtub and then went back to bed. They made love and were sound asleep by five o'clock.

Chapter 19

Wendelville, New York: Corner of Campbell Boulevard and Tonawanda Creek Road South

Khalid decided to pass quickly through Lockport, check the lay of the land, and then find a suitable location between Tonawanda and Lockport where he could use his phone to detonate the four briefcase bombs later that night. He had the bombs stored in the trunk of the rented Malibu. He decided he could get back to Lockport around four in the afternoon and still have plenty of time to survey the area. They drove around Lockport. Benazir got out a map and directed Khalid onto Bear Ridge Road. They took Bear Ridge Road east and then crossed over Fisk Road onto East Canal Road, which followed the canal for a stretch of about a mile or two then veered away from the banks of the canal. They crossed the intersection of East Canal Road and Tonawanda Creek Road South. Then they turned left onto Tonawanda Creek Road South.

Khalid was looking for an isolated area where he could safely stop and set up a position from which he could call on his cell phone and detonate the bombs at Lockport, then quickly get over to Niagara Falls where both he and Benazir would cross over on the Rainbow Bridge and drive to the Toronto International airport. They had reservations on a British Airways flight to London at seven the next morning. He found such an isolated spot near Campbell Boulevard. Just off of Campbell, he located another gravel road that led directly to the canal, at which point the road ended abruptly, angled down to the water and served as a boat ramp. Isolated from the main road, but close enough to make a speedy getaway, it seemed the perfect location. He wanted to be right on the canal and close enough to determine that the canal locks were destroyed and the current in the canal had increased appreciably. This increase in flow in the Erie Canal would indicate that indeed they had a flooding situation below the destroyed locks in Lockport. It would take a little time for the strength of the current to increase back to where they had set up their position for destroying the locks. They were about 8 miles upstream from the locks in their present position. Once Khalid felt he found a suitable location for blowing the locks and making a quick getaway towards the Canadian border, he and Benazir left for Lockport. It was almost four in the afternoon.

“Will we hear the explosions from here?” Benazir asked, as Khalid started up the Malibu, turned the car around on the gravel road, and headed for Lockport.

“Probably not because they’ll be mostly under 15 feet of water or more. But we may hear some muffled sounds from the bomb between the two locks. I’ll know better when we get to Lockport.”

“How long will it take before we can see the canal current increase so we’re sure the flooding has started and we can leave for Canada?”

“I calculated a half hour to 45 minutes from that dirt road.”

“How long before the power plants shut down for lack of water?” Benazir kept asking questions, which surprised Khalid.

“That’s a tough one. It depends how much water they store in their power reservoir and how quickly they figure out what’s going on. But I suspect by early the next day the power grid will have some problems.”

“What if they don’t? I mean what if the power stays on and there isn’t any outage. Then what? Will the two-man assassination teams just pack up and go home, or what?”

“Absolutely not. As soon as the flood in Rochester is reported on the news they’ll start their carnage,” Khalid answered.

“But you said on Sunday that the sign to begin shooting their automatic weapons was some type of power outage all along the East Coast. If there’s no outage then what?”

“No I didn’t say that.”

“The hell you didn’t, Khalid.”

“Well then, I misspoke. The assassination teams will begin shooting if either there’s a power outage or whenever the flood is reported on the news. Either event is the signal to begin firing their weapons. Remember the objective: get rid of Musharraf. The turmoil we hope to create with the two-man teams is meant to draw the government’s attention and get the National Guard active. So the flooding and electrical power failure are really incidental to the overall objective.”

“When will al Qaeda in Iraq and Afghanistan become active?” Benazir continued with her line of questioning.

“They’ll wait for the same signals. They’ll actually take their cue from CNN.”

“How will the ISI generals in Pakistan know when to begin the assassination? It would appear the timing has to be perfect,” Benazir continued probing.

“Well that’s a bit tricky. It’s the only call from the cell phone I will have to make. Pakistan is 10½ hours ahead of us. The generals involved are expecting a call between one and two in the morning our time, that’s between 11:30 and 12:30 in the morning in Islamabad. I will call them and let the phone ring exactly four times and hang up just after I detonate the briefcases at the canal. Then they’ll know everything is in motion. It will take at least another 12 hours for all hell to break loose here and in Iraq and Afghanistan. Once they get that call, they will wait to also hear the news of all the attacks here and in Iraq and Afghanistan. They will assassinate Musharraf the next morning at their daily intelligence briefing.”

“It sure sounds like it will take a hell of a lot of coordination to make this plan work,” Benazir was skeptical.

“Don’t worry, it’ll work. You just get us to the Toronto International Airport and back to London and India.”

Khalid was beginning to get annoyed from all of Benazir’s questions.

It was 4:15 when Khalid pulled up to the diner on Pine Street and parked the Malibu. They decided to get a cup of coffee at the diner. They coincidentally sat in the booth in the back near the swinging kitchen doors – the same place Dave and Holly sat just a few hours before. The same young high school waitress waited on them.

“What can I get you folks?” the waitress asked.

“Just a cup of coffee for me,” Benazir answered first.

“Decaf for me,” Khalid said then continued. “Could you tell me where we could get a good view of the canal locks?”

“When you leave, just take a right out of the diner and follow Pine Street over the bridge. On the other side of the bridge you’ll see a crushed limestone path, just walk right down the path, you’ll be right next to the locks and the museum and the control house.”

“Thanks.”

They spent only ten minutes lingering over their coffee. They barely spoke to one another and left the diner. They followed the waitress’s direction right to the walkway

over the canal and crossed over the bridge over the two “Flight of Five” locks left from the 1800s and entered the museum. Ron Larabee was straightening things out, getting ready to close up the museum, which shut down to tourists at five. His shift wasn’t over till ten that evening. He was surprised when Khalid and Benazir walked into the museum. He looked at his watch. It was 4:35. He told both Khalid and Benazir that the museum and lock tour would close in 25 minutes.

“Oh that’s all right,” Khalid said. “We just wanted to be sure we saw some of the Erie Canal before we left for Niagara Falls. I’m Hemant Shah and this is my wife Premgi.”

“I’m Ron Larabee, I operate the locks and help with the museum.”

“Tell me Ron, how long have you been operating the locks here in Lockport?” Khalid asked.

“Twenty-five years,” Ron answered.

“Really?” Benazir spoke up. “You don’t look that old.”

“Do you operate three shifts around the clock, Ron?” Khalid continued the questions he needed to know.

“Not anymore, now we only operate two shifts: from seven in the morning till three in the afternoon. And from three till ten at night.”

“How big are the locks, Ron?”

“Three hundred feet long by 45 feet wide.”

“How long does it take to fill a lock?” Khalid kept the questions coming quickly. He knew he didn’t have much time.

“It takes about 20 minutes to fill a lock. The locks hold 2 and a half million gallons of water,” Ron anticipated Khalid’s next question.

Khalid nodded his head.

“Which way do the double lock doors open, into the lock or outward towards the canal?”

“Outwards toward the canal.” Ron answered hesitantly and seemed puzzled by the exact same line of questioning he had received from Dave.

“Do you get much boat traffic this time of year, Ron?” Khalid continued.

“Not much, we haven’t had a boat through the locks in days.”

“Tell me Ron, I’m just curious – is there a standard water level maintained in the locks?”

“Yes, we keep the upstream lock filled and the downstream lock canal level. Hey, I’ll bet you’re an engineer.”

“Why is that, Ron?” Khalid seemed startled by the question.

“Because you’re asking the very same questions a guy and his wife asked me not more than an hour ago and he was an engineer.”

Benazir was walking about the small museum looking at some of the artifacts from the original canal, but stopped dead in her tracks when she heard Ron’s last comment. She quickly caught Khalid’s glance and walked over to where they were both standing.

“Well good guess Ron, I am indeed an engineer,” Khalid said.

“Excuse me Ron but the couple that was here an hour or so ago. Both fairly tall, the woman attractive with short black hair?” Benazir asked.

“Yeah, do you know them?”

“Well sort of,” Benazir continued. “We’ve met them a couple of times along this Erie Canal route. Do you know if they’re staying here in town tonight? We might look them up.”

“I have no idea if they hung around. I think they may have mentioned they were going to Buffalo. But I really don’t remember,” Ron said.

“Excuse me Ron, but do we have time to walk around the locks, or is it too late already?” Khalid interrupted.

“No, go ahead; I can keep it open for few minutes longer.”

Khalid and Benazir walked out of the museum and along the catwalk attached to Lock 34’s double doors. They made sure they were far enough away from the museum so Ron wouldn’t hear them talking.

“They’re here, Khalid,” Benazir quickly blurted out when she felt they were far enough away from the control house.

