

## Chapter One

### Saipan Island, "The Back Door To America"

Ishmael Khan left work at United Technology, saying he had a business lunch. Heart beating fast, he drove along Beach Road, through the humid and intolerable heat of the day toward the pig farm where he had hidden the dirty bomb.

Passing a constant litter of discarded beer cans, wine and whiskey bottles, used toilet paper and fast food take out cartons, all windblown on the roadside, the stink of raw sewage dumped directly into the ocean forced him to roll up the window of his Nissan Altima. Even the filth of Saipan could not diminish his joy today.

It had been so easy. Ishmael giggled as he thought about the stupidity of Americans. After he had been hired at the local firm owned by Pakistanis, he had simply slipped inside the United States. No need for a passport or visa. He was INSIDE America! It was like being in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York. He was REALLY HERE! And now, Inshallah, he would do God's will.

From the time of his birth in Karachi, Pakistan, Ishmael was taught by his parents that he was God's holy warrior. The imam in the mosque drilled that divine message into him, saying he had been chosen by Allah to give Him glory. His teachers in the madrassa instructed him on his namesake which was linked back 4000 years to the Patriarch Abraham's Arabic wife Hagar and her son John Rester Zodrow • 6

Ishmael. They all told him it was his great destiny to become a holy martyr for Jihad. After the wonderful occurrence of 9/11, excitement grew daily among his brethren in Karachi. They would meet and discuss the next great move on Satan. Ishmael concentrated on a single fatal blow. A dramatic course of action that had always appealed to him, delivering a nuclear bomb into the United States. He knew that highly enriched uranium in such a nuclear device had a relatively low level of radioactivity and was therefore very difficult to locate with current radiation-detection equipment. So if he could get his hands on one, he felt he could make it happen.

But he soon learned that obtaining such a nuclear device was a huge, almost impossible problem.

With the fall of the USSR, certain break-away countries became known traffickers in thermonuclear weapons. But in a GAO report Ishmael had read on the Internet, he learned that under its Second Line of Defense program, the U.S. Department of Energy had installed 70 portal monitors at over 60 sites in Russia alone. And more were planned in Bulgaria, Estonia and Lithuania. That meant it was unthinkable to buy a nuclear bomb and smuggle it out.

This left the obvious choice of obtaining radioactive materials used in conjunction with conventional explosives, which was known as a "dirty bomb". As a scientist-engineer, Ishmael knew there were only eight types of radioactive sources suitable for dirty bombs. Four caused external injuries only. The other four, including Cesium-137 and Americium-241, were the best, producing internal bodily damage to organs as well. One gram of Cesium or Americium were so powerful it would take 2 million grams of oil or 3 million grams of coal to equal their force. And he had over 5 grams, a whole teaspoon of Americium.

Khan had read a federal study conducted by the Canadian government deducing that a dirty bomb with just 7 • Back Door Down

5 grams of Cesium-137 or Americium-241 set off in a large city would produce panic and thousands of deaths and other long-term casualties of disease and cancers. The cleanup alone would require billions of dollars and the effect on the economy with the closing of the Long Beach/Los Angeles port, the biggest on the West Coast, could rise into many trillions.

And if he was lucky, given a little breeze, say 7 mph, the blast could spread radiation over 250 square kilometers, or about 200 square miles and kill many more Americans. Just as important, the psychological impact across the nation would be devastating. People were generally fearful and ignorant of radiation and considered it evil and always lethal. Mass panic everywhere was inevitable.

In a strange twist, he learned that Al Zawahiri, himself, Bin Laden's second in command, who had convinced Bin Laden to bring down the towers on 9/11, was concentrating his efforts on building a dirty bomb using Americium. The results were laughable.

In his mania to obtain a dirty bomb, Zawahiri found that household smoke detectors contained Americium. And that he needed at least a gram to make his dirty bomb work. Zawahiri sent out a worldwide Fatah message, everywhere throughout the Muslim world, asking that they send him smoke detectors. Thousands of them poured into his office inside the cave. However, the amount of Americium-241 in each detector was very small, only about 0.2 micro grams. And it would take over 1 million smoke detectors to complete his task. Realizing he would never reach his goal, the Egyptian Doctor buried the mess. To this day, U.S. Rangers capturing Zawahiri's abandoned cave remained baffled at finding bags and bags of smoke detectors.

Still, using the Internet to study the problem closely and finally consulting with various university professors he trusted, Ishmael discovered that even if he obtained a dirty John Rester Zodrow • 8

bomb, it wasn't the hardest part. The U.S. Government, after 9/11, had concentrated massive efforts on securing every American airport. So assuming that was a dead end but still hopeful that he could build a dirty bomb, Ishmael continued his investigation and finally hit pay dirt.

In a report by the Rand Corporation, The Office of Homeland Security admitted that with more than 6 million containers a year entering U.S. ports, examining them all was not possible. Instead, they would attempt to identify only "high-interest" vessels and search their containers.

