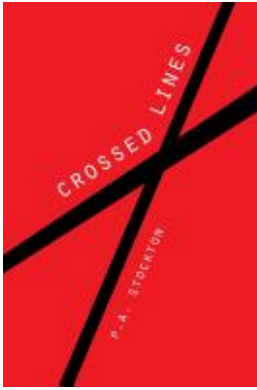


An abstract graphic featuring two thick, solid black lines that intersect at a central point, forming an 'X' shape. The background is a solid, vibrant red. The lines are positioned diagonally, with one line running from the bottom-left towards the top-right, and the other from the top-left towards the bottom-right.

CROSSED LINES

P. A. STOCKTON



Dr. Jake Phillips is volunteering his time on the Texas/Mexico border doing medical checks on immigrants. While examining a young boy, the boy's actions raise questions. In less than twenty-four hours the boy, his brother and a transportation bus disappear. Dr. Phillips enlists the aide of an old friend and the chase will lead them to kidnapping , murder and a plot that will not only change his life, but the lives of everyone...

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P.A. Stockton

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ISBN: 978-1-63491-506-9

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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2016

For Phillips time was dragging by since all they could do was drive, but at the same time it was moving too fast to act. The closer they got to Charlotte the more he worried. From Charlotte it would only be slightly over six hours to D.C. and they wanted to secure Rogelio and the truck before they got into highly populated areas. He tried to put himself in the minds of these men, he didn't think they would stop at another motel, with the route they had taken it looked like they had a destination in mind and that worried him even more.

He shifted in the front seat and reached for this phone, "Kathy, I just want to give you our position and be sure you keep an open line for us."

"Already on it, Mr. Phillips. We've had an open line for you since last night, those were orders from Pepa," Kathy replied. "So just push the button and we'll have you."

"Thanks," Phillips said and put his phone down.

"I've been thinking about a money trail and we can't even start looking for that since we don't have a starting point. This thing has to be costing a lot of money," Phillips said.

"It could be funded directly from the Middle East, but you're right we do need a starting point and I don't think our pal in D.C. is taking it out of his personal account," Brock said. "The heavy weapons have been brought in, but they had to have bought the lighter weapons here. I'm thinking hand guns and some long guns, those can be bought off the street. We also don't know for sure where the explosives came from. Did they bring all those in or purchase them here?"

"I'm wondering if some of this stuff was carried across the border, Sanchez said he did find out that human mules were carrying something across." Phillips said. "I'm going to get someone started on finding out if our pal has an offshore account."

Phillips reached over to toggle the radio. "Wait on that," Brock quickly said, "we've got two white vans coming in behind us." He nodded at the rearview mirror, "Let's be sure they're legit."

Phillips waited and when they had passed Chads vehicle he toggled the radio.

"Did you catch that?" Phillips asked. "Do you think they're part of this?"

"Yeah and I saw them coming. They have paper plates, it makes them look they are headed to a buyer. Good cover," Chad said. "Heads up we've got more coming in behind you." He told Sanchez, "Slump down."

Sanchez slumped down in his seat so he could barely see over the dash and tried to pick up numbers on the plates. When the four vans cleared them, Sanchez sat up and wrote down a number. "I got the numbers and they're all the same number, but I got them."

Phillips came over the radio, "Just for drill, call it in. I don't think all those numbers should be the same."

Brock said, "Here come two more. We need to stay close to these vans, there's an exit for I-77 coming up."

"Okay," Chad came back, "pass me and keep them in sight until we know where they turn off. We'll stay with the target."

The two white vans passed Brock and before he could pull out behind them another van pulled out of traffic and into the fast lane. Brock shouted into the radio, "Sanchez, Get the plate number, it was a regular plate."

Chad watched Brock pass them then toggled the radio, "Sanchez called in the plates. We should hear something soon. He told them it was urgent."

"Roger that," Brock came back.

Brock followed the vans until they took an exit right before hitting Charlotte. As soon as all the vans had taken the exit, Phillips put his phone on speaker and called the tracking unit back at the active case facility. "I need to know where a line of nine white vans

is headed. They just passed us the other side of Gastonia and turned onto I-77 toward Winston-Salem.”

“We’ll get them on satellite. Piece of cake,” a voice came back.

“Why do you say that?” Phillips asked.

“Because the plate number that Chad just called in is the same plate as one of the vehicles you placed a tracking device on a few days ago. We lost it for a few days, must have been in a fortified garage of some sort, but we’ve got him now. Greg just gave Chad the same info,” the voice informed him.