“Well they were here but they may have left for Buffalo.” Khalid wasn’t as sure as Benazir that they hung around Lockport.

“No, they’re here, Khalid. I can feel it. We’ve got to find them. We can eliminate our only problem with our escape.”

“How the hell are we gonna find them?”

“How many places to stay overnight can there be in Lockport? We can check the Yellow Pages back at the diner. We’ve got to try. If they’re here in Lockport, we can find them.”

“Okay but first let me check out these locks.”

Khalid and Benazir walked around both locks and Khalid evaluated exactly where he would place all four of the explosives. He would eventually place them in the exact, same positions where Dave had told Holly he would place them. Neither he nor Benazir could believe how easy it would be to get back to the locks after ten o’clock that evening and set up all the briefcases. Like Dave and Holly, they quickly realized how easy it was going to be. And best of all, he wouldn’t have to fill or empty any of the locks. They were filled in the exact positions he calculated would be easiest for the explosives to be most effective. They left the locks after walking about for 30 minutes and were sure to thank Ron Larabee for keeping the locks open an extra 15 minutes. They quickly walked back to the diner and asked for the local Yellow Pages, copied down the phone numbers of the four hotels and three bed and breakfasts that were listed, and went out to the Malibu. Benazir got out her cell phone from her purse and began dialing.

“No goddamn cell phones!” Khalid screamed at her.

She quickly stopped dialing and put the cell phone back in her purse. Khalid almost frightened her. “Okay, then let’s find a public phone.”

Khalid drove around town till he found a public phone at a gas station. He filled up with gas and Benazir went inside to get change. Then she walked outside to the public phone.

Benazir first called the four hotels that were listed in the Yellow Pages; the Holiday Inn, the Comfort Inn, the Lockport Motel, and the Hartland Motel. She used the same ploy at each hotel. She said she was supposed to meet a couple in Lockport for dinner, but forgot where they were staying. She used the name of Khalid’s yoga instructor, Morgan, when she was asked what name they registered under. No luck.

Then she started dialing the B&B’s. The first one listed was DeFlippo’s Inn. Again no luck. She dialed the next B&B listed in the Yellow Pages. The phone rang three times.

“Hello, Hamelton House B&B, can I help you?” Joan Hamelton politely answered the phone.

“Yes, Ms. Hamelton, I’m Mrs. Hemant Shah. We came in from out of town and are supposed to meet some friends for dinner tonight, a husband and wife, but we forgot where they said they were staying. They may have checked in under the name of Morgan. They’re both pretty tall; she’s quite tall, attractive, short black hair. He’s an attractive gentleman too.”

“Well we have one couple that checked in a few hours ago that fit your description, but I believe they checked in under the name of Cohen. If you’ll wait a minute I can see if they signed the guest book.”

She came back and picked up the phone.

“Yes you’re right, one signed in as David Cohen, and the other signed in as Holly Morgan. But didn’t you say they were married?”

“Well you know today’s modern couples. Sometimes the wife still likes to go by her maiden name. But that’s the Cohens. That’s them for sure. They probably checked in under his name.”

Benazir could hardly contain her glee. She signaled to Khalid, who was waiting in the car; her ‘thumbs-up’ gesture let him know that she found them.

“Shall I tell them you’re here? I think they may be still sleeping in their room,” Mrs. Hamelton said.

“No, no, no. Please don’t wake them. We’ll surprise them at the restaurant. Please don’t even tell them we called. They probably figured we didn’t make it. Maybe we could get a room in your B&B tonight. Do you have any rooms available?”

“Yes we have two – one on the second floor where the Cohens are staying.”

“Well can we get back to you on that? We might just go back to Buffalo tonight; we’ll see how late we get out of the restaurant.”

“Sure that’s fine, but don’t make it too late. My husband and I usually go to sleep at ten.”

“Okay, that’s fine, we should know before ten. But please don’t tell the Cohens. We want it to be a big surprise.”

“Oh no, I won’t say a thing. I like surprises like that myself.”

“Thank you so much Ms. Hamelton. See you later.” Benazir hung up the receiver on the pay phone and rushed over to the Malibu.

“We got ‘em, Khalid! Let’s go over to the B&B and eliminate them right now.” Benazir slammed the car door shut.

“Not now you crazy idiot. Not until I set the explosive charges at the locks. They’re not going anywhere. We’ve got all night. They have no idea we’re here. If we go over there now and something happens, the whole goddamn plan could be blown. We could screw everything up. We know where they are; we’ll eliminate them after we set the explosives at the locks. It’ll be around 11 o’clock. They’ll be asleep and so will the owners of the B&B and so will most of the fuckin’ town of Lockport New York. We’ll have to take them back to the canal on that gravel road with us where we’ll call to set off the charges. Can’t leave their bodies in the B&B. Too much time between 11 and one o’clock when I have to place that call to Pakistan. Someone could discover them. Too risky. We’ll have to take them with us back towards Tonawanda. Let’s find a Walgreens or CVS and get some nylon rope and duct tape. Good work Benazir. How the hell did you find them?”

Benazir explained to Khalid the ploy she used. She was confident Mrs. Hamelton wouldn’t tell Holly and Dave about their presence, so Khalid was reassured they could wait till later that evening before they kidnapped them and took them back to the boat ramp. They drove back towards Tonawanda and waited on the deserted gravel road. Khalid took the four metal briefcases out of the trunk, and one by one he set the mechanisms and armed each bomb. They decided to find a restaurant in the area and kill some time. They would wait till 10:15 before they headed back to the locks.

Chapter 20

Hamelton House B&B: 7:30 p.m.

“I am starving,” David sat up in bed.

“You’re always starving David,” Holly was still curled up in a fetal position. “What time is it? It’s still light outside.”

It was dark in their room. They had the window shutters closed for privacy, but streaks of light still pierced the cracks between the shutters. Dave tilted his watch so he could read it and pressed the stem in, which lighted the dial.

“It’s 7:30, let’s get some food,” Dave said as he worked his way to the edge of the bed.

They both dressed and walked down the grand wooden staircase. It appeared the Hameltons had left the house and no other boarders had yet checked into the B&B. They grabbed a flyer listing some local restaurants from the vestibule in the living room. Holly gave the flyer a once-over and suggested Garlock’s Restaurant on South Transit Street, just a few blocks south on Pine Street then over one block on Lincoln Avenue, then a right on South Transit. They were there in less than five minutes. They had no way to lock up the B&B, so they assumed everything was safe and left the front door unlocked.

The restaurant was fairly crowded for a Tuesday evening, but they didn’t have to wait for a table. The menu was rather extensive, and it looked like most people in the vicinity were dining on large steaks. They both ordered the petit filet mignon with a double-baked potato and chives. They ordered a bottle of red wine and lingered over coffee and dessert till almost 9:30. They both were a little disappointed that they had cut their bike trip short. Dave and Holly were obsessive about their biking and finishing the trip. But both also agreed; under the circumstances, the prudent decision was to get back to Pittsburgh. Still, they had second thoughts about possibly continuing later in the month, maybe coming back to Rome and finishing the trip to Albany. The more wine they drank, the more they were determined to finish the bike trip.

Dave reminded Holly to call her daughter and tell her not to ride the train to Albany Friday. She said she would call her daughter first thing in the morning. They got back to the B&B just before ten. It appeared the Hameltons had returned. Their black Ford SUV

was parked out front on the cinder driveway, but they were probably already asleep. A light was left on in the vestibule, and a nightlight was on in the upstairs hallway. The front door was left unlocked, so Dave and Holly just assumed they left the door unlocked all night. It appeared they were the only boarders for the night. Holly liked that. Now she could make as much noise as she wanted to. Dave liked that too. But they were asleep almost as soon as their heads hit the pillows, long before either one could make too much noise.

Ron Wilson was exhausted. The last thing he wanted to do was schlep over to the Syracuse airport, get a bomb-sniffing dog, and then traipse 35 miles over to the Days Inn in Weedsport. His entire day had been spent searching for Bucky Williams. Bucky was reported to have been seen in several locations in upstate New York. He was also reported to have been seen in several locations in northern Pennsylvania. The manhunt stretched all the way from the northwestern Pennsylvania-Ohio border to Syracuse, New York. The problem was that Bucky appeared to have many people in his corner, rooting for him, giving him shelter and food, and placing phony sightings to confuse local law enforcement officials.

Bucky had been in local police custody in Fredonia, New York for several robberies, but he was already a two-time loser, so he knew he'd get substantial prison time. He had escaped from jail in Fredonia with a ballpoint pen. That was almost a week ago. He used the pen to get out of handcuffs and took off for the forests of northwestern New York State, which he knew like the back of his hand. Escaping with the use of a ballpoint just made his legend and the mystique around Bucky grow.