The report went on to say that in addition, as a First Line of Defense, Homeland would shift the responsibility of examining in-coming cargo to friendly, foreign ports. That placed the burden of security to self-policing manufacturers and shippers. It was called The Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism, C-TPAT, and obligated importers to take responsibility for their cargo. Ishmael thought that was ridiculous to put the security of a nation into other nations' hands. But then it struck him. The U.S. Government had done this because it was admitting it could not, without help, stop a

determined terrorist.

Ishmael delved deeper, unearthing shocking facts about American seaports. Newark and Baltimore only screened 6% of all incoming containers. Honolulu, Los Angeles/Long Beach, Seattle-Tacoma were equipped with the new drive-through nuclear detection devices. But their success rates in practice tests were less than 50%. What he needed was a lax country. One that the U.S would never suspect. One that was trusted. And then he found it. The way into America. Once there, it would be like shipping the weapon of mass destruction across state lines, from Arizona into California.

Visiting an uncle in Islamabad, Ishmael had come across a flyer designed to promote commerce. The flyer from a place called Saipan stated, "DO BUSINESS IN A COUNTRY WITHIN A COUNTRY." 9 • Back Door Down

Immediately, Ishmael applied for an engineering position at United Technology Analysis on the island of Saipan. Owned by fellow Pakistanis who were sympathetic to the cause of jihad, United Technology Analysis contracted with such companies as Boeing, General Electric, IBM, Airbus to conduct non-invasive stress tests on glass, composites and metal. The company's current contract with Boeing was to check the specifications of density on all wing installations used on board the new 787. And that with a little begging, is what Ishmael was put in charge of doing.

As he had hoped, the tests performed with the portable and bench-type fluid density gauges and sensing devices held sufficient amounts of Americium to make his dirty bomb. Together the two German-made gauges held a total of slightly more than 5.8 grams of Americium-241. Plenty to do the job.

It was easy to steal two of the Siemens portable gauge devices. United Technology filed its routine police report, but everyone knew that was as far as it would go on the island. There was so much theft in Saipan, the cops rarely pursued anything. And it didn't seem to make any difference that the two instruments contained nuclear material.

Ishmael turned off Beach Road and aimed the company Nissan toward the nearby green hills, then sped up a long dirt road to the farm surrounded by palm and Flame trees. He stopped below the house and parked by the hog pen. Several filthy black hairy beasts lifted their long snouts out of the mud. But it was obviously too hot to move. This place was a Muslim's nightmare.

Khan waved to Lulu who was driving his small tractor, toward a maize field. The farmer was an Islamic radical, a believer in Jihad. When Khan said it was ironic he was raising pork, Lulu said he never touched it himself and what did it matter if Christians ate the foul flesh? John Rester Zodrow • 10

Holding his breath as well as he could against the fetid stench of pig urine and defecation, Khan delicately stepped inside the tall metal barn. He picked his way around stacks of hay bales until he arrived at the corrugated tin wall in the back. Kneeling, he tentatively felt beneath a grain bin and pulled out a package, about the size of a two-gallon water bottle. Inside it, he had taped a cell phone and detonator inserted by wires into eighteen pounds of homemade C-4 plastic explosive surrounding the Americium 241. That large amount could be triggered from

anywhere in the world, simply by dialing the correct phone number. Ishmael checked its outward appearance carefully and saw it was just as he had left it, wrapped tightly in its green garbage bag, held fast with twine. The package would be placed inside a large lead-lined metal box. Even if it was scanned, there was no danger of the slightest curie of radiation setting off the most sensitive detector. Ishmael had taken the additional precaution of placing the Americium-241 inside a small tempered glass vial he had selected especially for this purpose. And if dogs tried to sniff for the radioactive Americium, it was shielded inside sealed paraffin wax. But he knew that in handling the fissile material and constructing the bomb, he would pay the price later. It did not matter. Praise to Allah. Making his way back to the Japanese car, Ishmael carefully set the package on the passenger seat. As he drove back to Garapan city, he smiled, thinking about the appropriate packaging he had so carefully chosen in which to place the bomb. It had to be both a clever disguise and his own personal message to Satan America. Inside the garbage bag, jiggling on the seat beside him was the perfect symbol. A store-size carton that once contained Hershey kisses. 11 • Back Door Down

## Chapter Two

Mark Bolt sat in his Homeland Security office overlooking San Juan harbor, gazing out the windows at the vessels tied up with their shipping containers being un-loaded by a huge crane and hauled away by trucks. Nobody knew what was in the containers. Until now, Saipan had been allowed to ship anything they wanted to the mainland, without establishing what was in the thousands of containers. But by this time tomorrow, everything would change with the Radiographic Imaging System monitors. These devices sent high-energy photons through cargo containers to create a radiographic image of the contents inside a shipping container, searching for nuclear weapons, contraband, stowaways, and other illicit cargo. A nuclear weapon, for instance, would show up as a white or black image on the radio graph and would be clearly visible even if hidden in a shipment of low-Z material like food or paper.

