

Infinite Exposure

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For all of those willing to step back and see the whole board,
not just listen to what the announcer says and be spellbound.

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Preface

This book is a work of fiction. It uses many historical events, news articles, and company names to build a time line necessary for projection forward. Without using many of these actual names and quotes, it would be difficult to build the sense of realism that gives credibility to the outcome. There is no slander or malice intended. Indeed this book is intended to be a wake-up call for both an industry and a country.

Follow the journey of this book and look for a way out, not for yourself, but for all of us.

Spine of Water Reed

It's not every morning you wake up with armed men kicking in your door and rushing into your bedroom, but that's certainly how this morning started. All because he really wanted a new computer. Not just a new computer, the best system Dell was shipping. But that want was satisfied over a decade ago. Today, he couldn't even sell that computer on eBay. Today, it was a trip with a bag over his head, wearing handcuffs to an interrogation room.

He had quite a while to think that morning. They left him alone for what seemed like hours. The stone room had no windows and must have been well below ground judging from the chill and dampness. *Best not to think about wells*, he told himself. The one overhead bulb didn't seem to give off much in the way of warmth or comfort. Of course, the worst part about all of this was what was missing: No big mirror on the wall where people could watch from the other side. He had seen that on television shows. The fact it was missing was more unnerving than anything else. Whatever was going to happen here wasn't supposed to have any witnesses. In truth, he wished the bag was still on his head.

Stop it! He screamed in his mind. *Bad enough actually being here — don't do their job for them.* Somewhere outside of the room he could faintly hear a mosque calling worshipers to prayer. *A good Muslim should be praying now*, he thought. He had no idea which wall faced Mecca, but he knew a good Muslim would rather pray in the wrong direction than miss prayer. Calmly, without a mat, he prepared himself as best he could, knelt, and began praying.

Soon into his prayers the door to the room flew open. Obviously these weren't good Muslims he was dealing with. Two different sets of hands grabbed him and slammed him down into the chair. A third man was already seated on the other side of the table. His casual attitude made it seem that he had been sitting there a while. Odd that Nedim had not heard the door open. The other man's breathing was slow and relaxed. He must have been standing outside the door for a while, because it was a full three flights of stairs to this room. Nedim remembered that much. One of them went up and the other two down. The exact order of up and down staircases was escaping him at this moment for some reason, though.

The two men who put him into the chair were still behind him. He couldn't see them, had no idea what they were wearing, but knew they hadn't left the room. Being a computer consultant helped him reason that much out. That job just didn't do him much good when it came to avoiding being here in the first place.

Reason, what a fine word. The word most people who don't understand logic use. Nedim had spent four years at university, studying logic and software design, and learning programming languages. He was supposed to be good at what he did, yet here he sat. He had no illusions as to why he was here, but he had to play the fool for a while.

Across the table was a really nice gray suit with a narrow pin stripe, white shirt, and colorful tie; obviously a Yankee come home. Probably even drank beer. Nedim knew he was the only good Muslim in the room.

Sitting in front of the man was a yellow file folder. It was stuffed to what looked like its capacity with papers. On top of the folder was a single sheet of paper. Even looking at it upside down he could read the heading of "Confession." There was a lot of typed text and a place for him to sign at the bottom. Life was not looking good.

Next to the file folder was a half-used white legal pad. Sitting on it was a silver Cross pen. This meant they (whoever "they" were at this point) wanted something. Perhaps today wasn't going to be completely horrible after all. When it came right down to it, Nedim was more than willing to let others die or go to prison for him. Actually, he admitted to himself, he kind of liked the idea. Nothing says importance like being able to order others to die. Isn't that why he really got involved with this in the first place?

Focus! He shouted in his mind. Then he looked the man across the table in the eye and asked, “Why am I here?”

“We have identified you as an al-Qaeda operative,” replied the man.

“I am a good Muslim, nothing more,” replied Nedim.

The man opened the folder and started removing printouts of Nedim's emails. There were circled items and handwritten notes all over them. Many of them were pictures that looked identical, but some had handwritten notes at the bottom. He remembered many of those images having been used throughout the past couple of years.

Nedim sat silent while the man continued to flip through printouts of his emails. He noticed that the man appeared to have a better color printer than he did. That, more than anything else from this morning, irritated him. This pile of julab had a better printer than Nedim, yet Nedim was the only good Muslim in the room.

It seemed so simple when this all started. Nedim was on a flight away to university. He was seated next to a man who claimed to be a cleric and certainly could quote any section of the Holy Quran he wished. It turned out the cleric was from a mosque near the university Nedim would be attending. Because Nedim considered himself a good Muslim, he could not turn down an invitation to pray there and attend some lectures around his class schedule.