He had escaped from the Fredonia jail and robbed a gun store and stocked up on guns. He was an excellent marksman and hunter, and somewhat of a local legend in the area. That so many associates and family members were protecting him pissed law enforcement officials off to no end. He killed a New York State Highway Patrol officer and seriously wounded two other local policemen. Why anyone would try to give aid and shelter to this guy baffled local authorities. But they did. This just made their task that much more difficult. The locals actually defended Bucky in the press. They said he hadn't meant to kill the patrol officer. Bucky was an excellent shot. He just wanted to

wound the officer and shot him in the leg. Unfortunately, the bullet severed his femoral artery, and the officer bled to death before they could get him to the hospital.

Ron Wilson called his wife and told her he probably wouldn't be home till after midnight. He arrived at the Syracuse airport around 9:30. Parked his car in an illegal parking zone. Put his FBI placard in the windshield. Waved to a local policeman who recognized him. And walked into the main concourse.

He had already called airport security and told them he was coming to pick up the dog. He walked into the security offices and sitting on the floor was a black Labrador Retriever.

"Agent Wilson?" The security officer in charge said as Ron entered the office.

"Yes," Ron answered.

They shook hands.

"I'm officer Tuckerman. This here is Mule, our finest bomb sniffing dog."

Upon hearing her name called, Mule bounced up and began wagging her tail and moving her large 60-pound body in a wave-like motion. She immediately sat down next to officer Tuckerman.

"Mule? Isn't that the name they give to a guy smuggling drugs – a mule? Is the dog a bomb sniffer or drug sniffer?" Agent Wilson joked.

"One hell of a bomb sniffer. Especially plastic explosives. She can smell any telltale traces of explosives even after they been removed from a room for days, provided it hasn't been scrubbed down. Don't worry about Mule. She'll do her job."

"Come here Mule," Agent Wilson called the dog over to get friendly with her.

The dog walked over and Ron petted her. She wagged her tail furiously.

"Will she go with me or do you have to come along?" Ron asked officer Tuckerman.

"She'll go as long as I accompany you to your car and open the back door. Then she's all yours. Make sure you bring her back. We're kind of fond of her."

"Do I need to know any commands? How does she know to search for explosives?"

"Don't worry, just let her go in the room you're searching. If she smells anything, you'll know. Trust me. You'll know."

Officer Tuckerman, Agent Wilson, and Mule walked through the airport concourse back to Ron Wilson's car. Officer Tuckerman opened the back door and Mule jumped into the back seat and lay down. He handed Agent Wilson some doggie treats for Mule, then he shut the door. Ron got in the front seat, started up the car, and took off for the Days Inn in Weedsport.

It took about 45 minutes to get to Weedsport and the Days Inn parking lot. He had already called the Indian owners, a Mr. and Mrs. Patel, from his car, telling them he would be there in 30 minutes or so. The owners were waiting for the agent in the small lobby. Agent Wilson opened the back door of his car and led Mule by her leash into the motel lobby. Mule was very well behaved. Mr. and Mrs. Patel introduced themselves and asked politely if Agent Wilson would please show some proper identification, which he did. The Patels then led the agent and Mule to the two rooms in question.

Before Mr. Patel could even slip the electronic key into the slot, Mule leaped up on the door and started pawing madly on the surface, scratching off some of the paint.

"Don't worry; the FBI will pay for any damage," Agent Wilson quickly remarked after he saw the scratches on the front door.

Before Mr. Patel opened the door completely, Mule slipped through the partially-opened door and began running about the room leaping on both beds, running into the bathroom then standing on her hind legs with her front paws on the desk. Then running around the room again going into the bathroom. She was barking madly the entire time. The dog was beginning to foam at the mouth, she was so excited.

"Okay girl. Okay, girl. Good girl. Come here. Sit."

Agent Wilson tried every dog command he knew to calm Mule down. "Sit" worked the best as Mule came by the agent's side and sat down, panting heavily. He gave the dog a treat. The Patels' eyes looked like they were hanging out of their sockets. Agent Wilson was somewhat shocked himself. They went to the next room and Mule went through the exact same routine, pawing on the surface of both double beds. Pawing on the surface of the bathtub in the bathroom. Pawing the surface of the desk. Panting and sweating and barking all over again until Agent Wilson commanded her to sit.

It was a little after eleven when Agent Wilson, standing alone under the glare of the sodium vapor lighting in the Days Inn parking lot, called Agent Jerry DeGorgio at his

home in Buffalo. He was going to call Agent Chaffee first, but didn't have his home phone number. He knew this was important enough to call DeGorgio at home.

DeGorgio was sound asleep.

"Hello, who is this?" DeGorgio answered the phone in a somewhat confused state of mind.

"Jerry, this is Ron Wilson. I'm at the Days Inn in Weedsport. We got ourselves a serious problem."

Chapter 21

Lockport, New York

Khalid and Benazir found an all-night restaurant back on Erie Boulevard near the Horton's doughnut shop Dave and Holly had stopped at the first day of their bike adventure. By the time they finished eating it was already 10 o'clock. They drove back to the gravel road to kill a little more time. They wanted to be sure the lock operator, Ron Larabee, had locked up and wasn't lingering near the area. Both Khalid and Benazir, for the first time, showed signs of nervousness.

They got to the Pine Street Bridge and parked their car near the limestone towpath. The area was well-lit, but there wasn't a soul around. Khalid turned off the car and turned off his headlights and waited several minutes in the car to be sure no one was walking around the area. Just as he was about to get out of the car, he saw a young couple head up from the towpath with their dog. He hadn't counted on people walking their dogs along the towpath late at night. The couple walked up the path to Pine Street and crossed over the bridge back towards town away from Khalid and Benazir. Both Khalid and Benazir had ducked down in the front seat. They could hear the young couple talking as they walked back towards town. They waited a few minutes until the sound of their voices faded completely away. Khalid and Benazir peeked over the seat through the rear window and saw the couple was long gone, nowhere in sight.

Khalid got out of the car and told Benazir to remain low and out of sight in the front seat while he checked out how difficult it would be to get past the locked chain-link fence. He came back to the car in less than a minute; he knocked on the side window and motioned for Benazir to come out of the car.

"The lock on the gate is no problem, bring your gun and put the silencer on," Khalid instructed.

Khalid opened the trunk and took out two of the four briefcase-bombs. Benazir watched as she held the .22-semiautomatic with the silencer attached.

"Can you handle one of the briefcases?" Khalid asked Benazir.

"Yeah, I think so," she replied.

"Okay, let's go."

They walked briskly. Khalid carried two of the 30-pound briefcases. Benazir carried one. They quickly walked over to the locked gate, which led to the museum and the two canal locks. Khalid told Benazir to wait at the locked gate and he returned to the car, opened the trunk and brought the remaining briefcase-bomb over to the locked gate.

“Shoot open the lock,” Khalid commanded Benazir.

Benazir aimed her gun at the lock and pulled the trigger as she and Khalid looked away. The lock opened immediately and the chain around the gate fell to the ground with a clang. They quickly crossed over the path near the museum and brought all four bombs. It took two trips. They were now under the cover of the museum and the control building. They had free access to both canal locks.

Khalid left three of the briefcases near the museum and quickly carried one across the bridge to Lock 34, the lower lock and tied one of several 30-foot long pieces of nylon rope he had looped around his belt to the briefcase. He was standing on the bridge attached to the double-door locks and slowly lowered the metal briefcase over the side, sliding it down the metal doors until it slipped below the surface of the canal. He continued lowering the bomb until it hit the bottom of the canal and was resting along the steel doors. He dropped the rest of the nylon cord into the canal and walked quickly back to the museum.

He then proceeded to take another of the metal briefcase-bombs and walk over to the steel double doors between Lock 34 and Lock 35. He lowered that bomb into the water on the side that the doors opened, so the explosion would tear the doors off their hinges.

He walked briskly back to the museum and carried the last two briefcases back towards Lock 35. He walked along the lock wall, under the Pine Street Bridge and came to a locked fence, which prevented him from getting to the end of Lock 35. “Shit,” he thought to himself; he forgot that they blocked off access to the end of Lock 35. He quickly left the bombs near the locked gate and went back to get Benazir.

The first shot from her .22 didn't open the lock. The second shot jarred the lock but still didn't open it completely. The third shot caused the damaged lock to fall off into the canal and the chain followed the lock into the water. Khalid told Benazir to wait there and he quickly walked to the end of the lock and placed the third bomb on the upstream side of the steel doors on Lock 35. He walked back to where Benazir was waiting and

retrieved the final bomb. He walked back to the end of Lock 35 and walked along the concrete wall towards the original “Flight of Five” locks. Then he carefully just dropped the metal briefcase into the water. It quickly settled beneath the surface of the water against the concrete wall. He quickly maneuvered his way back to Lock 35, then back to where Benazir was standing guard. They quickly left the lock area, crossed over the bridge to the museum, crossed back across the walking bridge to the limestone towpath, headed up the towpath 25 yards to Pine Street and their parked car. It was 11:05. The entire operation took less than 20 minutes. Khalid and Benazir had hardly spoken to each other the entire time. When they got back in the rented Malibu, they both uttered a sigh of relief. There still wasn’t a soul in the area. Neither could believe how simple it was to place the bombs. But they still had one more mission.