It wasn't a perfect system. a large variety of benign cargo that naturally emitted radioactivity, including bananas, granite, porcelain, and stoneware, all with occurring radioactive materials making a machine err in its analysis. But still it would be a huge improvement. They had secretly arrived inside wooden crates, each labeled "Electric Generator."

The reason the so-called Sniffers had arrived secretly was that over the years, the Office of Homeland Security had tried to set up these monitoring devices in the port, but had constantly run into stiff resistance from the native-controlled customs officials. There had been a constant stream of delays in ordering the Radiographic x-ray units with paperwork misplaced and lost. Then bribes John Rester Zodrow • 12

had been demanded. The Governor of Saipan tried to levy a tax on the Sniffer. And Homeland Security had discovered that it had little authority to order any change on this convoluted, family-controlled society of Chamorros whose clans ruled the island. Homeland could suggest. But that was about it.

Two other Homeland officers before Mark had attempted to install the Sniffers and each had returned home unsuccessful. Then Mark Bolt, who had arrived with his family three months ago, had taken the bull by the horns. He convinced his immediate superior Ernie Yates in Washington D.C. to secretly ship three Radiographic scanners, without knowledge of the local Saipan government. And now that they had arrived this morning, Mark vowed that if he had to he would install them himself. 13 • Back Door Down

## Chapter Three

They had driven from Capitol Hill before sunrise, Polycarp insisting they must see the beach as the sun rose. The old native was right. It had been a magnificent sight. They drank orange juice and coffee Sally had brought in thermoses and munched on bologna sandwiches while the morning broke with a fantastic display of purple, silver rays shooting skyward, finally breaking into a vermilion sky above lightening water until the sky became a cloudless pure, joyful blue.

All day long, Polycarp, dove and body surfed with Laura in the azure ocean. He didn't use a mask but held his breath for what seemed forever and pointed out all the colorful golden and red fishes that swam in the coral. Laura couldn't get enough of it. Her lithe body quivering with pleasure, she accompanied Polycarp on each dive and each time rose up like Venus from the waves, shouting to Sally who was sunning herself on the beach, describing another new discovery of colorful fishes.

This was the paradise Sally had hoped for. Warming her bikini-exposed, flat stomach and slender legs, she relished the lack of flies, humidity, stench and garbage. And natives insulting her even while she shopped for groceries. They banged into her cart and in line to check out, women shoppers cut in front of her. On the street, she was constantly called "a fucking haole" and noticed hostile stares.

One time in Garapan's grocery store parking lot, as she rolled her cart to her car, an old woman approached.

Sally smiled, thinking she wanted to greet her and said, "Hello." John Rester Zodrow • 14

Instead, the woman spat in her face, and began shrieking invectives in a Chamorro language that she could not understand.

But despite all the difficult things to endure in Saipan, Sally was amazed and glad that Laura seemed to thrive. She loved the tropical weather, liked climbing little Mt. Tapochao behind their house at only 1600 feet. Soon, she was running with the Navy's neighborhood kids on Capitol Hill where they lived, even speaking some Chamorro, the island's native language.

For the first time since they had arrived nearly a year ago, Sally thought of sex. Of being with her husband, Mark. Of making love. Lately, she had been such a sour puss. But now upon returning home, she promised to make it up to Mark and screw his brains out.

Momentarily, she watched Laura frolicking in the softly breaking waves and thought how in coming to Saipan, she had hoped to make a clean break from her past. Was it only December 31 of last year that she had officially quit the CIA? Recruited straight

out of Pennsylvania State University at age 21, she had been trained in field work, becoming an expert at anti-terror infiltration. Rising through the ranks, Sally had been selected to be a covert case officer, serving her first stint on the Greece desk. There as a SOO, a Staff Operations Officer, she had posed as a State Department employee and was able to infiltrate a group of radical Islamics and stop a coup from materializing in Lebanon.

Next, as a Covert Operative, Sally had been stationed in Istanbul to serve in the C.P.D.'s then modest Iraq branch. When, in late 2002, word came down from the White House to 'Find the weapons of mass destruction there' her unit was expanded and renamed the Joint Task Force on Iraq. Within months, the JTFI grew to fifty or so employees. 15 • Back Door Down

But try as she and her other colleagues might, slipping many times over the border into Iraq, into such places as Baghdad, Kirkuk, and even the Kurdish territories, and despite all the pressure she received from her superiors, no one could find a trace of weapons of mass destruction anywhere. Then on March 19, 2003, when the Bush administration invaded Iraq anyway, claiming Saddam Hussein had merely hidden those nuclear and chemical weapons, Sally transferred to the Cyprus desk in disgust and watched the debacle begin.

Later, in operations inside Turkey, and Syria, she focused full time on clandestinely handling moles and spooks to garner vital foreign intelligence on a full range of national security issues. As an OO, an Operations Officer, Sally was awarded numerous accolades for her sound judgment, ability to assess the character and motivations of others and establish strong relationships with those she supervised. Her assignments also included working with the NCS, the National Clandestine Services, to procure intelligence of highest interest to National Security, working in the fields of international terrorism, weapons proliferation and covert action in international crime and narcotics trafficking.