“Holy shit!” Phillips said.

“No kidding,” the voice replied. “We’re good. We’ll call you when we get the info on that other plate number.”

“Interesting that this other van should show up,” Brock said. “I thought it was headed in the other direction or it could be the one we turned over to the Feds when it went into Louisiana. Which means they lost it. Is there some way you can check and see what happened to both of those?”

Phillips picked up his phone again as Brock toggled Chad, “Can you see us and how far behind the target are we?”

“I’m trying to catch up with you now and you’re about a quarter mile behind the target,” Chad said.

“I’m going as slow as I dare in this traffic and I don’t want to pull over,” Brock said.

“Just keep doing what you’re doing and stay on I-85, our target is going through Charlotte and has not changed highways,” Chad said.

“I just called in and checked on that last van that just went by us and it’s the van we turned over to the Feds,” Phillips said. “They lost it in New Orleans, they had two cars and CCTV looking for it, but it just disappeared.”

“Well, if it went into a shielded garage, I can’t fault the Feds. New Orleans can be a tough place to tail someone, even if you know where they’re going,” Chad said. “When they were ready all they

had to do was jump on I-10 and then jump on Highway 65. Pretty easy drive to here.”

“Where is that second van the guys were following?” Chad heard Brock ask.

“They have it headed to St. Louis, how that happened I’ll never know, this whole thing is unpredictable,” Phillips replied.

“That’s just the way they want it,” Chad interjected.

Phillips phone rang again, “Go,” was all he said, then listened for a few minutes.

“We’ve had another explosion,” he said when the call ended. “Bay Bridge in California. Two white vans were crossing the bridge when one stalled, the other one pulled up behind it, obviously traveling together. The drivers got out to check the stalled van when both of them blew, killed both drivers and put cars in the water and a lot of twisted metal on the bridge.”

“So they’re remotely detonating them,” Brock said. “Another reason to be able to track the personal tracking devices.”

“The bridge is listing and has a big hole in it. They must have stopped near one of those faulty pillars and took advantage of it,” Phillips finished.

“Any idea on the loss of life?” Sanchez asked.

“All they gave me was the info on the drivers. We’ll have to turn on the radio to get the ongoing news,” Phillips said.

“Well, let’s do it,” Sanchez said smiling and rubbing his hands together. “I haven’t had my news fix in days.” He found the news station, sighed deeply and closed his eyes.

“I swear I have never seen anything like it.” Chad laughed. “You’re like a dog getting his belly scratched.”

“Say what you will,” Sanchez said, “at least you get to find out what is going on in the world, even when they get their facts back asswards.”

They had tuned into the report as a reporter was interviewing a witness who had passed the stopped vans and had barely cleared the blast area when the vans were detonated. The witness was

talking about the damage done to his car by flying debris and his voice was shaky. The reporter asked him what he remembered seeing, "I'll tell you what I told the police," the man said. "These two vans, panel vans, were in front of me about two cars ahead. The brake lights on the van in back came on and traffic stopped in my lane, now I didn't know it was two vans until I passed them, anyway the last I saw they had pushed the one van off to the side of the lane. The other driver pulled his van behind it, I guess they were traveling together, otherwise why would he stop. Man, when my wife sees this car she is not going to be happy, we have insurance, but I don't know if it will cover this. Anyway, I don't know how far I had gone when there was this huge whomp sound, the bridge shook, there was a blast of wind that pushed me forward a little and then all this stuff started coming down on the car. I knew it wasn't an earthquake because of the falling debris. I mean I'm on a bridge dude, what's to fall on me, the sky?"

Sanchez laughed, "Now where else can you hear that kind of stuff and live off all things. Ya gotta love it."

The news broadcaster went on to give the death toll at ten with an unknown amount missing and thirty-five injured. The police were attempting to clear the bridge of all people, but some would not leave their cars on the bridge unattended. The police were having difficulty assuring them that no one would be able to get near them but the authorities and that when possible they would all be towed. In the background a man could be heard yelling that the police couldn't be trusted either. They were speculating that one of the vans must have been carrying explosives and were calling it a horrible accident.

"Boy do they have a surprise coming," Brock said over the open radio.

"Sorry, I thought I had turned you off," Sanchez said.

"It's more fun listening to it this way, plus we don't have to mess with finding the station," Phillips added.

"The Feds and DHS are going to be very busy, I think this is just another one of many to come," Chad said.

"You're right and until they start taking us seriously and start tracking down those transmitters a lot of people are going to die," Brock said.