“Do you know where that B&B is located?” Khalid asked Benazir as he started the car and made a U-turn on Pine Street to head back towards town.

“It’s just a few blocks past the diner we ate at this afternoon. I’ve got the address. We should be there in just a few minutes.”

Khalid drove slowly south on Pine Street past the commercial district and entered a residential district. The B&B was the third house down on the left. It had the long wrap-around front porch that was showcased in the Yellow Pages ad.

“There it is, 130 Pine Street!” Benazir whispered as she pointed towards the house.

Khalid slowed down and turned off his headlights before he even stopped the car. He parked on the street right in front of the B&B. Two cars parked abreast were in the driveway. The white rented Dodge Caravan and the owner’s black SUV.

Khalid and Benazir got out of the car and walked over to the Dodge Caravan and looked inside. There were Dave and Holly’s two bikes balanced between the two back seats. Now they were positive the two were in the B&B. Benazir and Khalid walked up onto the front porch and rang the buzzer. The front door was actually left unlocked, but they never tried it. No one came to the door. So Benazir pressed the buzzer again – a long rather annoying buzzer sound filled the air. A light came on just inside the door in the hallway and a woman looked through the window curtains on the door.

Benazir waved and smiled and the woman opened the door.

“I’m sorry,” Mrs Hamelton said, “but we’re closed for the night.”

“Oh Mrs. Hamelton, we called you earlier in the evening, maybe you remember us, we’re friends of the Cohens,” Benazir did all the talking in her most sympathetic, cultured, British voice. “We don’t want to drive all the way back to Buffalo, if we could just stay here for the night, we’d be more than happy to pay extra for the room.”

Mrs. Hamelton looked at her watch.

“My lord it’s after 11!” she said.

She still hadn’t opened the door all the way. It was opened just enough for them to talk to and see each other.

“Well, all right; come in, but we’ll have to settle everything now, do you have a credit card?”

She opened the door and Benazir and Khalid walked into the vestibule. Khalid held his .22 semiautomatic behind his back. The silencer was in place. He stepped in front of Benazir, quickly lifted the gun and shot Mrs. Hamelton first directly in the throat then in the forehead. She dropped onto the highly polished wooden floor. The wound in the head hardly bled at all, but the throat wound bled profusely all over the floor. She lay at the feet of Benazir in a curled position. Khalid felt her throat. She was dead.

Just then someone came walking through the kitchen into the vestibule, in his bathrobe, and startled both Benazir and Khalid.

“Who is that honey?” he said as he walked into the vestibule. He hadn’t seen his wife on the floor yet. Then he saw her curled in a fetal position, blood all over the oak flooring. “Oh my God, what the hell happened here?” He questioned Benazir and Khalid as he dropped to the floor beside his wife.

“I don’t know,” Benazir quickly answered first. “We were just going to check in when your wife collapsed on the floor and started bleeding from the mouth. It happened so suddenly.”

Khalid still had his gun held behind his back. He took it out and shot Mr. Hamelton as he was about to stand back up. He shot him twice in the forehead. Mr. Hamelton was a large man – six-foot two or three and 250 pounds. He fell backwards and hit the floor with a rather large thud.

Holly shot straight up from a sound sleep. She wasn't sure if she actually heard the sound of someone falling on a floor or whether she dreamt it. Then she heard the sound of people running up the stairway.

“Jesus Christ, David, they're here!” she shrieked.

David sat right up next to Holly, slightly bewildered and confused just as Benazir and Khalid raced into their room with both their guns drawn and aimed directly at them.

Chapter 22

Pine Street Bridge: Wednesday, September 6, 11:20 p.m.

Jerry DeGorgio immediately started to get dressed while still talking to Agent Ron Wilson.

“Make sure you get a good description of the Indians or Pakistanis who stayed in those two rooms from the owners of the Days Inn. We’ll need to get that information out to law enforcement officials immediately. What’s the name of the owners again?” DeGorgio asked.

“The Patels,” Agent Wilson said.

“Right. Well, ask the Patels if they would mind going through their files and see if they can recall any other Indians or Pakistanis or suspicious foreigners that stayed with them in the last month or so.”

DeGorgio told Agent Wilson the entire story about the Morgans and their conspiracy theories concerning the locks at Lockport, the power generation facilities at the foot of Niagara Falls and all the other fine points the Morgans had brought up in their telephone conversations with Agent Chaffee.

“Hey Jerry, we found traces of plastic explosives in the rooms. Don’t you think you’re taking that information and blowing it all out of proportion. I mean, c’mon, man. Those explosives could be used for all kinds of things, but blowing up canal locks and shutting down the power at the base of the Falls. And terrorists and conspiracy plots. That’s a little much to extract from a bomb sniffing dog sniffing out some rooms at a Days Inn – in Weedsport, no less. Let’s not get too carried away here and jump to conclusions.”

“Well, I have my wife getting Doug Chaffee on the phone so we can have a three way hook up; he probably feels the same way you do. Wait, here’s Doug. Doug, I got Ron Wilson on the phone.”

“Hi Ron,” Agent Chaffee still sounded sleepy.

“Hey Doug, did we wake your ass up?” Ron asked.

“You sure as hell did, what the hell is going on? It better be damn important, I was just about to have sex with my wife,” Agent Chaffee was laughing now.

“We got ourselves a problem Doug. Ron took one of those bomb-sniffing dogs to Weedsport and the dog went nuts in both those rooms. There definitely were explosives in both rooms. Probably C-4 plastic,” DeGorgio said.

“Shit!” was all Agent Chaffee could say. “Are you positive, Ron, the dog sniffed out explosives?”

“Absolutely, the dog pawed and barked at every goddamn thing in the room: the beds, the bedspreads, the desk, the bathtub, the carpet. That shit was all over the place,” Ron said, then paused briefly. “Oh yeah, and another thing. I forgot to tell you this Jerry, but Mrs. Patel said she always thought something was strange about the guy who checked in with the attractive wife, a Hemant Shah. She remembered his name without even referring to the registry. He said he was from India the same state as the Patels, but he didn’t speak their native tongue, and she said he spoke Hindi like a Pakistani, not like a native Indian.”

“Jesus, maybe those wacky Morgans were right. We better get a hold of them and get their confirming descriptions. I’ll call them after we get a task force to Lockport. I think we’re gonna have to get Washington involved in this one Jerry, Ron. What do you guys think?”

They both just answered “Yep.”

“Well, we have nothing to really go on except what the Morgans kept telling us, so we better get up to those locks in Lockport and assume they’re wired to go. Ron, can you call Washington? I think this better go all the way to Mueller.”

“To Mueller! Hold on a second Doug. We’ve really got nothing except we detected some explosives in two rooms in Weedsport. And some wacky married couple, the Morgans, threatening us with leaking to the newspapers. We could look like real horses’ asses if all this is, is some local bank robbery or even some big mistake.” DeGorgio seemed nervous.

“Hey Jerry, so far that wacky married couple has been right on the mark. And if their wacky theories only prove to be 50% accurate, and we dismiss this as some prank or bank robbery – well then you better get out your atlas and find out where the hell Ishpeming is. Now goddammit, Ron, you contact Washington and get some bomb experts

to Lockport within the hour. Fly their ass up on one of the planes we always have at the ready at Andrews. I'll call Mueller in Washington myself.

“Jerry, you get every goddamn agent in Buffalo and Rochester and as far as Erie, PA that you can, and get their ass to Lockport, New York. Contact the State Police and the local Sheriff in Lockport. Don't tell them all the terrorist-conspiracy shit. Just tell them we think some wacko maybe trying to destroy the Lockport locks. Tell them we think we may have trapped Bucky Williams. I don't care what you tell them. Just get them to those locks in Lockport. Also I want those locks and that entire area lit up like the first game of the World Series. And Jerry, get some divers from the Buffalo police or fire department, that's probably the most important thing, do that first. What time is it?”

“I got almost 11:30,” DeGorgio answered first.

“By 12:30 I expect to see everything and everyone in place at the locks in Lockport. I'm leaving right now.”

“Hey wait a minute Doug. I'm in Weedsport. There's no way in hell I can get to Lockport in an hour,” Agent Wilson spoke up.