Then, after two years, with her tour up, Sally returned to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia and joined the Counter Proliferation Division. Serving as a COO, a Core Collector Operations Officer for Narcotics, she met Mark Bolt who was in the Navy Seals at the time. Unexpectedly, they fell in love and within a month, got married.

Discovering that she and Mark could not have children, because of his low sperm cell count, they adopted Laura as an orphan at age 4 from war-torn Kosovo. Laura had been born with Fragile X Syndrome. Her mind would never mature much past twelve. But ironically, her face and body were extraordinarily lovely. Boys with the Fragile X John Rester Zodrow • 16

curse were not so lucky. They had elongated heads, large ears, flat feet, slack muscles and a low IQ. Except for the IQ part, girls skated. Probably, the experts said, because they had an extra X chromosome to make up for the damaged one.

But Laura had a great sense of humor. She always giggled about herself, "Dumb, but charming. You know, kinda like Marilyn."

Wanting to devote full time to raising her daughter, Sally resigned her position at the CIA. Her superiors were appalled at losing her. But Sally never looked back. She

knew she had made the right decision.

On the beach now, she lay back, stretched and luxuriated. At peace for the first time since she had arrived in this dreadful place, and lulled by the warm breezes on her body, she fell asleep and dreamed of their home in the Rocky Mountains.

"What's it going to be?" she asked as they drove up from their house in Leadville, along the long winding road to Independence Pass, situated at the tippy-top of the Continental Divide. This was a menu, full of delicious and variously rated rock climbing. Laura had already done eight easy climbs. It was summer and the warm mountain air blew through the open windows of their Jeep.

"Robert Redford lives in Medford! What are my choices?" Laura asked from the back seat.

"The Spookalator," Mark was driving.

"Done it."

Over the last month, they had been teaching Laura how to mountain climb, taking her on little day excursions, she, growing tanned from the sun, gaining confidence and learning impressive skills. Her secret was the ability to intensely focus on a problem that presented itself while climbing.

"Truth Decay." Sally offered.

"Too easy." 17 • Back Door Down

"Buckets of Love?"

"Ugh, love, dove, corny! I wouldn't be caught dead up there!"

"What about the Daredevil?" Mark asked. "I think you're ready for six bolts." He was referring to the number of pitons required to be set into rock to reach the top.

Momentarily, Laura considered his proposal, watching the mountains glide by above her. The Daredevil was a medium rated, single climb with a mandatory heel hook over the roof at the last moment before gaining the top. At that point, it meant she would dangle upside down, holding on with just her fingertips, and then lift her feet up to gain the final edge. The sheer face of Daredevil was a vertical 190 feet drop to a boulder-strewn bottom below.

"Bette Davis, here's a kiss! It's nearly totally vertical," Laura said.

"Why it's called the Dare Devil," Mark agreed. "But I think you can do it."

"Okay, I'll do that one today."

"On rope," Sally added.

Gearing up, they hiked over Classy Cliff and made their way above Master Head, then arrived at the base of Dare Devil. It loomed darkly above in its basalt face, its majestic vertical wall thrusting to the sky.

Mark checked all the equipment, hooked up the rope to each of their harnesses then took the lead. The first 10 feet of Dare Devil was an easy climb, but then the escarpment rose starkly into its sheer face for the next 180 feet.

Sally had last man position on the rope. Laura was above her, roped in between Mark and herself for safety. In case Laura or she slipped, Mark would belay, halting their fall.

Sally carefully watched Laura. She was doing well in the climb, concentrating, doing fine, using her fingertips to find places to gain the next ledge, wedging fists into tight

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crevices, chinning herself up to gain the next rocky outcrop.

From the very beginning, Laura had shown no fear of heights and had taken to mountain climbing with a natural talent. Like Laura, the thing Sally had always loved about mountaineering was not the danger but the total sensation of focus. All the complexities of the world peeled away and just the total concentration of where to put hands and toes. Once into the climb, immersed in a deep meditation and single-minded contemplation, Sally watched Laura move above her, knowing her daughter was feeling the same sense of pure joy.

The granite wall they were all on, now began to incline outward, its face tilting back toward the bottom.

Ahead, Mark looked down at them. "Everybody okay?"

"Clint Eastwood could," Laura shouted, her voice echoing against the vertical wall.

"I'm going off rope!"

And before Mark or Sally could protest, she slipped off the safety rope from her carabiner on the harness. Now the long nylon was attached to only Mark and Sally.

"Laura," Sally tried to keep her voice calm. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to free climb, mom."

Sally glanced up at Mark. He was frowning. "Laura," he said, "this isn't a good idea. You could fall, baby."

"I won't fall! I can climb! I can be just like anybody! I can do it! You just don't think I can!"

"Honey," Sally begged, "slip the rope back through your harness ring."

"I'm not a kid anymore, mom! I'm going to free climb this! And when I do, you'll have to listen to me!"

"I always do!" she tried.

"No! No, you don't!"

