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PATRIOTISM

by Robert Brigham

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ROBERT BRIGHAM

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ONE

June 20, 2019

“Extremely sorry to interrupt, my good man, but would you mind terribly if I unmuted the sound?” He nodded at one of the several TV screens spaced about the VIP lounge at Newark airport.

The man moved the glass of red wine from his lips to the table siding the luxurious beige armchair, and his eyes from the laptop to his inquisitor. He saw a portly male with a round face, undistinguished nose, ruddy cheeks, prominent chin, and steely eyes. English, judging by his accent. He was dressed in a tailored gray suit and sported an umbrella the man bet doubled as walking stick. The man thought, *He’d be no pushover in a negotiation.*

The man glanced at the TV and saw the flamboyant banner promising “BREAKING NEWS.” Streaming underneath he read “BOMBS KILL AND MAIM DOZENS IN OMAHA NEBRASKA, MIDLAND TEXAS.”

“Certainly,” the man said. “Please do.”

“...at least 5 are confirmed dead with another 11 wounded. Over 850 miles from Omaha, in Midland, Texas, a second explosion was detonated in a supermarket. Casualties are unknown at this time, but witnesses have reported several people bleeding on the floor while others don’t seem to be moving. We have on the phone Mr. Paul Dexter. Mr. Dexter, are you there?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you for agreeing to speak with us. I understand you were in the Midland store when the blast occurred?”

“Yes, several aisles away.”

“Can you describe what you experienced?”

“Well, er, I was just shopping, you know. Just like normal. Then there was this explosion. Suddenly everything was flying off the shelves. People were screaming. I heard a baby crying. People were

running, trying to get out the door, but kinda scared 'cause the door was closer to the blast."

"How soon did the first responders arrive?"

"Gee, I don't know. Seemed pretty quick to me. When I got outside there were lots of ambulances. I saw, oh, God, it was awful, I saw people covered in blood being put on stretchers and then, I guess, taken to hospitals."

"Did you see anyone acting suspiciously before it happened?"
There was silence. "Mr. Dexter, are you there?"

"Yes, yes. Just, like, I feel bad saying this. Sounds like I'm racist or something. But, well, I did see two Hispanic guys. We got a lot of them in this town. Seemed like they was just shopping, but they both had backpacks."

"Did they seem suspicious because of the backpacks?"

"I guess. But it's more than that. A couple of minutes before the explosion they started chattering to each other in Spanish and headed in the direction where the bomb went off."

"Anything else about them?"

"I don't know if it means anything, but after it happened I never saw them again. Sort of like they had left before things went crazy, like maybe they knew something was up."

"Did you mention that to the police?"

"I did. They seemed real interested."

"Thank you, Mr. Dexter, for speaking with us. I'm thankful you're all right."

"Sure. Thanks."

"We are waiting for a representative of the Omaha police to become available. Just to recap, a bomb went off in the historic district known as the Old Market, an area with shops, restaurants, art galleries and more. The video on the left half of the screen is courtesy of Omaha station KMTV."

Viewers saw footage shot earlier of a crowd gathered three blocks from the blast, first responders in evidence, and ambulances racing off. Upon completion of the sequence, it was played again—and again—and again. The right portion of the screen zoomed in on the anchor who said, "We have Omaha police

spokesman Sergeant McGallister on the phone. Sergeant, thank you for speaking with us. We have reports of five deaths. Can you confirm that?"

"There's still a lot of confusion at the scene, but I personally know of six with twelve wounded. These are preliminary figures and may change."

"Is there any information at this early stage on the perpetrator?"

"Yes. It's really remarkable it happened so fast. But we've caught him. Several eye witnesses identified him."

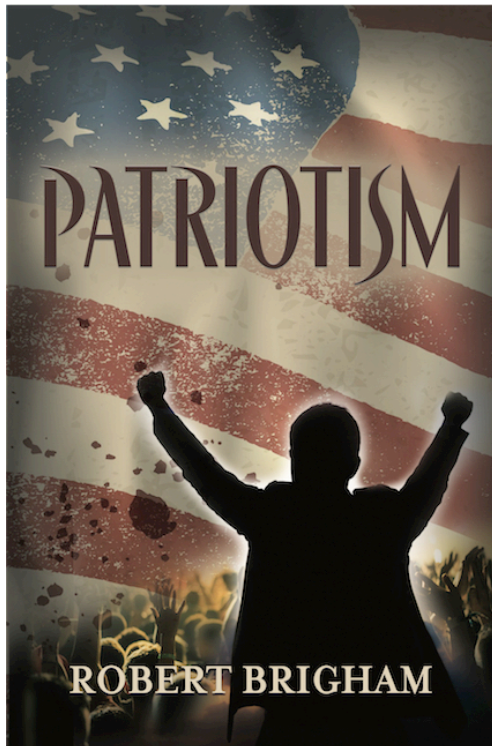
"Do you have a name?"

"We do, but we're not releasing it at this time. All I can tell you is he's African-American and is well known to the police. He claims innocence, but we have him cold." The officer paused. He could be heard speaking to someone, then said, "I have to go now."

"Thank you, Sergeant McGallister of the Omaha police. So two explosions making the news. We have with us now three experts in..."

The man's flight was announced and he took in no more of the anchor's words. As he rose, the English gentleman said, "It's a terrible thing, this. What is the world coming to?"

The man nodded, as if in agreement. But, as he turned away and felt unobserved, he smiled.



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