“I forgot where you were Ron. Stay with the Patels and keep in constant contact with Jerry or me if they have any more information. And make sure you lean on Washington and get those bomb experts on a flight. Okay, let's go!”

Agent Chaffee was in his garage and out his driveway in 2 minutes. He waited until he got to the end of his street before he turned on his siren. Once he got through Buffalo and the northeastern suburbs he turned the siren off. He took out his cell phone and searched for the cell phone number of Holly Morgan. He dialed it automatically. It rang five times and then the answering service picked up. He left her a message.

“This is Agent Chaffee of the FBI; you were right about the explosives. I need to get in touch with you as soon as possible. Here's my cell phone number.”

Agent Chaffee gave the cell phone number then he disconnected the call and called DeGorgio to find out where he was and how far he had things organized. Then he tried to call back Holly Morgan. Five rings, no answer, this time he didn't wait for the answering service to pick up. He disconnected the call and called Ron Wilson. The bomb experts from Quantico, Virginia, were already in the plane and Director Mueller was already informed of the situation in Lockport. Mueller took no chances and

informed Chertoff. The information flow stopped with the Director of Homeland Security, for the time being. The President wouldn't be informed till later in the morning.

“Where the fuck are those goddamn Morgans?” Agent Chaffee thought to himself and sped through North Tonawanda towards Lockport. He would get to the Pine Street Bridge before 12:15 a.m., Thursday, September 7.

Chapter 23

Hamelton House B&B: Wednesday Night, 11:20 p.m.

“Don’t try anything stupid Mr. Cohen, or Ms. Morgan’s brains will be splattered all over this room.” Khalid was calm as he ordered Dave to put his hands behind his back.

Benazir held her .22 semi-automatic pistol with the silencer pressed firmly against Holly’s left temple. Khalid quickly finished tying David’s hands behind his back with pieces of nylon rope he had cut to specified lengths of about 4 feet. He then taped his mouth all the way around his head tightly with duct tape – twice.

“Okay madam yoga instructor, it’s your turn.” Khalid said. “Don’t get cute either or your boyfriend’s brains will get splattered around the room.”

Benazir dragged Holly up off the bed and she stood with her hands behind her back as Khalid tied them with the nylon rope. Then he duct-taped her mouth firmly shut.

“I think we’d be better taking their car,” Khalid told Benazir. “There’s more room to maneuver and if they should get on to us they’ll be looking for a Malibu, not a white Dodge Caravan.

“Where are your car keys?” Khalid asked Dave. But he forgot he had Dave’s mouth duct-taped. He ripped the duct tape off from around his head.

“Ouch! Shit!” Dave uttered, but refused to tell him where the car keys were.

“Khalid brought the barrel of the .22 up close to Dave’s face.

“I’ll just ask one more time, where are the fucking keys?”

Holly couldn’t talk but made enough noise through the duct tape that Dave knew she meant for him to quit playing tough and tell Khalid where the keys were.

“They’re in my side pocket.”

Dave motioned with his head down towards his left side.

Khalid reached into his left side pocket and retrieved the keys, along with his wallet.

“Get her wallet too; it’s over there on top of the dresser,” Khalid said to Benazir.

“Where’s your cell phone?” Khalid asked Dave.

“It’s in my bike bag in the van.”

Khalid looked at Holly.

“Where’s your cell phone?”

Holly just shook her head.

“Where’s your goddamn cell phone?” Benazir screamed at her.

She shook her head again. Dave quickly spoke up.

“She didn’t bring her cell phone. I brought mine because we thought one was enough. We didn’t want any extra weight. That’s what she’s trying to tell you.”

Holly had placed her cell phone in an inside zippered pouch sewn into her one-piece canary-yellow biking outfit. She had accidentally left the phone in the inside pocket. The pocket was meant to carry credit cards and the like, but her slim Motorola phone fit in there quite comfortably. She had turned off the ringer and left the quiet vibration “ringer” on so when they were biking, the sound of a ringing phone wouldn’t destroy the mood. It was impossible to detect the phone in the inside pocket. The biking outfit was so skin tight that neither Benazir nor Khalid had bothered to frisk her.

Khalid re-wrapped the duct tape back around Dave’s mouth and they headed downstairs. The staircase had a twist to it so they couldn’t see the Hameltons’ lifeless bodies on the floor at the bottom of the staircase until they were around the bend. Upon seeing the dead bodies and the blood, still bright red and pooled on the hardwood floor, Holly winced and made a sound like a dog yelping; then quickly averted her eyes from the scene.

Khalid ushered Dave and Holly into the back of the van with both bikes standing upright between them. Khalid then gave his gun to Benazir and told her to shoot them both if they made any suspicious moves. Benazir had already put her gun back in her purse and dropped the purse on the floor just in front of her in the front seat. Khalid started up the van and headed immediately for their established position on the gravel rode about 8 miles back towards Tonawanda.

It was 11:35. Holly could feel her phone vibrating against her ribs. After five “rings” the vibration stopped. A few minutes later the phone vibration started again. Five rings and it stopped.

“Who the hell is calling me at this time of night?” Holly thought to herself. “It must be one of my daughters.” Her eyes welled up with tears.

Dave was thinking what the hell could they do to get out of this mess. Both he and Holly knew what their fate was. He was pissed that he didn’t just try something back at

the B&B when both he and Holly were untied and relatively free to move around. In retrospect, he thought, that had probably been their best chance. Now he thought only an act of God could save them.

Benazir was looking through both Holly's and David's wallets as Khalid kept driving towards Tonawanda on Bear Ridge Road. After reading his driver's license and other personal information she spoke up.

"Well, well well, your boyfriend's Jewish, Ms. Morgan. What a coincidence. I once dated a Jew. Actually I was engaged to a Jew, believe it or not." Benazir said.

"Shut the fuck up! You talk too much," Khalid hollered at Benazir.

"Oh quit worrying Khalid, these people aren't stupid, after all they figured out what we were up too. Well, almost. They know their fate."

Benazir was turned in her seat facing towards the back of the van while talking to Holly.

"I'm going to remove your duct tape Holly. If you start screaming I'm going to kill your Jewish boyfriend, right in front of you. Understand me?"

Holly nodded.

Benazir reached over and gently pulled off the duct tape from around Holly's mouth.

"You know Holly, under different circumstances, I think we could have become friends," Benazir smiled.

"I doubt it," Holly quickly answered. "And I think that's bullshit about you being engaged to a Jew."

"Oh believe me it's no bullshit. If it weren't for his Holocaust-surviving parents, I'd probably be married to him as we speak. But they convinced him to break the engagement."

"Goddammit that's enough talking. You're talking too much. Now shut the fuck up!" Khalid was adamant and mad.

Benazir turned back around in her seat and kept silent. But Holly continued the conversation.

"Well, what a coincidence. Twenty-five years ago I was also engaged to a Jew, whose mother and father were also Holocaust survivors. And he sort of broke off the engagement too."

Holly looked directly at Dave then quickly faced forward.

“But you know what lady, I didn’t sulk and get mad and join a Jihadist movement and kill innocent people.”

“What did you do, may I ask?” Benazir said, sarcastically and turned back around towards Holly.

“I married another man, a good man, and had two beautiful daughters.”

And as she uttered the words “two beautiful daughters,” she broke down in tears.

“All right, that’s enough of this shit. Tape her goddamn mouth back up and no more talking.” Khalid left no room for compromise.

Benazir reach over into the back seats and put the duct tape back around Holly’s mouth.

Dave’s engineering mind was working overtime. But he couldn’t think of anything. He thought that he would charge Khalid if and when they got out of the van alive. He was determined not to go quietly. He remembered hearing stories from his parents about how effortlessly the Germans hauled the Jews off to concentration camps and gassed them. He was determined to not “go quietly into that night.” He was still pissed he hadn’t tried something back at the B&B.

Holly could feel her phone vibrate for a third time. It was a little after midnight when they drove down the gravel road to the boat ramp.

Chapter 24

Lockport, New York. Pine Street Bridge, Locks 34 and 35: 12:18 a.m.

Agent Chaffee was approaching the outskirts of Lockport on Bear Ridge Road. He could see in the distance the sky was lit up like a nighttime baseball game. He knew DeGorgio had somehow got the temporary lighting already in place. He just followed the bright glow in the sky and soon came right onto Pine Street just a few hundred yards from the bridge over Locks 34 and 35. There was already a beehive of activity all along the bridge. Twelve FBI agents had already arrived from nearby cities. State Police and local sheriffs were wandering about still not sure what the hell was going on. Agent DeGorgio was running things from the middle of the bridge. He had his cell phone cemented to the right side of his head. He saw Doug Chaffee pull his car right onto the bridge and park it right in the middle. DeGorgio waved at him as he got out of his car. DeGorgio was back on his cell phone. Doug waited for DeGorgio to finish his phone conversation.