"About what?" 19 • Back Door Down

"About a lot of things."

"Laura, you can talk to us with the rope on!" Mark shouted down. "Remember the first rule. Be safe?"

In answer, Laura began pulling herself up, ascending solo, hand over hand.

Mark levered up to a little shelf projection and looked down at Laura. "Okay, you said you wanted us to listen. What do you want to talk about?"

Sally could have screamed, "No, no, don't chat! Not here! Not this high! We have to do something!" But she forced herself to keep still and hold her breath while watching Laura scale the face free hand.

"Mom, you lied to me!" Laura paused a moment and studied the granite above her for the next hand hold.

"About what?" Sally asked.

"About what happened to my baby brother?"

Sally froze, unable to move.

"I know you had him, mom! I found your album you hid in your closet. I was looking for my book on birds. And I found it."

"You went in my things?" Sally felt a growing anger at a secret long kept and now exposed. Even Mark didn't know about the child she'd given birth to as a teen ager.



"I saw his picture in your album. I even saw your writing on the back. You gave away my brother!"

The earth far below Sally rushed up at her. A kind of vertigo spun her around.

"Honey," Mark shouted to her. "Don't look down!"

Sally raised her eyes to Mark, wondering what he was feeling at hearing this revealed. Her world was wobbling, tipping over. Why had she not told him about the brief fling she had had with Jerry, finding herself pregnant? It had been so long ago, ancient history. Two years before she met Mark. John Rester Zodrow • 20

"Laura," Mark said calmly up to her. "There's a little split. To your right. Probably caused by ice forming. It will make a good finger grip. Do you see it?"

"I see it..." But she did not reach for it.

"Laura," Mark smiled. "Do you think your mom loves you?"

"I suppose she does."

"And your little brother?"

"Not if she gave him away."

"Laura. Don't you think it tore your mother's heart out to do that? She would have never done that unless she had no other way of keeping him."

Mark turned, looking at Sally. Their eyes locked and she felt a rush of emotion flood her. Shame that she had never trusted him enough to reveal her baby.

"Tell you what, Laura." Mark's voice reverberated against the rock wall. "You put your rope back on. And we'll find your baby brother."

"We'll get him back?" Laura asked brightly.

"I can't promise that," Mark gazed at Sally.

"Then no deal!" Laura lunged up and grabbed the crevice Mark had pointed out. But the rock crumpled in her hand. Her boots slipped and she swung out over the chasm, barely holding on with her other hand.

Sally gasped and climbed toward her.

"Humphrey Bogart, you ate my yogurt! I can do this!" Laura swung back, brought up her other hand and found a new little ridge. This time, her grip held.

Looking at Mark, Laura said, "Dad, you promise we'll find my little brother?"

"Yes."

"You promise too, mom?"

Sally said, "You bet, we'll."

"I mean it, mom!"

"I know, honey, we'll find him." 21 • Back Door Down

Laura thought about it a moment. "How will we know where to look?"

Mark said, "We'll do it together. It may take time, but we'll find him."

"Honest?"

"On my honor! Now put your rope back on."

Laura thought about that for another moment, hanging there, then looked down at Sally. "You should have told me, mom. I know I'm not that smart, but you don't have to hide things from me. I can handle it! Because, you understand it bothers me.

`Cause I just really, really, really need to see my little brother, mom!"

"From now on, I'll tell you everything," Sally managed.

"No more secrets?"

Sally looked up at Mark. "Not one this big."

Mark grinned and nodded.

Satisfied, Laura reached out, grabbed the belay rope and threaded it back through her harness ring, tying the knot.

"Thank you," Sally whispered, her voice weak.

"Okay, then." Laura said, "Roped in. Good to go."

"That's my girl," Mark nodded.

"Paul Newman can." She concentrated on her continuing her climb upwards. "Jack Nicholson, you sonofagun!"

Under the final ledge, Laura swung up both her arms, grabbed hold, flipped upside down and pulled herself over the top of Dare Devil.

Sally followed, gaining the summit and rolling up onto the flat ledge. She saw Laura already hugging Mark. He was holding her, tears welling in his eyes.

Sally watched them a moment, unwilling to intrude. Then Laura saw her. "Good climb, huh, mom?" she grinned.

With uncertainty, Sally caught Mark's gaze. John Rester Zodrow • 22

While Laura began to undo her harness, Mark came over to Sally, who was feeling awkward and embarrassed at what he had learned from Laura.

He reached down and smoothly unclipped her carabiner.

Sally nodded, fighting back tears, not knowing what to say. "I should have told you..." she began, her voice trailing off.

He pulled her tight into his arms. "You know she blackmailed you," he whispered into Sally's ear.

"Not so dumb, huh?"

"Looks like we'll have to find her brother."

Sally nodded. "Ironic, huh? I put my own baby up for adoption and we adopted another."

"Today," he whispered. "We're family. All of us."

Sally felt a great burden lift from her. She gazed out across the magnificent Rockies thrusting their snowy heads high into the sky all around them and understood that their love was true. It had withstood the test. And she vowed that no matter what, she would do anything in return for this man, her husband named Mark Bolt. Anything.