Nedim continued to sit silent, watching the man flip through the emails. Some, with a significant amount of circled words and handwritten notes, were even turned so he could read the handwriting. Nedim continued to show no expression.

After attending some prayer services at the cleric's mosque, Nedim was asked to sit in on some of the discussions about the lessons of the Quran. Quite a few of Nedim's classmates were in these discussions as well. Most found reasons to bow out eventually, but a handful who considered themselves good Muslims stayed.

One of Nedim's classmates, Sami, was not the good Muslim he claimed. His family owned a pizza restaurant. They actually handled pork! Nedim also believed they ate it. A good Muslim should not have a girlfriend and go out on dates with her. Sami did. Sami had sex with his girlfriend and would openly talk about it back at university. Sami was not a good Muslim. Nedim would point this out every chance he could during the discussions with the cleric, yet the cleric would not toss him out of the discussions.

Publicly, the cleric said it was his duty to bring all to Islam. Privately, Nedim suspected the real reason was that Sami's family had wealth. Nedim was a good Muslim and was attending university by means of a scholarship. He studied hard, but the computer lab was open to students only so many hours per day. He really needed his own computer to meet the academic requirements for his scholarship, but the scholarship would not provide one.

Nedim was snapped back to the situation at hand by a stiff slap to the side of his head. The man had said something and he had missed it. One of the two he could not see snapped at him to answer the question he had not heard. He responded that he had not heard the question because he was praying as all good Muslims should be doing at this time. That answer earned him a strike on the other side of the head.

The man asked his question again. "Do you know the penalty for being a terrorist?"

"I am a good Muslim, not a terrorist," responded Nedim. Closed-fisted blow from behind this time, so fast and hard he had no idea which of the two delivered it, mainly because his nose had borne the brunt of the impact with the table and sprung his head back upright. He knew he was upright because blood was running down over his mouth. Vision was not a sense he had at the moment as everything was a whirl of color and light, but it seemed things would come back into focus soon.

He tried to wipe the blood from his face and had his hands firmly pulled behind the chair, then tied.

The man asked his question again. "Do you know the penalty for being a terrorist?"

"I am a good Muslim, not a terrorist," responded Nedim. This time the blow was from a club of some kind.

“I did not ask if you were a terrorist. We have the answer to that question lying before us. I asked if you know the penalty for being a terrorist in this country?”

After a moment, Nedim responded, “Life in prison or death, depending upon how wealthy your family is and how famous you are.”

“Are you famous or from a wealthy family?” asked the man.

“No,” Nedim was forced to respond.

Before him on the table was an email that had grown to haunt him. This was the email that selected the Nairobi embassy for bombing and the date in 1998 when it was to be bombed. He had no problem with the killing of infidels. The problem with this bombing was how the Islamic reporters had covered it. Across the street from the embassy had been a secretarial training school for women, and near it a day care center. Muslim women should not be attending school, nor should their children be in day care. All good Muslims know this. There had been a fatwah justifying it, yet the outrage had happened. It appeared there were no good Muslims left in the land of the prophet. That bombing caused a lot of the money to dry up as well. It was the reason Nedim didn't have a better color printer at home.

“We are prepared to execute you tomorrow,” the man said.

Nedim said nothing, but his mind raced wildly. Others were supposed to die, not him! He did not believe in martyrdom, nor that there were any virgins to be had. Besides, logic told him that unless there were thousands of them, within a month or two of his arrival in paradise they would just be used and complaining wives anyway. Unless he was getting seventy-two beautiful virgins per month for eternity, martyrdom simply wasn't worth it.

Nedim knew the worth of things. He also knew that not all virgins were beautiful. His sister was outright ugly. He suspected that would be the pool from which the virgins were drawn. He also suspected that was the very reason women were required to wear a niqab or burkha. Ugly women could have beautiful eyes.

There was one thing about martyrdom Nedim didn't know and it bothered him a great deal. Would he have a fully functional body in paradise? He had seen what was left of martyrs on the news. Logic told him that unless you got a new body in paradise, the quantity of women (virgin or otherwise) didn't matter. Then again, did you even qualify as a martyr if the police (or whatever these men were) simply beheaded you in public and you never claimed any infidel lives?

The interrogator and Nedim sat staring at one another, each waiting for the other to blink. To an onlooker, it would have looked like two children having a staring contest at school. The simple truth was that the other men were waiting for Nedim to crack. One of them would have certainly hit him again if they had realized his mind had left the room and become completely tangled up in the virgin problem.

When Nedim's mind finally came back to the room, he noticed the other man had picked up a silver pen and had been doodling on the pad. Nedim didn't take his eyes off the man, but his field of vision revealed there was now a lot of ink on the once clean white pad. None of it stood out as words, so it must have been doodles.