“My God Jerry, how the hell did you get all the lighting up so fast?” Chaffee asked.

“I came up with the divers from the Buffalo Police department. They have two helicopters at the ready at the Niagara Falls airport 24-hours a day patrolling the Niagara River. We’ve been here for almost thirty minutes. The divers already found two bombs near Lock 34 and between Lock 34 and 35.”

“Are you shitting me? You already found two bombs?”

“Yeah, the divers said it was easy. The bombs were those aluminum-type briefcases. You know, the kind they have on that goofy TV program *Deal or No Deal*. The bombs had 30 feet of nylon cord attached to them; the bomber must have forgotten that those ropes can float.”

“How did you know they were the bombs?” Chaffee inquired.

“We have two bomb-sniffing dogs we brought out from Buffalo on the helicopters. We brought one of the briefcases out of the water. Both dogs were all over that metal briefcase.”

“Where are the briefcases now?”

“The divers suggested we leave the bombs in the water till the boys from Washington get here and determine how the damn things are wired. The divers figured the safest place for the bombs was back in the water, so we pulled the two bombs by boat about a half-mile downstream towards Rochester. They’re sitting in the middle of the Erie Canal in about 15 feet of water. We figured if they go off, the water will absorb most of the shock.”

“Good thinking. Did they find any more briefcase-bombs?”

“They’re in the water near Lock 35, as we speak.”

Just then they heard through a portable megaphone that the divers found two more bombs near the gates of Lock 35 and near the wall in front of the original “Flight of Five” locks. They were hauling the bombs a half-mile upstream towards Buffalo.

“Are the guys from Washington here yet?” Chaffee asked.

“They got here a few minutes before you.”

“How the hell did they get here from Washington before me? Shit. They had to drive from the Buffalo airport, which is on the other side of town. That alone would take almost an hour,” Chaffee seemed puzzled.

“No no no, Doug they landed at the Niagara Falls airport. It’s not even five minutes from here by helicopter.

“Great work Jerry, really. If we don’t wind up in Ishpeming, I’ll have you to thank.”

“I’ve got some other information you’ll be interested in, Doug. The local sheriff has really been helpful. He immediately called both lock operators. They’re in the control room right now. One of them, a guy by the name of Ron Larrabee, says that earlier today two married couples came into the museum a couple hours apart and asked very detailed and similar questions about the locks. The first couple were Americans. He remembered the woman was very attractive and tall. But get this; the second couple was foreigners. He guessed they were from Mexico or India; he said they were both light-skinned.”

“Jesus, that means they were both here this afternoon. Both the terrorists and the Morgans. The Morgans may be staying right here in Lockport tonight.”

“They could be,” DeGorgio said.

Just then one of the FBI agents sent from Washington came up to Agents Chaffee and DeGorgio and introduced himself.

“Are you Agent Chaffee?” he said looking at DeGorgio.

“No I’m DeGorgio; this is Agent Chaffee,” DeGorgio said, putting his arm around Doug Chaffee.

“Hello, I’m Stan Smith. I just flew up with three other agents from Washington. They’re going to evaluate the bombs soon, but decided to leave them in the canal for the time being. They decided they couldn’t do any damage sitting in the middle of the canal resting on the bottom. Is there something I can do?”

Stan Smith was in his late twenties and obviously a recent graduate of the Academy at Quantico, Virginia. Why they sent someone to Lockport with so little experience was a mystery to both DeGorgio and Chaffee, but they didn’t say anything. It wasn’t Smith’s fault that some idiot back in Washington sent a raw recruit.

“Good to meet you Smith,” Chaffee said and stuck out his hand. “Yes there is something you can do. Look up all the hotels, motels, and Bed and Breakfasts in this town, and find out if someone by the name of Morgan is registered. Do it quickly.”

“I got a local Yellow Pages in the front seat of my car,” DeGorgio pointed to an unmarked black Ford 500 parked in the middle of the bridge just 20 feet from where they were all standing. Agent Smith took off for DeGorgio’s car.

Just then DeGorgio’s cell phone rang.

“Agent DeGorgio.”

DeGorgio waited and listened for a minute.

“Jesus, you’re kidding. Shit. No, Chaffee’s here; I’ll tell him.”

“What was that all about?” Chaffee asked.

“The divers are downstream of Lock 34, keeping their eye on the two bombs. They found two bodies floating near the banks of the canal. They dove down and found two bicycles. They said it looked like they were both males shot in the head, maybe just a day or two ago. They both looked like foreigners, Indians or Pakistanis.”

“Goddamn, those must have been the two bikers the Morgans told us about on the phone yesterday. Where are those fucking Morgans!”

One of the New York State Patrol officers called out to DeGorgio and reported that the divers thought they had found all the explosives around the two locks.

Just then Agent Smith came back and told Chaffee and DeGorgio he called all three hotels and all three B&B's. No one by the name of Morgan checked into any of the hotels or motels, nor the B&B's. One of the B&B's didn't answer but Smith assumed they were probably closed for the season.

"Closed for what season?" Chaffee questioned the young agent.

"Closed for the summer, sir. I suppose."

"First of all don't suppose shit. Second, it's still officially summer until September 21. And third, have you ever heard of the fall season and the changing of the colors, the fall foliage? That just may be the busiest season in these parts. Get down to that B&B and find out why they didn't answer their phone." Agent Chaffee wasn't very diplomatic in the way he talked to Agent Smith, the new recruit. But this was no time for diplomacy.

"I'll leave for the B&B now, sir. It's just a few blocks from here."

"Good."

Doug Chaffee waked around the bridge with his cell phone pressed against his ear. He was talking to the Buffalo office where he'd positioned two agents to take any calls. He told the agents that he wasn't to be bothered with any calls unless they were of the utmost importance and pertained to his work in Lockport. He felt somewhat relieved that the possibility of blowing the locks was completely removed. But he was still worried about the Morgans. He was beginning to assume the worst. The phone call ten minutes later from Agent Smith would confirm those fears.

"Sir I'm inside the B&B on Pine Street, you better get some police over here quick to tape off a crime scene. We have two dead bodies at the foot of a stairway. They've both been shot in the head."

"How old are they?" was the first thought that came to Chaffee's mind.

"I'd guess mid-sixties."

"Did you check the entire B&B upstairs and down?"

"Yes sir. It's clean, no other bodies," Agent Smith was starting to sound shaken.

"Have you ever seen a dead person before, Smith?"

"No, sir."

"Are you gonna be okay?"

“Yes sir, I think so, sir. I can handle this sir.”

“Are you sure? I can send DeGorgio down there.”

“I’m okay.”

“Good. Well, welcome to the FBI, Smith.”

Smith was already checking on the two cars parked in the yard. He was most concerned with the rented Chevy Malibu with Jersey plates. He reported the information back to Chaffee.

Chaffee waved for DeGorgio to come over. DeGorgio was getting the descriptions of the two foreigners from Ron Larrabee, the lock operator who’d seen them that afternoon. An FBI artist was on the way to Lockport to sketch a picture of both foreigners and send it to local authorities and all border crossings. It was 12:30 a.m. Things were moving swiftly, almost too swiftly.

“We’ve got two more bodies, Jerry. I think the Morgans are either kidnapped or dead by now. Smith found the owners of the B&B dead on the floor. One of the cars parked in the yard was a rented Malibu. It was rented in New Jersey. It probably belonged to the terrorists. He’s checking on it now. I’m sure the Morgans stayed at the B&B last night. Somehow the two terrorists found out. They must have taken the Morgans’ rented car. Find out where they rented that car. I think they called us from Canastota. Locate the largest city near there and contact every car rental agency. Find out what kind of car they rented. Goddammit, we should have taken those Morgans more seriously!”

Helicopters were now whizzing over the canal locks every few minutes. It was difficult to hear a cell phone conversation. Chaffee wanted to know what the hell all the helicopter activity was for; they already had found the bombs. Still, only a very few law enforcement officials on sight knew the entirety of the circumstances surrounding the frenzy of activity, and Agent Chaffee wanted it kept that way. He feared the terrorists’ true motives were yet to be revealed, just as the Morgans had said in their 22-minute voicemail. He had no reason to doubt anything the Morgans had said on that tape. Chaffee’s phone rang.

“Hello, Agent Douglas Chaffee,” he was more formal; he saw the call emanated from Washington.

“Yes, this is Director Mueller, What’s going on up there? Are we under control?”

“Well sir, we’ve found the bombs, and they’re safely placed up and down stream in the Erie Canal. But I’m not sure we are completely under control just yet.”

“What does that mean?” the Director of the FBI quickly shot back.

