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The Hunt for Sunan

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THE HUNT FOR SUNAN

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Chapter 11

Nadine Russo stuffed the note back into the bottom of her purse where she found it. She slipped her shoes back on and hustled down to the rental car. She couldn't explain her actions, she just had to get out and go somewhere. She couldn't stop shaking.

The lined sheet of paper was folded over four times. It looked so innocent in the bottom of her purse. Unfolded, the hand-written words were far from innocent.

Jenson and Karson watched the back of the building looking for signs of activity.

This was not the type of assignment Jenson imagined, when he signed up for this mission. His superiors didn't provide the details until Jenson and Karson were on route. Instead of a simple intelligence-gathering mission, he was thrust into a kidnapping and recovery mission. And the collateral damage could be substantial.

In contrast, Karson seemed to have no reservations about what they were doing.

Jenson was loyal to the cause, and grateful to be selected, but couldn't help being a little jealous of his compatriots who were embedded in London, New York, or some other great city. It was an honor to be selected. Not only did you have to look the part, which very few did, but the training was rigorous.

Agents spent months learning to be fluent in the language, learning dialects, accents, and local customs. Even with all of their training, imbedded agents usually passed themselves off as immigrants to explain their imperfect language skills.

Jenson just wanted to blend in like the rest, but now he had kidnapped a former compatriot and was conspiring to wreak havoc on a small Louisiana town. A botched mission forty years earlier triggered all this.

A woman zipping out the back door startled Jenson. She hopped into her dark mid-size sedan. She wasted no time backing out of her parking spot, near the back door of the hotel.

She backed sharply to the right, coming within inches of backing into the pool fence, before skidding to a stop. She zipped out of the parking lot, past their Crown Vic, and on to Hawthorn Drive.

"What's the rush, lady?"

"Let's pull up over there, right next to the door." Karson instructed.

"Shouldn't we go in the side door, like we did earlier," Jenson responded, "closer to Sunan's room?"

"No, we may want to make another stop after Sunan's."

Nadine took a screeching left onto Hawthorn and another onto Elm Street. She zipped halfway down the block, pulled over and stopped.

Nadine made sure the car doors were locked. She sat in her parked car. "You're really testing me now, aren't ya?" she asked shifting her eyes toward the dark sky. She thought about the note. She wanted to burn it.

She thought about her impromptu drive around the block. Where the heck did I think I was driving to, she wondered.

Kansas City is nine-hundred miles. I'm not driving home. "Am I?"

The locked car was her little sanctuary from the events outside. She stayed there doing nothing. She didn't know how long, but she may have sat there five, ten, or fifteen minutes. She didn't check the time. It didn't matter.

Nadine broke her trance and gave herself a shake. She put the car back in gear, made a U-turn on Elm, and drove back to the hotel. She thought she'd been gone less than a half-an-hour, yet somebody had already taken her prime parking spot.

She pulled into the next parking spot, next to the large Ford that took her old spot. She wondered if Daniel would notice the move. She thought she could try to move the car back in the morning, if her original spot reopened. "Just leave it. Who cares," she said aloud to herself.

She scowled at the big gas-guzzler that stole her parking spot. Losing her parking spot seemed trivial, but annoying. She took a long look at Yanus's window, with the right-hand side of the curtain still open, before starting back to her room.

As soon as the back door of the hotel slammed shut, Karson and Jenson poked their heads up so that their eyes were just above the top of the dashboard. They watched the back door, making sure she wasn't coming back out.

"That was close," Jenson sighed, as he righted himself to an upright sitting position.

"Let's get outta here," Karson ordered. "The security patrolman should be at the Lapointe Pump Station around three o'clock and we need to be ready." With Jenson driving, Karson opened up his briefcase to make sure he had everything.

On one side of the briefcase were two small circuit boards. The circuit boards had four magnets glued to the back,

a one-inch diameter by three-inch long sealed cardboard tube on the bottom edge, a nine volt battery, a retractable antenna on the right side, and four wires coming off of the left side.

There was some Arabic writing on the back of the board as well. Jenson hadn't learned Arabic, so he had no clue what it said, but he was certain it was placed there to deceive anyone who found it.

On the other side of the briefcase were their tools – wire cutters, a soldering gun, wire clips, a hex head screw driver, Philips head and hex head fittings, pliers, a voltmeter, duct tape and a few other small tools.

Karson closed the briefcase and pulled the stun gun and a capped hypodermic needle out of his coat pocket.

"I see they let you have another one," Jenson observed.

"Let *me* have another one," Karson said curtly. "You're just as responsible for losing the last one as I am. Here, take this." Karson handed the stun gun to Jenson who stuffed it into his coat pocket.

"There's just alcohol in this one anyway," Karson held up the hypo to the glow of a passing street light to display its clear liquid contents.

Jenson knew the next few days would be busy and stressful, preparing for the big event. The mission supervisor, the architect of this plan, probably hadn't planned on Sunan showing up, or a nuclear engineer coming in from Arizona to complicate things. Or maybe the supervisor did see this coming.

Russo was probably expected, but maybe the misdirection and vandalism of the pump stations wasn't their best idea, Jenson thought. La Salle a little too crowded with curious eyes.

Jenson didn't know who the supervisor was. All communication and direction came through the Hughes, who

assured them everything was under control. Jenson and Karson were at the bottom of the line when it came to getting information.

Jenson drove to the south end of Elm Street. Elm Street dead-ended at Canal Road. He pulled off the road and parked on a flat dirt patch between Canal Road and the southern leg of the La Salle Canal.

They climbed up the canal bank and followed the canal to Girard Lapointe Pump Station. It was padlocked as expected.

They walked to the backside of the fuel tank and waited for security, the man with the keys, to arrive.

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