A little voice in the back of Nedim's mind said he should be asking for a trial. The big voice of logic told him these men had never shown him badges, didn't wear uniforms, and made no claims to any government affiliation. A public trial was not going to be an option. That big voice said his body was going to be found on a street near his mosque with a proclamation pinned on it and his head a few feet away. There was only one way out of this, and that was not to blink. The first point of yielding had to come from the other side of the table, or this was over.

Without taking his eyes off him, the other man placed the confession in front of him and laid the Cross pen on top of it. A blow to the back of Nedim's head came with the words "sign it." Thus ended the staring contest, with a cheat.

His hands were roughly untied, he right hand brought to the pen while the left was held behind him. "Sign it," said the man calmly from across the table.

"I am a good Muslim, nothing more," responded Nedim.

The man reached in his suit jacket and pulled out a folded newspaper page. He unfolded it and laid it before Nedim. "Good Muslims don't kill other Muslims," was the man's quiet reply. "You are not a martyr and you will not be welcomed into paradise. How could you possibly atone for this in the few short hours you have to live?"

Nedim quite honestly did not know. The sheet of newspaper before him was the front page from the day after the embassy bombings. It went on in detail about the Muslim women and children who were killed. Even though a fatwah had been issued authorizing the deaths of all who served the infidels, these deaths weren't covered by it. They were in a building across the street. Clerics from all over the world had issued fatwahs authorizing the deaths of all involved in this bombing.

That one botched bombing had sentenced everyone in his cell, and perhaps all cells, to death at the hands of other Muslims. Indeed, with the printouts they had in their possession, these men needed no official capacity whatsoever to chop off his head in the middle of a public square. They would never be prosecuted. They would receive medals and money from infidels around the world.

"You did not bring me here for atonement," Nedim responded.

"True," the man responded. "We would much prefer to execute you in front of the local mosque as soon as morning prayer completes."

"Why don't you?" responded Nedim. His mind raced to slap his mouth shut, but it was too late. The words were out.

The man sat silently for a moment while one of the brutes behind Nedim began forcing the pen in his hand to sign the confession. Apparently the brute had not been burdened with an overabundance of education, for he was squeezing Nedim's wrist so hard the fingers couldn't grip the pen even if he wanted them to.

"Others would prefer for us to execute all of you," said the man.

The forcing, struggling, indeed, even time, seemed to stop after he spoke those words. Nedim now knew the way out of this. He might still die, but it would not be for weeks or months. He might even avoid prison.

“All of who?” responded Nedim. He did not want to appear to be a drowning man clutching at any reed to stay alive. He didn't even care about the fist that found his skull almost as soon as he asked the question. There was a way out of this, but he had to play the game to the bitter end to be given it.

The man tapped the pile of printouts in the folder and said, “All of them. Not one of them is to be left alive when we are finished.”

Nedim began to shiver. He told himself it was the cold stone of the floor taking its toll on his feet and the chill of the room taking its toll on his bare legs, but he knew it was a lie. The reality of what was about to happen was sinking in. For him to stay alive, these men would have to kill all of those he had worked with, all of those who had known he worked with the others, and every person any of them had trained or spoken with. He seriously doubted the men in this room had that kind of capacity. In reality, they would arrest or kill some portion of the current list, then go off to other things. At that point, he would be dead. Either these men would kill him, or one they had let live would complete the task. It was an odd feeling to be perfectly healthy and know he had less than two years to live, an even odder feeling than knowing he would die in only a couple of hours if he refused. Perhaps it was the waiting — the thought of going to bed every night wondering which side was going to kill him while he slept.

This had all been so simple when it started. The cleric had arranged for a computer that was envied by all, even the rich students, to be delivered to him at the university. At first, all he had to do was study hard and graduate. Once out in the working world, all he had to do was to send a few emails back and forth. Some of them simply snapshots. None of them were pornography of any kind. Perhaps that was where it all went wrong. Had they used porn to embed their messages, really good porn, nobody would have noticed there was anything embedded in the messages. They could have even set up a porn Web site and made money to fund the cause while transmitting messages around. Sad that he would never get to suggest that to his cell.

The man was still staring at Nedim. He might not have even blinked since the staring contest had started a while ago. Nedim couldn't be certain of much at this point.

“Just how do you propose to find them?” asked Nedim.

“You will lead us to them,” was the man's response.

“I know not where they are or what they look like,” responded Nedim. It was a lie. He knew where some of them were and what some of them looked like, but not enough of them to keep himself alive.