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## Chapter Four

On the fourth hole of the beautiful Palau Golf Resort, designed by the great Australian golfer, Greg Norman, Jason Richardson III, recent inheritor of the Marianas Lines Shipping after his father died of a sudden heart attack last year, drove his Titleist #1 perfectly toward the pin. The "Millionaire Playboy in Paradise", as The Wall Street Journal called him, smiled at his perfect drive. The muckraking, International Internet Truth had not been so kind in its description of him, labeling Jason "a degenerate sex weirdo born into unearned wealth." "Great shot! 300 yards at least!" Remi Tan, known as the unofficial Mayor of Saipan and chief of his Chamorro

clan, flattered him. The two were having their weekly golf meeting at the Resort. "--well, 280 anyway," Jason shrugged happily. Where else, he thought, in the entire United States of America could you play for peanuts on beautiful golf courses, openly bribe elected officials because it was considered an accepted way of life, and have any beautiful, exotic young girl, including those below age 12, for \$7.00 with condom, and \$10.00 without? Paradise.

The two men climbed back into their golf cart and drove along the #6 fairway toward their balls. A call chimed on Remi's cell phone. Seeing who it was, he took it. "I'll see what I can do." He disconnected.

"Who was that?" Jason asked.

"Guy who needs a shipment on one of your boats."

Remi Tan was the "Unofficial Mayor" of Saipan because he secretly had the power to keep everything running John Rester Zodrow • 24

smoothly on the island. Always putting deals together. Like building that power plant with the Vietnamese, or pushing through the new hotel on Susupe beach financed by Joseph Ling, the Chinese Mafioso who ran the casino on Tinian island. His job was keeping everybody happy. And it paid very, very well.

Remi had built an \$8 million dollar house on the neighboring small island of Akora on a hill that looked across the water to Saipan. People joked that his mansion wasn't high up so Remi could look down, it was there so they could all look up. He was the king.

As they arrived at where their golf balls lay, Remi said, "Oh, by the way, that guy who just called. He needs a whole shipping container."

"You know this guy?"

"Says he's an engineer. Works for United Technology here on the island." Remi decided not to tell Jason that he was a Pakistani. What did it matter anyway? Money was money.

"How much?"

"I'll charge him the usual. Half a million." He did not reveal that the Pakistani would pay \$1 million.

Jason studied him. "Look," he said, "I don't need more trouble, Remi. Remember one of my containers falling on the docks in San Francisco, spilling heroin all over?"

"Accidents happen in any business. Don't worry. That was all taken care of." Using a 3 iron, Remi took his second swing, flubbing it badly so the ball bounced only a short way down the fairway. "I'm taking a mulligan," he announced, putting down another ball.

"You can't take a mulligan here. That's only when you drive off the tee."

"Fuck you," Remi said.

"Fucking islander."

"Fucking American." 25 • Back Door Down

"You're an American too." Jason said.

"I may have a U.S. passport but I'll never be an American."

Remi Tan swung, stroking the substitute ball only slightly farther than his first.

"Shit," he said.

"Banzai! Banzai!" A group of drunken Japanese tourists had rolled up behind them in their carts. They were screaming, gesturing for Jason and Remi to get out of the way. Jason ignored them, chose a 3 wood, set up for his shot on the par four #4 hole, waggled his butt and hit a straight long drive. The ball rolled up onto the green, twenty feet from the hole.

"Nice," Remi shrugged.

Behind, one of the Japanese called out derisively, "You're short!" And they all laughed.

"How insulting," Jason said.

"They're talking about your lie; not how tall you are."

"I know that." Climbing back into the cart, Jason said to Remi, "I want a new cherry girl."

Reacting like a shopkeeper who's just been asked on what aisle he kept the peanuts, Remi thought a moment, then said, "I have one for you, Jason. A Vietnamese. Doesn't speak English. Mother needs the money. She will sell her."

Jason leaned close and lowered his voice. "How much?"

"The usual. Five thousand for a week."

"How soon?"

"I will have her waiting for you when we arrive at the clubhouse."

An impatient Japanese golfer behind them hit his ball high into the air, and yelled "Fore!" John Rester Zodrow • 26

Jason and Remi turned in the cart and watched the ball fly toward them, then smack down on the roof of their cart, ricocheting off into the woods.

Remi stopped the cart. "In World War II, the Japs cut off my grandfather's head for stealing a chicken."

He got out of the golf cart, fished inside his golf bag's lower pocket and withdrew a Marlin 9mm pistol. Swinging back at the Japanese, he shot off the entire clip.

BAM! BOOM! BLAM!

The golfers flattened themselves on the grass and dove behind nearby trees.

When Remi was reloading, Jason said, "I thought you liked doing business with them." "Business, yes."

"They could report you."

"Let them. My brother is Chief of Police. My father is a Judge."

"I love this place!" Jason smiled.