“Well sir, four people have shown up deceased so far, and there might be more, unfortunately,” Chaffee was already assuming the worst for the Morgans.

“Four dead bodies?”

“Yes sir, and we still have no clue as to where the terrorists who organized this thing are.”

“Terrorists? How can you be sure this is a terrorist plot?” Mueller seemed annoyed by the assumption of Chaffee that this was a terrorist plot.

“Well sir, all the evidence so far indicates that at least four foreign nationals, most probably Pakistanis, are intimately involved, two have already shown up dead, and we have no idea what that could mean. You might want to inform some folks at State and maybe even the White House. I think this is very serious, sir.”

“The White House! Now wait a damn minute, Chaffee. Quit jumping to conclusions. I’ve been talking with Chertoff and he definitely wants to keep this within the Department until we have rock-solid proof foreign terrorists are behind this. He’s afraid that if we over blow this and it turns out to be some local prank, it’ll make the President look bad politically, like he’s exaggerating the entire situation to make the administration look good.”

“A prank? We just found enough explosives, properly placed, to send half the flow of Niagara Falls into downtown Rochester. We just found four dead bodies. That’s no damn prank, Director. Quite frankly sir, I don’t much give a shit about the politics of this, you and Chertoff can worry about that, but I do have a dire situation here, and I’m treating it like a legitimate potential terrorist attack. You do with that information whatever the hell you want to do with it!”

Chaffee knew the real concern of Mueller and Chertoff was that if it actually was a terrorist plot and even partially successful, the administration would get blamed for being asleep at the switch and one more Katrina-like screw up. So Mueller and Chertoff were

playing down the terrorist angle for as long as they could, hoping the series of events would pass with no final determination that would implicate foreign terrorists.

Chaffee disconnected his cell phone. Jerry DeGorgio had been standing there listening to the last half of Agent Chaffee's conversation. Chaffee hardly noticed his presence.

"Who the hell were you just talking to, Doug? Was that Director Mueller, for Christ's sake?" DeGorgio was in disbelief.

"Yeah, it was Mueller."

"Are you nuts? You wanna get shit-canned? Do you wanna wind up working in our Ishpeming office?"

"Jesus Jerry, the guy thinks four dead bodies and enough explosives to dump Niagara Falls on top of Rochester, New York, might just be a prank? A fucking prank? Where the hell do we get these goddamn directors of the FBI from?"

"You know where we get 'em from. They're political appointees. It doesn't matter who we got in as President. Clinton was no better than Bush. All presidents are the same. A new president appoints his own director for the job. Qualifications don't have a damn thing to do with it. C'mon Doug, you've been around here 22 years, that's long enough to know how things work."

"Yeah, well, these guys don't know shit about what we do or how we do it. We've got agents running around the FBI for 30 years. They know the in's and out's of everything we do, but some jackass President comes along and appoints a judge or a lawyer buddy from Justice. The guy's worried about the political ramifications to the President if we've overblown the whole thing. What he's really worried about is if we missed the whole thing. What the fuck does Chertoff know about security – homeland or otherwise? What does Mueller know about security or anything about what the FBI really does or how we do it, for that matter? Mueller says he wants 'rock-solid' proof that this is a terrorist plot. 'Rock-solid' proof – what does that asshole think? The terrorists run around with a placard hanging down over their chest with a sign: 'I'm a bonified terrorist'? Mueller ought to get his ass down in the field like Smith, that Quantico graduate he sent down here, and look at two dead bodies lying in a pool of blood on a hardwood floor. Then let's see how much he's worried about the goddamn 'politics' of the situation!"

Agent Chaffee was getting steamed.

“Jesus, calm down Doug. You’re preaching to the choir. We gotta find out where the Morgans are and where those two damn terrorists are and how they planned to set off those charges and any other surprises they may have. Forget about Mueller and Chertoff.”

“Yeah, yeah, you’re right Jerry. I’m heading over to that B&B and see how Agent Smith is doing. Call me if anything new comes up.”

“Of course, you got it.”

Just then Agent Smith came running up Pine Street just as Agent Chaffee was getting in his car to drive down to the B&B.

“Hold up sir!” Agent Smith hollered at both Agents DeGorgio and Chaffee. “It’s a white Dodge Caravan. The Morgans rented a white Dodge Caravan in Rome, New York. They rented it yesterday from an Enterprise agency.”

Chapter 25

A Gravel Road Somewhere between Lockport and North Tonawanda: 12:10 a.m.

The white Dodge Caravan pulled to a stop on the gravel road, just before the incline of the boat ramp. Khalid left the car lights on but killed the engine. Then he thought the car lights lit the whole area up too much. Cars from Campbell Boulevard might see the lights and get nosy, so he told Benazir to just keep the much dimmer parking lights on.

He opened the sliding side door on his side and ushered David out of the van. Benazir did the same on her side of the van with Holly. They marched Dave and Holly in front of the car and made them kneel down side by side just in front of the parking lights.

“Watch them. If either one so much moves a muscle or attempts to get up, kill the girl first. I’m gonna take their bikes out from the back. Then I gotta go to the bathroom.”

Khalid barked out his demands to Benazir.

Khalid took the two bikes from the back of the van, one at a time, and leaned them against a tree along the side of the road. He put both their wallets back in their bike bags. Then he walked about 20 yards into the woods lining the narrow gravel road. Benazir stood watch over Dave and Holly, the silencer of her .22 semiautomatic firmly pressed against Holly’s temple.

Dave was thinking about charging Benazir and driving her right down the boat ramp into the canal. But he wasn’t sure he could make the move before she shot Holly. He knew one thing for sure, he wasn’t going to wait and be shot execution-style on his knees. He was beginning to lose control of his bladder. Holly had already lost control of hers.

“You think you’re so smart, don’t you guys?” Benazir just started talking, almost in a whisper. She didn’t want Khalid to hear her. “You think you figured this whole thing out, don’t you? Well let me assure you, you don’t know shit. You don’t know the half of it.”

Benazir almost seemed like she was bragging.

“The flooding that will wash away Rochester is just the beginning, too bad you won’t be able to see what’s really in store for your country. Hey Khalid, are you okay? What the hell’s taking you so long?”

“Goddammit, I’m taking a piss! Just watch those two.” Khalid sounded like he moved deeper beyond the tree line.

““Taking a piss,”” she repeated to herself in a half-whisper, then hollered out, “Don’t be so damn crude, we have visitors.” Then she muffled a laugh. “Like I was saying, before I was so crudely interrupted, you don’t have a clue. Khalid would kill me along with you if he heard me tell you this, but you’re not gonna be around long enough to use the information, anyhow. You think all we’re gonna do is blow those locks. Well, try to visualize this. Tomorrow around noontime we will have 50 two-man teams. Two-man assassination teams armed with automatic weapons wandering about your fancy malls and tourist spots up and down the East Coast. Do you have any idea how many people these teams could massacre? They’ll keep firing until they’re captured or killed. I’ll bet you didn’t figure that one out, did you Jew boy?”

She paused for a brief moment, laughed to herself and continued boasting, almost flaunting her knowledge with great self-satisfaction. “And there’s more. Process this pretty lady. I predict that within 24 to 48 hours, Pakistan will be ruled by al Qaeda.”

She was about to explain but Khalid was coming out from the trees.

“What the hell were you talking about?” Khalid demanded.

“Oh nothing, just reading them their last rites,” Benazir laughed.

Dave could feel the muscles in his calves tighten. He was seconds from jumping up and running Benazir towards the canal.

“Nobody move a fucking muscle!” A big booming voice came from the darkness behind the tree line.

“I’ll kill the girl,” Benazir hollered out thinking it must be the police.

“Lady you can kill anybody you want, but as soon as you pull that trigger, I’m gonna pull mine and splatter your goddamn brains all over this road.” And with that a shot was fired from behind the trees whistling within inches of Benazir’s ear. The gunshot sounded like a cannon and echoed through the night. Benazir was frozen with fear. She knew it couldn’t be the police.

“Now drop that gun lady and kick it over here.”

A large strapping figure of a man emerged from the trees carrying a hunting rifle, pointing it directly at Benazir’s head. He had a bushy black beard and looked like he had

had a bad night's sleep. Make that a few bad nights' sleep. He walked over to the .22-semiautomatic and picked it up. Looked at it quizzically.

"Well, well, look what we have here. A .22-semiautomatic, with a silencer no less. What are you some kind of a female assassin?"

Bucky still hadn't seen David and Holly kneeling on the ground. They were just out of the parking light's beam range. The bearded man walked closer to the van.

"Okay, Clyde, get over there with Bonnie."

Then he spotted Dave and Holly kneeling down, their hands tied behind their backs, their mouths securely duct-taped.

"What the goddamn hell is going on here?"