“Still, you will lead us to them,” responded the man. “We can have no further conversation about this without a signed confession. You have a choice to make now. Sign the confession and lead us to them, or we execute you in a few minutes when prayer is over.”

“You will kill me as soon as I sign.”

“No. At least not until we are done. Then it will depend upon how well you cooperated and how many of these people,” he paused to tap the printouts, “we have killed. The confession is to be placed on file along with your picture and the other evidence. Should you try to run, hide, or stop helping us track down these individuals, the information will be handed over to every news agency in the world along with a statement promising 200,000 euros for your return, dead or alive.”

Something was odd about that last statement, but Nedim didn't have time to think it through. The man went right on.

“So. Die now, or risk dying later. Make your decision.”

“My hand has no feeling,” responded Nedim. They both looked at the hand by the pen. It was white, and the wrist was purple. A motion of some kind from the man caused the brute to release his wrist. A thousand needles rushed out to the ends of his fingers, but he could not bring his other hand around to comfort it. In an act of pure agony, both emotionally and physically, Nedim signed the confession.

Once the confession had been signed, the bag, which Nedim had not seen enter the room, was put back on his head. He was forced to stand and his hands were cuffed. He assumed they were going to execute him now, despite what they had said. The feeling in his hand was still reminding him of his betrayal. In truth, he was at peace about dying now. A public execution would make the news quickly and his brothers would be able to flee to safety.

The long walk up and down sets of stairs occurred again. Nedim didn't bother to count. In truth, he didn't begin to panic until they shoved him into a vehicle. His knees hit what felt like seats in front of him, so he assumed he was in the back. They didn't need a car to get him to the mosque courtyard for execution! He had heard the call to prayer in the room. It couldn't be more than a few blocks! "No!" he shouted. "The mosque is close! I heard the call to prayer!"

He heard the brutes, now on either side of him in the vehicle, begin to laugh and hold him in place. "Relax," said the voice of the man. "We are going to take your picture."

"Why couldn't you just do that here?" Nedim asked.

"The camera and fingerprinting equipment are at another location," the man responded.

When the engine started, Nedim could tell from the quiet and the air conditioning that this was a car. The seats felt like leather on his legs, not cheap vinyl or cloth. It must be one of those dark Mercedes he had seen secret police and diplomats riding around in. The smell inside was not the smell of the city he was used to, nor of sweat and fear. It smelled clean and new.

They drove for what seemed like quite a while, with many turns, stops, speedy stretches and slow crawls. There was no way to tell how far they had driven, or which direction they had ended up going.

Finally, the engine was turned off at a stop. Nedim was roughly pulled from the back of the car. He walked into a building, down a flight of stairs, and had his bag taken off inside of another windowless stone room. There was a big white sheet hanging on one wall, some lights shining on it, and a mounted camera facing it. Along another wall was a table with an ink pad and some forms. Beside all of this was a computer with a printer. The computer had a cable running over to the camera.

This room came equipped with two new people. Both of them were white, but both looked strikingly different. He judged their age to be in the late twenties to early thirties range. Nedim was taken over in front of the sheet and made to face forward. A series of front and side photos were taken, then he was dragged over to the table.

While Nedim's handcuffs were being removed, he noticed something odd about this place. Silence. There were no noises coming from other parts of the building. No conversations. No mechanical devices. No sounds of people outside. *This place must be very isolated*, he thought.

The fingerprinting proceeded while the printer spat out his photograph on a page with all his personal information. The printout finished about the time his last finger impression was being taken. The camera man placed it into a folder he handed to the man in the suit. "We own ya now, mate," he said when he looked at Nedim.

He's British! A voice screamed in Nedim's head, or perhaps he screamed it, he couldn't be certain. The man who had been taking Nedim's fingerprints said, "That we do," in the thickest German accent Nedim had ever heard as he handed the form over to the man in the suit.

He's German! Screamed the same voice Nedim had heard only moments ago. That explains the euros! This was very bad indeed. Not only had he been captured, but he had been captured by people who weren't even on the list to be killed yet.

A Brit working with clandestine Pakistani operatives was a very bad sign. A German working with all of them was a very bad sign indeed! It was obvious to Nedim the men in this room were not under the control of any one government. Perhaps there was no government controlling them at all.

Nedim had heard stories about freelance operators like this from the days when bin Laden was throwing the Russians out of Afghanistan. They did what they pleased, always seemed to have limitless stores of weapons and funding. Sometimes they would go into a village and kill everyone there, then leave a few dead Russian soldiers and some Russian weapons for the news reporters to find. These types of men didn't fight for a cause, they fought for money and the thrill of the kill.

When Nedim's mind came back to the room he realized all of the men were laughing at him. Even the man in the suit.