When Jason first arrived here in this lonely little group of islands in the middle of nowhere a few years ago, it was hard to believe he was still in the United States. There were only three enterprises in the islands, tourism, a corrupt government supported by Congress and the garment business with lots of foreign girls. He felt like he'd entered an upside-down universe, one of those strange Sci-Fi parallel worlds, where everything was opposite in morals and laws. Here, you were expected to be sinful.

In this Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, it was not only permitted but required to be dishonest. Everyone seemed on the take. Nepotism in government was the rule, and just about everyone in the islands worked in some form of government. Politicians were expected to appoint their unqualified relatives to high-

paying offices, and steal every penny they could get their hands on. Oh, and did he mention, there was no Federal Income Tax? Saipan! It was paradise! 27 • Back Door Down

At the seventh tee, a huge Chamorro nicknamed Manhattan appeared. Jason was afraid of Manhattan. He was Remi's go-to for the heavy lifting that needed doing. The man the size of a Sumo wrestler bowed to Remi and kissed his hand.

"The word from my friends in San Juan port," Remi said to him, "is that something called Sniffers have arrived. And that a zealous agent named Mark Bolt at the port snuck them in. They will be used to check our shipments to the mainland."

"That cannot be allowed," Manhattan said. The precious export of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, Philippine "ice" and money laundering that made the clan's family fortune would be disrupted. Perhaps stopped altogether.

"Perform the clan's medicine on him. His family too," he said. "Leave a message for Homeland."

Manhattan nodded, understanding, then lumbered off. Jason pretended he had not heard. He hit his tee shot. It launched off low, flew out about a hundred yards, shanked badly to the left and smacked the top of a palm tree, disappearing inside its maze of thorns and branches.

Jason threw down his club, annoyed. "I've had enough of this. Where's my cherry?"

"Why, as I said, she is waiting for you, Jason." Remi cooed smoothly.

They abandoned their game and drove straight across the greens toward the clubhouse. As they approached the eighteenth, Jason saw a tiny, flat chested girl in a white dress, her hair adorned with blue ribbon, standing beside her mother.

Remi observed Jason stare, a look of lust riveting his eyes.

"How old?"

"Eleven."

"What's her name?" John Rester Zodrow • 28

"Min Hu." Remi knew Jason would not keep the girl long. He tired easily of these cherry girls. They usually lasted about a month or so. Sometimes shorter if they became pregnant.

As Jason alighted and walked to greet Min Hu and her mother, Remi dialed his cell.

A strongly accented voice spat, "Khan here!"

"Ishmael Khan?"

"Yes?"

"Your package will be accepted for shipment."

"Who is this?"

"Never ask that question."

"I can't afford to have this stopped."

"It will leave the port today. Just bring \$1 million dollars. I will meet you in the harbor." 29 • Back Door Down

## Chapter Five

**B**oson Ron Chandler, the Bolt's next door neighbor, in his white Navy uniform,

emerged from his house, drinking coffee. He had heard the siren approach then saw the firetruck pull up. He watched as a fireman, a huge guy in a regulation fireman's cinder-protecting hat, yellow fireproof coat, heavy brown pants with suspenders and asbestos-lined boots, climbed down and walked toward him.

Chandler asked him, "Hey, Chief, where's the fire?"

Manhattan said nothing. But the handgun stuck in his belt gave him away.

Spotting the weapon, Chandler dropped his coffee thermos and reached for his holstered, standard issue .45 Colt on his hip. But another fireman swung out from the passenger's side and fired once. The bullet struck Chandler in the throat, sending a fine mist of red spray across his coffee spilled on the street. The Bosun dropped his weapon and tried to yell but instead slouched weakly down to the street, convulsing, trying in vain to call out a warning but only managing to gurgle blood across the front of his white Navy blouse.

Unconcerned, Manhattan strode past him, and crossed the browning front lawn, went to the back of 2379 Mimosa Lane where he checked for a dog. There wasn't supposed to be any. But you never knew. Manhattan hated dogs. A wild Boonie dog had bit him as a kid and he had had to strangle it.

He opened the gate, took out a rag from beneath his jacket, squirted barbecue lighter onto it and lit it. Smashing the kitchen window with his elbow, he threw the flaming mess inside. He could see fire spread across the kitchen John Rester Zodrow • 30

linoleum floor, then grow in intensity, leaping up into the cabinets. Manhattan smiled. The fire would serve as a distraction and allow them to make their later escape unnoticed.

At the front of the house, smelling smoke, Ripor kicked open the door.

Upstairs, Mark Bolt, who had come home for lunch, heard the siren approach then stop right outside his window. He was alone in the house because Sally had announced she'd had it with the heat, the humidity, and the attitudes and needed a break. Boson Chandler, next door, had suggested a guide he knew called Polycarp who would pack lunches, and take them into the pleasant breezes of a pristine beach on Forbidden Island. The three of them had left before dawn.