Dave and Holly looked up completely befuddled with what was going on and saw the bearded intruder plainly in the glow of the parking lights for the first time. Their eyes enlarged and they both turned towards each other then back at the heavy-set bearded stranger and recognized him at once. His face had been all over the TV for the past week, but they recognized him from the flyer they'd received from the New York State Highway Patrol when they crossed into New York from Pennsylvania several days ago. It was Bucky Williams. And Bucky could see from their startled expressions that they recognized him.

"You know who I am, don't you?" Bucky directed the question at Holly. She nodded in the affirmative.

"Hey Clyde, take that duct tape off the lady's mouth," Bucky directed the command towards Khalid.

Khalid turned towards Holly, bent down and was ready to rip the tape from her mouth.

"Gently, asshole," Bucky said.

Holly was infused with an immediate feeling of relief with the tape removed from her mouth and took in a big gulp of air.

"Yes, we know who you are. You're Bucky Williams," Holly said, still gasping for air speaking in excited breathless phrases.

"You got it lady. You probably know my rap sheet too."

"We do," Holly answered.

"Why were these people getting ready to kill you two?"

“Bucky, you have got to believe me,” Holly slowed down the pace of her speech. “These people are terrorists. They plan to blow up the canal locks down stream in Lockport and flood a huge area of the state. They have assassination teams ready to massacre Americans up and down the East Coast. They plan on causing some type of a political overthrow of the government in Pakistan.” She started to speed up the pace of her speech as she got more excited.

Khalid, upon hearing Holly talk about the assassination teams and overthrow of the Pakistani government gave Benazir a hard gaze. He would have killed her on the spot if he had his gun.

“Easy, lady. Slow down a minute,” Bucky said.

“Don’t listen to any of that bullshit Mr. Williams,” Benazir quickly interrupted. “We kidnapped those two for ransom, plain and simple. I don’t know where the hell they came up with this terrorist nonsense.”

Then Khalid joined in, “That’s right Mr. Williams, we’re sort of in the same business you’re in. If you let those two get away, they’ll go right to the police. You know we sure as hell wouldn’t tell anyone.”

“Kidnapping? It looked like you were getting ready to shoot these people in the head.” Bucky said and paused then continued, “Take the tape off the guy. I want to hear what he has to say.”

Khalid walked several steps in front of Dave and not-so- gingerly ripped the duct tape from around his head. Dave winced slightly.

“Bucky, what my friend said was the absolute truth. These two sons of bitches kidnapped us because we could identify them and expose them. If you had come by two minutes later we would be dead. There was no fucking ransom involved. They’re lying through their teeth. You got to believe us, Bucky. There could be thousands of lives at stake.”

Benazir started to talk again in that cultured British accent, “Bucky, think about this logically...”

“Shut the fuck up!” Bucky cut her off in mid-sentence. “I gotta think about this. Bonnie and Clyde are right about one thing. If I let you two go, you’ll go straight to the authorities. They won’t. Maybe I should just kill all four of you.”

Dave spoke, “Bucky, I give you my word on this. Yes. Eventually we would go to the authorities, but if you let us go, we’ll give you an hour before we say anything to anyone about you.”

“Two hours, we swear on our children’s lives. Two hours Bucky.” Holly said. “That should give you enough time to be well over 100 miles away in any direction you choose.”

“Don’t listen to that crap, Mr. Williams. They’ll stop the first goddamn car on the road and turn your ass in.” Benazir wanted a final word.

“Okay, here it is. I don’t have a lot of time to screw around with any of you. First, I want all your telephones. If you lie to me and I find a phone, I will kill you.”

Dave spoke up first. “Mine is in my front bag on the black bike.”

Khalid took his cell phone out of his pocket and tossed it over at Bucky’s feet. Benazir quickly took her phone out of her handbag lying at her feet and tossed it over towards Bucky. She still had her .22 semiautomatic in there and didn’t want Bucky searching her bag. It was her and Khalid’s only chance. She would wait for the opportune moment. This was not it.

“Where’s your phone lady?” Bucky looked at Holly.

“I didn’t bring a phone. My boyfriend did so I didn’t bring mine.” Holly took the risk and flat-out lied.

Bucky collected the two phones on the ground and backed away keeping everyone in sight till he made it over to Dave’s bike. Then he quickly looked for the bag on the handlebar, reached in and obtained Dave’s cell phone. Benazir had the briefest thought of reaching for her gun in her purse, but Bucky looked back at them too quickly.

Bucky slowly walked back to the van and one by one threw the cell phones into the middle of the Erie Canal.

“Okay, here’s what we’re gonna do. Tape both those twos’ mouths back up,” he ordered Khalid.

Dave and Holly both tensed up thinking their fate was pretty much sealed. Bucky started again.

“You two, stand up.” Bucky ordered Dave and Holly.

Khalid and Benazir couldn’t conceal their smiles.

With some difficulty, first Dave, then Holly stood up. Dave thought about seriously charging Bucky once he got to his feet. But quickly changed his mind when Bucky said: “Okay you two have exactly five minutes to get as far away from here as you can. I don’t know why the hell I trust you to give me two hours before you contact anyone for help. I must be nuts.”

Dave and Holly were just stunned and couldn’t move at first.

“Four minutes fifty seconds,” Bucky said, looking at his watch.

With their hands tied behind their backs and their mouths secured with duct tape, Dave and Holly ran like hell up the gravel road. In less than a minute they turned left on Campbell Boulevard.

“You made a big mistake Bucky,” Benazir said.

“What are you gonna do with us?” Khalid asked.

“Both of you just shut the fuck up. If you are who you say you are, you can go after those two after I leave. If you’re the terrorists they say you are, you’ll run like hell the other way, cause the way I figure it, when they do stop someone, they call the authorities about you not me. So just get on your goddamn knees and put your hands on top of your head. We still got four minutes left.” Bucky looked at his watch again.

Dave and Holly ran down Campbell Boulevard. It was pitch-black outside because there were so many trees arching over the narrow two-lane road blocking out the moonlight. They continued running for another minute, hoping a car would drive by. No cars, no people, nothing. It was desolate and deserted. Suddenly Dave turned off the road and ran into the forest, Holly followed him but was making loud noises under her duct tape. He couldn’t understand anything she was uttering, but Dave knew she thought he was nuts. He ran about 100 yards into the woods and stopped. Holly looked him straight in the face. Her eyes said it all. “What the hell are you doing?”

Dave tried to get behind Holly but every time he did, she turned around to face him again. Now it was his turn to give her the same look back. He wanted her to stand still so he could get behind her. He had an idea, but she wasn’t cooperating. Finally Dave stood there and blew with all his might against the tape and wiggled his lips furiously to

get some space between the duct tape and his lips. He finally managed to get enough space to make a barely coherent comment, but Holly understood.

“Quit moving around, goddammit and stand fucking still.”

This time she let Dave get behind her. He got down on his knees and held his duct-taped mouth by her fingers till she felt the duct tape and got the message. She quickly loosened all the tape with her fingers till he could plainly speak.

“Jesus Christ what took you so long?” He grabbed part of the nylon rope with his teeth and slowly picked apart the knot. She quickly helped and got her hands free then took off Dave’s duct tape and untied him.

They held onto each other in an embrace that was brief. They knew what they had to do and didn’t have much time to do it.

“When did you figure that maneuver out?” Holly said referring to Dave’s brilliant escape technique.

“I thought about it as we were running. How much time do we have left?” Dave said.

“I’d guess a couple minutes, we better get the hell out of here and call the FBI.”

“No. I don’t think so. I think we’re safer here. In the trees rather than out on the road. They have no idea where we might have gone. What do you mean call the FBI? You still have your phone with you?”

“Sure, I thought you knew that. Didn’t you know I was lying about the phone?”

“Yeah. I knew, but I thought you’d left it at the B&B.”

“Nope it’s right here.” She zipped down her one-piece, canary-yellow bike outfit, partially exposing both breasts, then unzipped a small inside pocket and produced her cell phone. Dave grabbed her by both shoulders and immediately kissed her on the forehead.

“See, I told you. You should have joined the CIA.”

She turned the cell phone on and quickly scrolled down to the Buffalo FBI office number.

“Maybe that schmuck Chaffee will believe us now.” She clicked on the phone number.

“What should we do about Bucky?” She asked Dave, waiting for the phone to connect.

“We said two hours.”

“Dave, he killed a cop.”

“That man saved our lives, and possibly thousands more. We said two hours. We gave our word. Goddammit, we’ll give him two hours.”

The phone rang twice at the FBI offices.

“Office of the FBI, Agent Ria Smiraldi, can I help you?”

FOR THE REST OF THE STORY, PLEASE CONTACT THE AUTHOR