"Once the Feds get all the forensics on that explosion I think they'll take it seriously," Chad said. "Okay, I can see you now and I'll be passing you in less than five minutes. I'm turning the radio down."

Brock looked in the mirror, spotted Chad and as Chad passed them Sanchez gave them a little salute. Brock gave a little chuckle, "I think Sanchez proved his worthiness back there at that farm. That nine inch blade of his came in handy."

"When he said he had it, he really meant it," Phillips said as his phone chimed.

"What ya got?" Phillips sighed as he listened, "Shit, okay we're on it, thanks and keep us on your radar, we are right behind Chad."

He didn't break the connection, but toggled the radio. When he heard Sanchez answer he said, "We got a problem. That van with the tracking system on it is behind us. Get off somewhere, but keep us going in the same direction and I'll explain the rest."

"Roger that, we have an exit coming up," Chad said.

Into the phone Phillips said, "Let me know if that van follows us."

Chad followed the exit off the highway and into a restaurant parking lot, drove down two parking lanes and as he pulled back onto the service road he asked, "What's going on?"

"Hell if I know, but I got a call that two of the vans turned around and came back this way. One of them being the missing van. I didn't like the idea of them being behind us," Phillips said. "We also got the information on that plate number that was on all those other vans. It's bogus."

"Follow me," Chad said and took a sharp right into a tire shop. He pulled right up to an empty bay, jump out and started talking to one of the mechanics. Then walked back to Brock's car.

"What, you have a tire problem?" Phillips asked.

"No, but I don't think it's a coincidence that we have those vans behind us, Chad said. "Either they have a device on one of us, they recognized one of our vehicles or they're just being extra cautious that we're not behind them. We're here so I can check under the vehicles."

Chad walked back over to his SUV, opened the back and pulled out a small black box. He had Sanchez pull the SUV into the garage, had the mechanic raise the rack, held up a device and started scanning the undercarriage. When he finished, Sanchez backed out of the bay. Chad then motion Brock to pull his car up.

"We're clean," Chad said after Brock pulled out of the bay. He turned, handed the mechanic a twenty, thanked him and got back in his car.

"Let's catch up with these guys, they really are pissing me off," Chad said over the radio.

Phillips got back on his phone, "Stay on those vans."

"We are and they didn't turn off, they're still ahead of you. The other seven vans are still being watched and they're on I-77," the voice came back. "If there is any change we'll notify you."

"Roger that," Phillips said.

"I'm thinking we should put the Feds or somebody on those vans," Brock said.

"What so they can lose them? Phillips replied. "I think if we can keep the satellite on them we should be okay for now."

"Keep your guys watching them and call the Feds anyway. You need to cover your ass and the public," Brock said.

"We really don't know what's in those vans and I sure don't want to make a mistake," Phillips said.

"Do it anyway, this is not the time to have doubts," Brock prodded.

Before Phillips could make the call the radio came on, "Hey," Chad said. "Call and have the guys track our target. I want to try and get off their radar, just in case."

"No, I want to try and keep them in site," Phillips said.

"Listen to me Jake," Chad insisted. "If they think or know we are following them, they can kill the kid right there in that car, dump the body where we'll be sure to see it. They're close enough to D.C., if that's their target, that while we are standing over a body they get the job done. With us using the GPS and the guys tracking the van, we won't lose them. I thought we were trying to save Rogelio's life. If they know we're here and we back off maybe they'll think that threat they called in worked and they'll drop their guard."

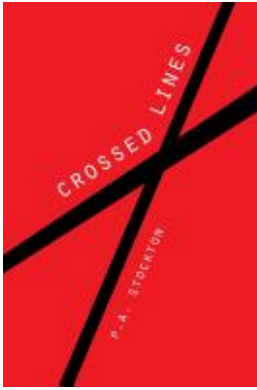
"They need him, they won't kill him," Phillips said in a low voice.

"I don't hear much conviction in that statement," Chad said.

"I'm not here to take sides," Brock said, "but Chads' right, they don't really need him anymore. We're now less than six hours from D.C and there are a lot of possible targets between here and there. I'm just saying, if they don't have the kid to assure a hit on their original destination they can pick another one." Brock paused and glanced over at Phillips, "Make the call Jake and have them notify the Feds and watch both sets of vehicles. Tell them what we're doing and why. Actually, have them plug in the other transponder to Chads' GPS and we'll have two sets of eyes on them"

"Okay Chad, we'll do it your way," Phillips said and turned down the radio. He made the call and tried to relax.

"Don't worry," Brock said, "we'll get them."



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