Polycarp, Mark and Sally had quickly learned, was in his mid-eighties, not Chamorro, but an ancient *Rafaluwasch*, who owned beach front property that he refused to sell for another hotel. Polycarp said he belonged to the old way of this island, that Saipan had sold its soul to America in exchange for money and a democracy that could never work here. In meeting him, he appeared silent most of the time, grimacing, with an outwardly irascible nature, never saying a good thing about anyone, mumbling under his breath. Boson Chandler had explained he was speaking to various spirits he worshiped.

But, as if to assuage Mark and Sally's fears, upon meeting Laura, Polycarp had let down his defenses and beamed a huge smile. He announced that he would take Laura to Forbidden Island and teach her the ancient way of sailing in his canoe, navigating by putting a hand in the water currents. To Polycarp, it seemed, Laura was a magical child, straddling this earth and the spirit world. "She sees what I see," he winked. And by the grin that Laura had flashed back at him, both Mark and Sally knew it 31 • Back Door Down

would be okay. And so the next day, this very morning, Sally and Laura had left before dawn for their holiday.

Now alerted by siren in front of his house, Mark, who was washing up, drew back the heavy bedroom curtains and saw that a green fire engine had indeed stopped outside on the street. Where's the fire? he wondered. Then he saw his neighbor, Bosun Chandler, in his Navy whites, stride out into the road and talk to the arriving firefighters. Mark saw Chandler draw his weapon, was shot by one of the firemen, then fall into the street.

Rushing to his bed, Mark reached beneath his pillow and pulled out his standard issue, 9 mm Glock. He was an excellent marksman. Downstairs, he smelled smoke. Then he heard the front door kicked open, followed by a heavy tread on the stairs as someone climbed upstairs toward the bedrooms. Mark stepped behind the partially closed bedroom door, trained the pistol and, finger tightening on the trigger, waited for it to open.

Manhattan and Ripor ponderously climbed up to the last step, then stopped on the landing just outside the bedroom. Ripor immediately moved toward the door. But Manhattan stretched out a gloved hand, reached inside his fireman's coat pocket, pulled the pin on a standard issue Marine grenade and tossed it inside.

Mark tensed, pistol cocked, as he saw the explosive bounce past him on the carpeted floor. He dove over the bed just as the bedroom exploded into fire, dust and debris. Throwing the door fully open, Manhattan and Ripor opened fire. When no rounds were returned, they stepped inside and saw that the Homeland agent was groaning, his chest and face torn by shrapnel from the hand grenade.

Ripor drew his favorite weapon, his short island machete, way better than any gun, and crouched beside Mark who lay bloodied and stunned, half dead already.

"Wait, don't finish him." Manhattan told his son. "Where are the others? His wife and child?" John Rester Zodrow • 32

Ripor ran out, and checked the other rooms. "They are not here."

"Ask him where they are."

Kneeling down, Ripor crouched beside the dying Mark Bolt. "Where is your wife and daughter?"

The agent managed to open his eyes. "Fuck you," he said.

Manhattan nodded to Ripor who thrust the tip of his skinny blade into his ear. The Homeland agent thrashed around briefly, blood spattering the firemen's clothes then died.

According to their custom, the clan not only killed but mutilated their victims. It was their message of terror they sent.

They chopped off the agent's fingers, toes, nose, ears, lips and other parts, stacking them in a neat pile on the bed for the authorities to find. These amputations were to let everyone, even fellow islanders, know the clan ruled here. As was their duty also, this war-like tribe of Chamorros performed a last act, and cut off Mark Bolt's sexual organs.

When they had finished with their grisly tasks, Ripor, in addition, cut off the head, and threw it inside a plastic bag they had brought. Manhattan lifted the bloody corpse and heaved it inside a larger garbage bag. Later, they would dispose of the head and

body in different places. Usually in one of their favorite spots, such as the barracuda-infested swamps on the south of the island. By nightfall, there would be no remains left.

Outside, they heard police cars arriving. The fire station would have been called too by neighbors who saw the growing flames in the rear of the Bolt's house. But the firemen were already here. That was a good joke. And they probably wondered what an idle fire truck was doing there with a dead man lying in their street while the neighborhood burned?! That was a good one too. 33 • Back Door Down

Chuckling, Manhattan and Ripor carried the big bags down the stairs into the kitchen. They were not worried. They knew that the police were not a threat. Every one of them was a relative of their extended family and had been alerted as to what would be happening inside the house today.

Emerging through the kitchen's back door, Manhattan and Ripor peeled off their thick fire-proof clothes, revealing bright flower- adorned Hawaiian shirts and black Big Dog shorts. They removed their latex gloves, tossing them into a trash can on the patio, pulled on flip flops and finally, despite their enormous size, managed to vault over the rear wooden fence.

Parked waiting in the back alley, wearing his own Hawaiian island shirt was Mombaso, Ripor's brother and Manhattan's other son. He greeted them as they swung inside his white Island Taxi that he drove for a living.

Mombaso pulled slowly down the alley. He reached over and turned up the air conditioning. His brother and father smiled. Manhattan found his cell and pressed an automatic dial number.

"Finished?" Remi Tan asked.

"His wife and daughter were not there."

"Then find them and send the rest of the message," Remi said.